INVESTIGATING THE CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING FOR CREDIT POLICY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

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DECLARATION

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INVESTIGATING THE CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) FOR CREDIT POLICY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

I declare that the above thesis 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.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF A DISSERTATION/THESIS

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<u>Title of thesis:</u>

INVESTIGATING THE CHALLANGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) FOR CREDIT POLICY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

KEY TERMS:

The following is an example of key terms used for a thesis:

Recognition of Prior Learning, Public Service, Learning Theories, Experiential Learning Theory, Qualitative Research, behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, RPL assessments, transversal skills, pre-assessment,

DEDICATION

In memory of my father, Andile "Jumbo Jet" Tywabi. You may be gone, but you'll never be forgotten. This is for you Jola!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The quest for equitable access to education and career advancement in the public service sector in South Africa has prompted the exploration of the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for credit to afford public sector officials the opportunity to be credited towards a full public administration qualification as registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Furthermore, RPL in South Africa builds on the pledge of government to eliminate impediments to learning and develop an evident, practical and reliable system as an efficient tool for lifelong learning. This qualitative study delves into the multifaceted landscape of the implementation of RPL in the South African public service sector, seeking to uncover enablers, challenges, and best practices that shape its application through a case study research design lens.

Through document analysis, in-depth interviews with RPL coordinators and a structured questionnaire, this research study employed a theoretical lens, drawing insights from behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and experiential learning theories. The research objectives encompassed investigating the contextual factors influencing RPL implementation, accessing best practice models, understanding key role players' perspectives, providing recommendations for effective credit assessment tools, and identifying constraints within the public service sector. At the time of writing, this study was driven to develop an institutional RPL pre-assessment guide to assist RPL candidates to adequately assess their preparedness to undergo RPL for credit assessment against the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) accredited Public Administration qualifications.

The study found a complex interplay of external influences, cognitive processes, and experiential learning in the RPL landscape. Participants highlighted the significance of organisational support, clear policies, and targeted advocacy for fostering a conducive RPL environment. Challenges emerged, ranging from limited funding to a need for standardised guidelines and increased awareness about RPL.

The findings will contribute to the existing literature by providing a nuanced understanding of the dynamics surrounding the execution of RPL in the South African public service sector. The theoretical framework enhanced the interpretation of results,

offering practical insights for policymakers, RPL coordinators and practitioners involved in RPL initiatives.

This study concludes by advocating for a holistic approach to RPL implementation, encompassing strategic policy improvements, targeted advocacy efforts, and tailored support mechanisms. The implications extend beyond the South African public service sector, informing broader discussions on the integration of RPL into policies for enhanced workplace skills development.

Finally, the findings were used to develop a cogent institutional RPL pre-assessment tool to support RPL candidates in the first step of their RPL journey.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Description/ Definition
DHET	The Department of Higher Education and Training
DPSA	The Department of Public Service and Administration
FET	Further Education and Training Institutions
HEI	Higher Education and Training Institutions
HRDSF	Human Resource Development Strategic Framework
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
NDP	National Development Plan 2030
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (Canada)
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
PSETA	Public Sector Education and Training Authority
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (South Africa)
RNFIL	Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning

Abbreviation	Description/ Definition
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDP	Skills Development Provider
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
VAE	Validation de Acquis des Experiences (France)
VET	Vocational Education and Training

CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1.   INTRODUCTION

The apartheid legacy has significantly contributed to the prevailing disparities in education, learning and development among the multitudes of South Africa citizens. The apartheid legislation resulted in disparities, limited literacy rates and insufficient job prospects for black individuals (Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017). Nonetheless, individuals accumulate knowledge throughout their lifetime in the diverse spheres of their existence. However, the acquisition of knowledge that takes place beyond the confines of formal education and training is often disregarded, unrecorded, underestimated, inadequately comprehended, and not widely acknowledged. The inaugural democratic elections in South Africa marked the culmination of the apartheid era and introduced a new era of inclusivity and equitable opportunities for education and training. The Skills Development Act was enacted in 1998 as a way of ushering in inclusive education and training policies (Ngcwangu, 2014). The concept of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was introduced as the primary means to address inequality and facilitate equitable access to educational and training prospects, with the aim of dismantling the apartheid system's disparities and divisions. RPL in South Africa upholds the principles outlined in section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. This law guarantees every citizen's entitlement to pursue further education and training. This suggests that education should be accessible without any obstacles.

The notion of RPL emerged from the policy discussions of the democratic South African government in the 1990s and has subsequently become a fundamental principle of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Harris, 2001). Moreover, RPL is a globally recognised procedure for evaluating non-formal learning in order to align it with the desired results of a certification that is officially recognised on the NQF.

More importantly, RPL is a key component of the South African national policy. It refers to the process of recognising, evaluating, and validating an individual's existing knowledge and skills for the purpose of granting them access to education, certification

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or further development opportunities (SAQA, 2015). This principle aims to acknowledge and utilise the expertise that individuals have acquired through their prior experiences. In addition, RPL is an assessment method that acknowledges the knowledge and skills an adult learner has gained through informal, non-formal and formal means. RPL relies on the notion that individuals acquire knowledge not only within official educational environments, but also through informal means. This type of learning, which occurs outside traditional settings, is deemed valuable and deserving of acknowledgment. The post-school education and training (PSET) sector embraced the concept of RPL to support individuals who did not meet the minimum requirements for further education to continue their studies. This was done by allowing them to have their workplace experience acknowledged as equivalent to formal education (Van Rooyen, 1997). RPL is influenced by the concepts of an ordered and regulated pedagogical practice and is rooted in formal education.

This study investigated the enablers or hindrances to the adoption of RPL in the public service sector of South Africa. Within the scope of this research, the public service sector pertains to national and provincial government departments, omitting local government entities (Cooper, Ralphs, & Harris, 2017; Tywabi, 2019).

The researcher, while working for the Public Sector Education and Training Authority has previously undertaken an unpublished assessment study in 2018 on RPL and how it is being used in the South African public service sector. The study specifically examined one provincial department that has adopted RPL for its employees to earn credit towards the Public Administration qualification. The implementation was done in two groups of employees. In 2022, the researcher further engaged in additional RPL studies with the International Labour Organisation ILO, International Training Centre. These studies entailed collaborative learning with counterparts from other nations worldwide, who are adopting RPL in many contexts and sectors. In this regard, the researcher contends that the RPL models endorsed by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and outlined in the South African Qualifications Framework (SAQA) National Policy on RPL implementation were not specifically designed for the workplace setting, as there is no documented RPL model tailored for this particular context. The researcher's objective is to create and suggest a pre-assessment guide for

institutional/workplace RPL. This guide will aid RPL candidates in preparing for their RPL process. The researcher aims to achieve this by assessing a workplace RPL process and comparing the qualitative experiences of RPL candidates with relevant literature on workplace learning theory and RPL theory. The goal is not to combine various learning theories but to extract some valuable insights from current research on workplace RPL in general, and the growing workplace RPL model in particular.

RPL (SAQA, 2015) refers to the principles and methods in South Africa that make an individual's prior knowledge and abilities visible, mediated and assessed for alternate access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development. The RPL assessment can be either summative or formative. It involves granting qualifications or partial qualifications against the learning outcomes necessary for a particular qualification. Additionally, it involves recognising credentials that fulfil the requirements of SAQA (2002) for the purpose of qualification. RPL candidates can utilise their credentials to secure entry into school programmes or occupational certifications, enter the workforce or enhance their professional trajectories (Assinger, 2022).

The RPL is founded upon global frameworks, particularly the competency-based Vocational Education and Training (VET) reforms of Australia advocated by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (Tywabi, 2019). According to Osman (2006), global approaches to RPL stress personal progress rather than issues of equity and access. RPL, often referred to as Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) in Europe (Geleng & Villalba, 2019), is a worldwide practice that aims to acknowledge and utilise the previous knowledge and skills of adult learners. Therefore, RPL can be understood as a policy provision with the objective of promoting social participation for historically marginalised communities in South Africa (SAQA, 2019).

In February 2016, the Recognition of Prior Learning Coordination Policy clarified and facilitated prior learning acknowledgement. It aims to address the difficulties that arise during the implementation of recognising prior learning in the post-school education and training (PSET) sector. Further, the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) formulated a supplementary policy and procedure on RPL as a fundamental component of the Human Resource Development Strategic Framework (HRDSF) for the

public service in October 2016 (Tywabi, 2019). The 2013 White Paper on Public Service Training and Education stresses personnel development and lifelong learning. It also highlights the need to address inequalities and ensure that all citizens have equal access to education and are not discriminated against.

The National Development Plan (NDP 2030) suggests that in order to cultivate a proficient public workforce, employment procedures should give priority to scarce talents and expertise to enhance productivity and foster economic growth. Therefore, RPL is essential for maintaining institutional autonomy and contextual practices, as well as ensuring the integrity of credentials and credit awards (Assinger, 2022; Galloway & Edwards, 2017). Nevertheless, the implementation of the RPL in the public service sector has ongoing obstacles owing to many factors, such as the absence of an approved Directive on Policy guidelines and Procedure for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the Public Service. This existing directive remains in draft status since 2021, resulting in a lack of relevant methods for its implementation. While RPL is considered essential for achieving redress and transformation objectives, it can be contended that advancements in workplace redress are rather constrained (Nduna, 2017).

1.2. BACKGROUND

According to ILO (2018), individuals engage in continuous learning throughout their lives, regardless of their location. This argument posits that learning that occurs outside of official education and training systems is frequently not comprehended or appreciated. Engaging in on-the-job training, informal apprenticeships, household management and caregiving for the sick and elderly all lead to the acquisition of information, skills, and experience. However, these activities typically do not come with a formal certificate acknowledging one's competencies (ILO, 2018). Furthermore, ILO contends that acknowledging all forms of learning can yield advantages in the job market, formal education, and training, monetarily, and in terms of self-worth. RPL policy is crucial for the successful implementation of the NQF. The latter serves as a means to authenticate and verify an individual's informal or non-formal learning experiences (Waynard-Moody & Musheno, 2022). The study question pertains to the adaptation and

widespread implementation of the RPL implementation policy in the public sector. The research topic is "Investigating the challenges in the implementation of the RPL for credit policy within the public service sector in South Africa". The researcher aimed to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on RPL in the public sector. Moreover, this study aimed to provide a significant input and enhance the lives of numerous public officials who have continuously pursued education. They now have the chance to get recognition for their achievements through credits that align with specified learning outcomes of a certification. The researcher is convinced that this study will capture the attention of important players in the sector, who will utilise certain findings to enhance their RPL implementation policy in the sector.

This chapter intends to provide and situate the current research by offering a comprehensive explanation of the reasoning behind the research, delineating the research topic, its goals and objectives, and detailing the research methodology employed. The researcher concludes this chapter by providing a concise summary of the main points covered in each of the subsequent chapters.

1.3.   RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The notion of RPL was introduced into the education and training discussion in South Africa through the NQF, following its inclusion in the policy of the African National Congress (ANC) in the early 1990s (Harris, 2001). As per Groener's (2013) findings, even if there is a strong desire and ethical dedication to tackling inequality two decades after democracy, the results of skills development in South Africa are still poor. In order to address inequality and improve access, it was crucial to restructure education and training. This was done to gradually dismantle the fragmented and unfair system that was inherited from the apartheid era (Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017). The National Policy for the Implementation of Prior Learning Recognition is a specific mechanism designed for this purpose.

RPL is considered essential in achieving the objectives of redress and transformation in the PSET sector. Nevertheless, the implementation of RPL in the public sector has posed problems, resulting in minimal advancements in addressing workplace grievances (Nduna, 2017). Therefore, the researcher considered it crucial to contribute

to enhancing the efficacy of essential policy objectives aimed at developing a more advanced education and training system in the country.

1.4.   STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The *National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning* (2014) specifies that RPL may be designed and executed in several ways based on its intended use. RPL may be used for several purposes, such as self-improvement, career advancement, or earning NQF credits. 'Access' RPL gives students a way into higher education institutions even if they don't fulfil the usual entry standards, while 'credit' RPL gives them credits towards a qualification, either partial or full, that is listed on the NQF, should they meet the exit-level outcomes requirements of the qualification. Research on RPL for credit against the PSETA-accredited Public Administration qualification is the exclusive focus of this study. Despite the large number of documented RPL situations, little is known about how to systematically and co-ordinately use RPL to advance professionally or accrue credits (Schut, 2015). During the thematic analysis of the RPL literature, the recurrence of some recommendations and results from past research with unresolved concerns in the field of practice became obvious. Meanwhile, a new line of RPL-related research is gaining traction. With the findings from the combined RPL research, the study's purpose was to identify gaps in the present body of knowledge, recommend areas for subsequent research and contribute to the burgeoning field of RPL research (Moss, 2017). Lack of consistent implementation strategies seems to be causing problems with RPL implementation, particularly in the public service sector, despite policy obligations to use it as a means of addressing inequalities and increasing access to the education and training system (Tywabi, 2019). The public sector adoption of RPL remains elusive in South Africa, despite substantial study on the topic and its applications in other parts of the economy (Gair, 2013). This is the identified area of research concern. The purpose of this study was to add to the body of research on the use of RPL for credit towards the National Certificate in Public Administration (NQF Levels 5 and 6), which is accredited by the PSETA in the public service sector (Tywabi, 2019). As a result, the purpose of this thesis was to propose an RPL workplace pre-assessment tool to assist RPL coordinators in preparing RPL candidates (in the public sector) for the RPL assessment process.

1.5. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to investigate the implementation practices of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for credit in the public service sector in the South African context.

The following objectives were pursued, to:

i.   investigate the enablers and/or constraints in the application of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa.
ii.   access the best practice model(s) for the effective contribution to the implementation of RPL.
iii.   determine the views and experiences of the key role players in the implementation of RPL by government departments.
iv.   identify the constraints (if any) to implementing RPL for credit in the public service sector.
v.   provide recommendations on RPL for credit assessment tools to be considered by implementors in the public service sector.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTION

Although RPL is ingrained in the NQF, the Department of Higher Education and Training Ministerial Task Team on a National Strategy for the Recognition of Prior Learning noted in 2013 that it has not lived up to its promise to support increased mobility and articulation of PSET opportunities (DHET, 2013). The strategic goal of RPL is to become a fully integrated, widely accepted mechanism that works in tandem with education and training programmes to enable South Africans to use the knowledge and skills that they have acquired outside of the typical institutional and workplace learning channels to the fullest extent possible (DHET, 2011: 34–35).

Simosko and Cook (1996) assert that for RPL to be effective, it must be acknowledged that learning can occur through practice before the skills and knowledge are formalised into a qualification. RPL is a topic of discussion as a means of upskilling the workforce for economic growth. As part of the creation of an NQF, South Africa has developed a set of policies and principles for RPL that are clearly defined. These policies, inter alia,

were intended to give people who were unable to academically further their education the opportunity to have their informal knowledge and learning recognised and certified (Bolton, Samuels, Mofokeng, Akindolani & Shapiro, 2017; Cooper, 1998). These authors also point out that the DPSA could have data of about 10,000 public servants (candidates) requiring RPL interventions in the sector.

The researcher developed the following research questions in pursuit of solutions to the main research topic considering the study's objectives.

1.6.1. Main Question:

What factors facilitate and/or hinder the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?

1.6.2. The following sub-questions were formulated to respond to the main question posed above.

i. What enables or hinders the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?
ii. What models of practice have been successfully utilised to aid in the implementation of RPL?
iii. How do candidates perceive RPL assessment processes?
iv. What are the constraints (if any) to implementing RPL for credit in the public service sector?
v. What guidelines and or assessment tools can be developed to ensure the successful and uniform implementation of RPL?

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Acknowledging past knowledge in the South African context, RPL aims to offer equity and access to education and training for primarily the people who were disadvantaged due to apartheid legislation, and to correct historical injustices in this regard. Nonetheless, studies have shown that workplace redress efforts have been slow. Thus, RPL is important to South Africa's skills development agenda because it promotes lifelong learning, helps with social justice, boosts economic development, and

emancipates workers by allowing them to use their workplace knowledge to get credits against qualifications on the NQF.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) is an all-encompassing framework for higher education that aims to promote access, fairness, redress, advancement, quality, and transparency (NQF Act 67 of 2008).

According to the NQF Act 67 of 2008, the goals of the NQF are as follows:

• To establish a unified national system for measuring learning outcomes;

• To make education, training, and career paths more accessible and mobile;

• To improve the standard of education and training; and

• To speed up the process of rectifying discrimination that has occurred in these areas in the past (DHET, 2016a:7).

This exploratory case study was conducted to explore the possible challenges that impact the seamless implementation of RPL for credit against the public administration qualifications within the public service sector.

This study could contribute to the post-school research repository on RPL implementation practices in South Africa. The study findings and recommendations could be useful in informing the development of RPL policy refinement/review in the public service sector. The study has the potential to contribute to the improvement of the implementation of RPL in the public service sector. This study will also capacitate RPL candidates with a tool to conduct self-pre-assessment prior to them enlisting for an RPL intervention. This study may be a useful resource / guide to the public sector policy department in understanding the resource and capacity requirements of RPL coordinators in the public service sector for the effective implementation of RPL.

1.8.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Kivunja (2018:46), a theoretical framework is a way for verifying current knowledge and offering an explanation, prediction and understanding of occurrences

while keeping the underlying assumptions. The researcher used Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) for this study because it is a comprehensive model that analyses how people acquire knowledge and develop abilities via experiences. Further, Kolb's ELT is commonly used in educational and organisational settings to assess learning preferences, develop effective learning experiences and encourage a well-rounded learning process that blends reflective thinking with tangible experiences.

1.9.   STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

1.9.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study's literature review aims to provide a theoretical overview of experiential learning theories and their application to the South African public service sector's "recognition of prior learning" (RPL). It helps to define the subtleties of the research issue and ultimately leads to a theory that can be used to understand the results of the empirical study. Following this, the theoretical framework lends credence to the first-hand accounts provided by RPL applicants throughout the data gathering process.

1.10.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.10.1. Research Design

Research designs are methods of inquiry that a researcher utilises to gather information to analyse and respond to the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to McGregor (2018), research designs are forms of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches that offer a framework and methods for conducting a research study. This study followed the qualitative research design approach.

1.10.2. Research Paradigm

A paradigm, according to Makombe (2017), is the lens through which a researcher observes the world. The researcher investigates the methodological components of their study using this conceptual lens to select the research methodologies to use and the data analysis plan.

The interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to perceive, comprehend and analyse how the participants interpreted the RPL for credit policy implementation in their department. This paradigm also assisted the researcher in analysing and comprehending the obstacles faced by departments while implementing RPL, which has an impact on how RPL candidates are supported during the implementation process. The paradigm further enabled the researcher to acquire thorough information about the RPL candidates' attitudes, behaviours, and motives.

1.10.3. Selection of Population and Sampling

The population is the larger group from which a sample is drawn, and it should be clearly defined to ensure that the study's findings are applicable and generalisable to that specific group. There are 12 provincial departments in the Eastern Cape. However, approximately five of them have implemented RPL for credit against the Public Administration qualification from 2014 when RPL for credit was piloted to date.

1.10.4. Population

The study population is the collection of all the instances in which the researcher is interested (Polit & Beck 2017). Each component of a population is referred to as an element by Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018). The study population for the research were the five departments that have implemented RPL, from which one department was selected through purposeful sampling as a case study for the current research.

1.10.5. Sampling

A study sample, according to Majid (2018), is a subset of data that a researcher has selected, using a predetermined selection technique from a larger population. In order to learn about the phenomena, researchers use a sample of individuals drawn from the target population (Shukla, 2020). The twenty-six participants were selected for this research because of their engagement in the RPL process. They were either candidates or coordinators, so they would have a good understanding of the RPL policy and legal frameworks.

1.10.6. Data Collection Techniques

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) assert that the term "data collection" in research refers to the precise techniques employed, the measuring tools, and the precise order in which the activities are carried out during the measurement process.

1.10.7. Qualitative Questionnaires

Enyioko and Akujuru (2019) state that a qualitative questionnaire is a method of gathering information from people via the use of a set of questions. Participants may fill out qualitative questionnaire s in person, over the phone, or online. The researcher visited participants in their East London workplaces to administer closed-ended qualitative questionnaires, whereas participants in the Gqeberha workplaces were provided with online questionnaires.

1.10.8. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, as described by McGrath, Palmgren, and Liljedahl (2019), allow a researcher to explore certain parts of the respondents' perspectives in more detail. Interviews provide insights into how individuals see and understand various phenomena of interest. The researcher used semi-structured interviews with RPL coordinators to collect data on the relevant institutional features of RPL implementation in the selected department.

1.10.9. Secondary Data

Secondary data refers to data that has been previously collected and processed by someone other than the researcher for a different purpose. The secondary data in the form of RPL policy documents in South Africa, journal articles and other literature were utilised to contrast with primary data, which was collected directly by the researcher from the participants for this specific research study.

1.11. DATA ANALYSIS

Aspers and Corte (2019) define data analysis as the systematic application of techniques to summarise, compress, evaluate, and explain data. Additionally, data

analysis is defined by Ravindran (2019) as the summary of collected data used for logical and analytical reasoning to identify trends, connections, or patterns. Data interpretation is the last stage of the investigation after the data have been analysed.

1.11.1. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY / CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability are considered to be the four factors that establish a person's level of trustworthiness. Researchers are concerned with trustworthiness as a gauge of research rigour in qualitative investigations.

1.11.2. CREDIBILITY

Credible research findings are those that are "true, credible and believable," (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa, et al., 2018). This indicates that such results will not make sense to the research audience. This study used legitimate research techniques and document them to ensure legitimacy. The credibility of the data was further enhanced by cross-referencing the interview transcripts and the researcher's handwritten field notes to whether the respondents' viewpoints were accurately represented in the data interpretation.

1.11.3. DEPENDABILITY

According to Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018), dependability is a research audit issue that necessitates an auditor to evaluate the research process and its results. Continuity is concerned with the "recording of steps completed, and judgments made during analysis" (Gray & Groove 2020). The researcher in this study meticulously documented and recorded the methods used for data collection, ensuring precision in the collection, examination, and evaluation of the data.

1.11.4. TRANSFERABILITY

Research findings from qualitative investigations are considered to be of high quality if they can be extrapolated to apply to other situations (Forero et al., 2018). This principle was adopted and be complied with in this research.

1.11.5. CONFIRMABILITY

The degree to which third parties can accept research findings as accurate is known as confirmability (Forero et al.,2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This endeavour was conducted to aid other participants involved in RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) who may have an interest in comprehending the methodology used in this research on the institutional execution of RPL for credit.

1.12. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers have an obligation to ensure that the studies they conduct comply with ethical norms (Polit & Beck 2017). Therefore, ethical review committees at research institutes play a vital role in providing an important external evaluation of study plans (Polit & Beck, 2017). The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the UNISA College of Education ethical Review Committee and received permission to conduct this study, indicated by the ethics reference number: **2023/08/10/38936607/37/AM**. The ethical clearance was approved for the duration spanning from August 10, 2023, to August 10, 2028.

1.13. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.13.1. Limitations

The implementation of RPL programme in the government sector is a relatively under-researched intervention in labour market research, which is the limitation of this study. Considering that there is an insufficient amount of academic body of literature that has been peer-reviewed in the South African context, is one of the factors that could further potentially limited this study.

1.13.2. Delimitations

To focus the scope of the research aims and questions the following delimitations were imposed on the extent of this inquiry. The first delimitation is that the inquiry was conducted in one provincial department in the province of the Eastern Cape. The justification for this option was that the department comprises regional and district offices

from which the RPL candidates were sampled, however RPL is coordinated by the provincial office.

Secondly, the study's scope was confined to the Eastern Cape province, namely to RPL Coordinators and RPL Candidates working within that department. This to understand the viewpoints of the different stakeholders within the same department.

Thirdly, the research was confined to just one of the five provincial departments that have implemented RPL for credit against public administration certification to avoid the possibility of conflicting or misalignment in the different departments' RPL implementation practices.

1.14. ESSENTIAL IDEAS DEFINITION

A wide range of terms are used in the RPL environment. To ensure that the reader understands the contextual definitions of such terms, the researcher has provided a detailed account of such RPL related terms in table 1.1. below.

Table 1.1: Essential Ideas Definition

Term	Definition
Access	Means beginning the process of obtaining a certain credential, whether that's a partial credential, a full credential, or admission to a culminating external summative examination.
Assessment	Refers to the steps used to gather evidence of a learner's work in order to determine whether or not they have met the requirements of a set of occupational standards or qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In this study, Assessments are made reference to in relation to the assessments conducted by Skills Development Providers.
Candidate	In the context of RPL, an individual whose performance is being evaluated by an accredited assessor from the

Term	Definition
	appropriate institution. In the context of this study RPL Candidates are the beneficiaries of the RPL programmes implemented by the sampled department.
Competence	Means an individual's (RPL Candidate's) theoretical understanding as well as their practical abilities. The capacity to adapt one's knowledge and abilities to different settings is an essential component of this.
Credit	The value given within a learning programme for achieved learning. In the current study, this means the credits awarded per exit level-outcomes against the Public Administration qualification.
Experiential Learning	Knowledge and/or skills learned through experience, rather than through a formal course or instructional learning. This could be accumulated in the workplace as part of the daily duties. In the current study, the experience and knowledge of the candidate will be assessed against the exit-level outcomes of the Public Administration qualification.
Formal Learning	Refers to education and training that takes place in a deliberately designed and organised setting. Acquiring a credential or partial credential listed on the NQF is the end result of formal education. Any learning programmes completed by the candidate will also be considered in the RPL assessment process in this study's context.
Informal Learning	Refers to the knowledge gained from ordinary experiences in areas such as paid or unpaid labour, family, community, and leisure. Any learning acquired by the candidate in informal settings will also be considered in the RPL assessment process in this study's context.

Term	Definition
Institutional Setting	Acquired by learning, experience, or information, knowledge encompasses comprehension, awareness, and familiarity. Being cognisant of knowledge is being aware of facts, information, abilities, and ideas that one has learned, seen, or experienced first-hand. Formalised information and facts are examples of explicit knowledge, while skills and know-how are examples of implicit knowledge. Any learning acquired by the candidate in world of work will also be considered in the RPL assessment process in this study's context.
Learner Agency	Refers to students' (RPL Candidate's) ability to take charge of their own learning by deciding what to study and how to study it. Being able to take charge of one's own education and make meaningful contributions along the way are essential components.
Learning	Means gaining an understanding of how to do a job well as well as the values and attitudes that go along with it. The ability to learn new things in any situation and at any level throughout one's life; this is what we mean when we talk about lifelong learning. Education encompasses not only the acquisition of facts and figures but also of ideas, concepts, attitudes, values, and skills necessary for individual development, societal and economic prosperity, civic engagement, cultural identity, and professional success.
Learning Theories	Frameworks or models that seek to explain how people acquire, process, and retain knowledge. These theories

Term	Definition
	provide a conceptual understanding of the learning process, offering insights into how individuals organise information, develop skills, and adapt their behaviours based on experiences. This model has been adopted for the purpose of the current study.
Pedagogy	Means the study and application of educational theory and practice, with a focus on the tactics, methods, and procedures used in the classroom. It includes the ideas and methods that teachers use to have meaningful conversations with their pupils and help them learn. This study is conducted under the premise that RPL is a specialised pedagogy.
Portfolio of Evidence (PoE)	A file, electronic or hardcopy containing evidence demonstrating competency against learning/ performance outcomes of an identified qualification, part qualification or specified job outcomes compiled and submitted by a RPL candidate for the purposes assessment of competency.
Pre-Assessment	Aims to gauge the extent of the candidate's workplace experience, knowledge, and skills relevant to the desired qualification. This step ensures that RPL candidates possess the foundational background necessary for the successful completion of the RPL assessment.
Qualification	A planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning and which has been assessed in terms of

Term	Definition
	exit level outcomes, registered on the NQF and certified and awarded by a recognised body.
RPL Advisor	The person who may or may not be a registered assessor, and who assists the RPL candidate in the collection and submission of evidence for assessment purposes. In the context of this study, an RPL Advisor is a departmental official assuming the role of Skills Development Facilitator and supports the learner in the RPL process.
Skills Development Facilitator (SDF)	The role of the SDF is to ensure that programmes aimed at skill development really take place inside the organisation.
Skills Development Provider (SDP)	A is an organisation that runs courses leading to nationally recognised occupational standards, qualifications, and part-qualifications, as well as oversees the internal evaluation of such courses. In this study, SDPs are the organisations that conducted RPL against the PSETA accredited Public Administration qualification under study.
Workplace Learning	The process of gaining knowledge, skills and competencies within the context of one's job or professional environment. It occurs as individuals engage in tasks, projects and interactions in the workplace, leading to both formal and informal learning experiences. Any learning acquired by the candidate in their workplace that will also be considered in the RPL assessment process in this study's context.
Workplace Learning Theory	A broad framework that encompasses various perspectives and models explaining how individuals acquire knowledge,

Term	Definition
	skills, and competencies in the context of their work environment.

(Sources: Adopted from DHET [2018], SAQA [2019], and DPSA [2021])

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The following outline provides a summary of the full thesis while directing the reader through the preliminary analysis and background information related to the research topic, the methodology used to collect data, data analysis, data interpretation, and discussion of the findings.

The thesis comprises six chapters, namely:

Chapter 1 explains how RPL came into being in South Africa, how it came to be implemented, and the policy structures that govern it. It goes on to detail the study's purpose, goals, and the problem statement. As a conclusion, the chapter emphasises the study's limitations.

In Chapter 2, the researcher presents the literature reviewed based on the title of the study. The literature assessed how other countries have implemented RPL.

In Chapter 3, conversely, the emphasis was on the study's theoretical underpinnings. The experiential learning theories and their implications for the research were described.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research approach, design, and methodology that examined the acceptance of previous learning (RPL) techniques for credit in one South African government department.

Chapter 5 discusses the results of the theme analysis and gives a presentation.

Theoretical underpinnings and a questionnaire of relevant literature are discussed in Chapter 6 of the research report.

Based on the study's results and data analysis, **Chapter 6** offers a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

1.15.   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the study's background, problem statement, specific research questions, justification, and aim of the study. The chapter outline covered the chapter's core concepts, scope, delimitation and limitations, as well as how it was structured.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented overall objectives that inform the depth and scale of the literature that has to be researched to react to the study's aim and objectives. This section presents extant literature in the subject of education and training, with a specific focus on certification acquisition through RPL from both international and South African perspective. The sub-sections that follow will present a contextualised viewpoint that will serve as the foundation for the study's advancement. The goal of contextualisation was to explore a wide range of existing literature to investigate current knowledge (Miguel et al., 2016), as well as to conceptually justify perceived enablers and/or limits to the implementation of education and training through RPL in the workplace. To meet the study's aims and uncover the challenges involved with obtaining qualifications for those who already have prior knowledge and experience in the industry, an analysis of the frameworks utilised to conceptualise RPL was required.

The following section will delve into detail about the conceptual framework. It will start with conceptualising the subject matter, which will then lead to an investigation of key areas that will serve as the foundation of this study. The researcher's lived observations and work experience in implementing skills development and unpublished research to understand the skills needs in the South African public sector inspired her to develop the study's topic. This resulted in the development of the research question. This in turn sparked an interest in a broad investigation into the dynamics associated with RPL implementation, with a focus on the best practice model or models for effective implementation; exploring the perspectives and experiences of key role players in RPL implementation; examining RPL candidates' perceptions of the RPL implementation processes after completion; and developing recommendations on how RPL administration can be enhanced (Thoresen & Ohlén, 2015).

This study is aligned to the definition of RPL as provided in the National Standards Bodies Regulations (No. 18787 of 1998), issued in terms of SAQA No.58 of 1995, which

offers the following definition: "Recognition of Prior Learning means the comparison of a learner's previous learning and experience, however obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specific qualification."

2.1.1. The Definition of RPL

RPL is a phenomenon that exhibits diversity in its implementation, contexts, principles, and interpretations (Anderson & Harris, 2006). South Africa has prioritised equity and access in the implementation of RPL more than other countries. RPL was initially implemented in South Africa's education and training system during the early 1990s, primarily influenced by the labour movement. It was one of several factors that contributed to broader reforms at the system level (Cooper & Ralphs, 2016).

2.1.2. RPL Theories

The majority of RPL conceptualisations, according to Harris (2004;2006, as referenced in Cooper, Harris, and & Ralphs (2018, p. 230)), are based on Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which originates from the cognitive and humanist psychology prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. The most popular theory of RPL in the past has been Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and related ideas in cognitive psychology (Harris, 2006, pp. 6-7). Harris claims that RPL seems to have fallen behind modern advancements in educational and social philosophy because of its dependence on these narratives (Cooper and Ralphs, 2016, p. 24). However, this study recognises the hybridised nature of RPL in the context of South Africa and includes it into Copper and Ralph's concept of RPL as a specialised pedagogy, which is discussed further in this chapter.

Anderson and Harris (2006, p. 86) cite Knowles (1980), who stresses the importance of adult experience. In the context of adult education, he calls adults' lived experiences the "richest source of learning" that, if disregarded or undervalued, students would interpret as a rejection of who they are. According to Kolb (1984), doing something with the phenomena is often necessary for experiential learning. This might include testing the action and interaction to get more knowledge about it or using the theory to achieve a desired outcome.

The role of RPL Candidates' experiences in evaluating information gained from working experience is better understood with the aid of the idea of learner agency, which is central to this research. Accordingly, the research is interested in gaining a better understanding of the learner agency in relation to the RPL assessment experience.

2.1.3. Credit Exchange Model

Both de Graaff (2012) and Trowler (1996) state that in order for an RPL applicant to be considered, they must demonstrate that their knowledge is directly related to the learning goals and assessment criteria associated with the level of certification or topics for which they are seeking recognition. This is known as the Credit Exchange Model. Neither the creation of new knowledge nor the transformation of current information into a different form is attempted by this concept, according to De Graaff (2012). Rather, recognition is granted to RPL applicants who assert that they possess a particular body of knowledge and who are able to prove it or provide supporting documentation (also see Trowler, 1996). A critique of this model is that knowledge becomes invisible if it does not fit within the boundaries of what is considered relevant to the curricula of an education institution. This is especially true when comparing knowledge to specific subjects in a certification, for example. Harris (1999) argues that while "the sites of knowledge production changes, what counts as knowledge does not" in this context. In the context of this study, the RPL candidates will be assessed to gain credits against the public administration qualification. Each candidate, also working in the same department and performing various administrative tasks at supervisory level, will be expected to produce a portfolio of evidence against the exit level outcomes of each learning area within the qualification.

2.1.4. Development Model

Trowell (1996) argues that in order to qualify for admission to or advancement within a higher education institution, one must first refine and repurpose their experience-based knowledge and abilities into codified propositioned knowledge. As a result, with the help of learning and reflection, the RPL Candidate may achieve the relevant learning objectives. According to this paradigm, it is crucial to compile a collection of proof. Evans (1988) states that in order to apply for RPL, one must first review and reflect on

one's own understanding of specific parts of one's experience, and then compare it to the course requirements of the level, qualification, or programme that one is seeking RPL for. To this end, it is the researcher's aim to assist prospective RPL candidate to better navigate the process of reflection on past experience, by developing a tool that will assist the learner to conduct their individual pre-assessment based on the exit level outcomes of the public administration qualification. The tool will provide examples of the evidence that may be included in the portfolio of evidence to allow the learner to gauge as to whether such evidence exists within their scope of work or past experience and gather this accordingly.

2.1.5. Transformational Model

According to Osman (2004). the Transformational Model acknowledges experiential and non-formal learning as legitimate forms of academic knowledge. Osman (2004) contends that neither the articulation nor the framing of such learning in terms of expert definitions, nor the matching of such knowledge and experiential learning with knowledge prevalent in the recipient institution, are necessary. The researcher supports Osman's position and holds that such forms of learning are legitimate in their own right and do not need to be redefined or matched to traditional academic standards to be considered valuable.

2.1.6. Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb (1984, p. 20) asserts that experiential learning theory provides a fundamentally different understanding of the learning process than either the more implicit theories of learning that support traditional educational methods, which are primarily grounded in a rational idealist epistemology, or the behavioural theories of learning based on an empirical epistemology.

In his research on the process of experiential learning, Kolb (1984) highlights the following four crucial elements of experiential learning:

i.   In experiential learning, the emphasis is on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content outcomes.

ii. Knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, and not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted.

iii. Learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms

iv. To understand learning, we must understand the nature of knowledge and vice versa.

The researcher aligns with Kolb (1984) experiential learning theory in the current study, as RPL recognises and validates the continuous, transformative process of learning through experiences, emphasising the importance of understanding both the learning process and the nature of knowledge.

2.2. A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: APPROACHES, ENABLERS, AND CONSTRAINTS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RPL

This part delves into the background of RPL as it pertains to the case study, the objective of applying RPL in different countries, different models, and some of the perceived challenges associated with RPL implementation. Historically dominating mainstream "scientific" discourses and conventional knowledge transmission and production norms are both challenged by RPL (Cooper et al., 2016). The RPL policy of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) makes it clear that this disruption and interference are being (reluctantly) permitted. RPL is defined as a specialised pedagogical tool that "allows for the incorporation of informal and/or non-formal knowledge" in the latter, allowing for the "inclusion" [of informally acquired learning] to overcome a variety of barriers to access and success in higher education" (CHE, 2016: 7).

The CHE advocates against utilising standard assessment approaches because prior learning may not always be expressed in ways that are integrated into a certain institution's pedagogies. This is congruent with Cooper et al.'s (2016: 124) viewpoint, which see RPL practices as a distinct pedagogy and set of tools for "navigating learning and assessment practices" across and within different learning contexts. It unavoidably entails "translating informal and non-formal bodies of knowledge into the formal and structured equivalents" (CHE, 2016: 27).

Standardising RPL processes and evaluations is often one solution to this prevalent problem, as indicated in the following paragraphs, particularly in the example of the United States of America (USA) (Shelembe, 2021). Additional known barriers will be elaborated on in the following sections when they are uncovered.

2.2.1. United States of America and Canada

Modes of knowledge creation and communication, as well as the location and value of education, have all been reorganised on a worldwide scale as a result of evolving socioeconomic, cultural and commercial factors, as well as globalisation and marketisation. This has resulted in a rethinking of what learning entails. However, RPL is not a new concept; it was initially employed in the USA between the 1950s and the 1980s. In the years after World War II, RPL was being investigated since many returning American servicemen and women were unwilling to resume their previous academic progress. ("RPL for advanced standing"). According to Bohlinger (2017), the first programme of its kind in the literature was a US-American initiative for WWII veterans. These individuals hoped that their prior job experience would help them reintegrate into the hiring process. Accordingly, RPL was considered a humanistic method of education that strives for social justice by encouraging individual and group development. The initial goal of developing and implementing RPL was to increase participation in post-school education and training (PSET). For instance, American servicemen and women neglected to pick up their education right after WWII. They dared the government and schools to acknowledge their abilities throughout the conflict so they might enrol in universities. In the United States, RPL is utilised to provide advanced standing or a set number of credits for courses and degree programmes. The use of well-designed and well-developed standards, models, concepts, and processes that are constantly reviewed to suit the growing needs in quality assurance and assessment methods in general is critical to sustaining assessment integrity and credibility. The United States approach is notable for its wide range of nationally created standardised examinations, which have reduced the requirement for individualised evaluations (Shelembe, 2021). Albeit that many South Africans who were subjected to political exile, resulting in some unable to pursue post-school education and training, RPL for advanced standing is not implemented in this regard.

2.2.2. RPL Practices in Canada

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is the term given to RPL in Canada, and it is used in a variety of settings, including secondary schools, post-secondary institutions, businesses, sector councils and industry groups, apprenticeship programmes, the military, and professional accrediting or regulatory organisations. However, in Canada (Quebec), feminist groups, rather than war veterans, advocated that prior learning obtained through domestic duties be recognised for entry to higher education (Alves et al., 2020). In this case, RPL is a logical extension of experiential learning theory, in which experience functions as a transformative process, resulting in learning that is centred on process rather than results. Numerous RPL-related policies and efforts have been devised and implemented in postsecondary institutions, with colleges generally receiving more favourable attention. These approaches and programmes, particularly in research-intensive institutions, remain intermittent, fragmented and woefully underfunded at Canadian universities. It is also lamentable that some academics who oppose for reasons related to epistemology or education, RPL may serve as strong access barriers in any field. Thus, it might be a significant challenge to shift academics' perspective from that of guardians of study-based information to that of mentors of students armed with knowledge gained from professional and real-world experiences. One of the main obstacles to a successful RPL deployment is gatekeeping (Browning, 2020). The researcher concurs that even in South Africa there is still gatekeeping in the RPL for access to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as each HEI grants RPL for access following autonomous HEIs policies approved by HEI Councils. The Senates also impose certain quotas for the award of RPL for access and this route to entry is also not widely understood by the general public and HEIs are able to overlook RPL for access Candidates into their institutions, thereby perpetuating barriers to entry into HEIs in the country.

2.2.3. RPL Practices in Brazil

It is worth noting that Brazil has no history of long-term or permanent RPL policies. In recent years, some initiatives have been established to encourage the acknowledgment of lifelong learning for specific social sectors and professional classifications. The

National Network of Professional Certification and Initial and Continuing Training, generally known as the Certific Network or just the Network, is a governmental policy for professional education designed expressly for socioeconomic inclusion by the Brazilian government. It is the closest policy offering to a permanent and structural RPL programme. It is intended for low-skilled workers seeking professional knowledge certification through informal and non-formal learning methods (Alves et al., 2020).

The French strategy of recognising gained experiences, as well as the Portuguese plan of recognising academic and professional knowledge, both have an impact on the Certific Network's recognition procedure, which is founded on the concept of professional certification. The Certific Network is intended for young and adult workers over the age of 18, who meet the following criteria: they must have a certificate or diploma that is compatible with the minimal education required for the relevant professional certification process; they are not currently employed; and they are interested in formal recognition of professional knowledge, skills, and competencies developed in formal and non-formal learning processes, as well as in their life and work trajectories. Despite its best efforts, the Certific Network ran into roadblocks that made implementation difficult. The Certific Centres received no new funds for their physical infrastructure or for employing personnel, hence the certification units received no financial support. As a result, policy implementation has been impeded, postponed or blocked (Alves et al., 2020). RPL has been on Portugal's national policy agenda since 2000, and it is based on the EU's lifelong learning principles (Lima & Guimaraes, 2016).

2.2.4. RPL Practices in Portugal

In Portugal, three approaches to RPL have been detailed. Firstly, it is democratic emancipatory education policies that emphasise the impact of critical teachings and view education as a tool for advancing social justice and social rights. Secondly, another approach is based on how democracy and economics interact to create opportunities for everyone, uses education to modernise society and maintain state control. Finally, the emphasis is on human resource management education policies that are built on redistributive principles such as boosting productivity, competition and flexibility. The structural issue of low educational attainment, particularly among adults, was what drove

the need for RPL in this country. Noteworthy is the case of Portugal's 10 million citizens, of which 895,140 adults have no formal education, and more than half of those between the ages of 25 and 64 have not completed upper-secondary education. Additionally in 2016, 33% of people between the ages of 25 and 34 had completed their secondary education (Alves et al., 2020).

In Portugal, the RPL process begins with the adult (i.e., learner or student) receiving supplemental training for a minimum of 50 hours in areas where they have fewer skills. Contrary to the Portuguese practice, in South Africa the training component is implemented upon identifying gaps in a RPL candidate's portfolio of evince during assessment, thereafter, training in the specific skills gap is then conducted to ensure competence. After completing training, the adult is awarded a jury certification of competence, which recognises the competencies as having been validated and certified during the training. The adult is examined in the form of a jury presentation during the certification session. After passing the exam, the adult receives full or partial certification. There were several challenges to the successful implementation of RPL in Portugal, including political instability, a change of administration, and significant cutbacks to financing from 2012 to 2016. Nevertheless, in order to guarantee a successful implementation, some supporting components were established. Enabling factors include, for instance, the participation of representatives from the many parts of the labour market whose job requirements were defined. The first was the creation of a National Qualifications System. This system's stated goal was to better align VET qualification frameworks with labour market demands and to strengthen the link between general education and professional training across all VET courses. The National Qualifications System gave rise to the National Council for Vocational Training and the Sector Councils for Qualifications, both of which are responsible for establishing the minimum requirements for each position. The Portuguese government further introduced the "Qualifica" Programme in 2017 to advance and promote adult education and training as well as improve the qualifications of adults. Additionally, to facilitate the successful implementation of RPL, the National Catalogue of Qualifications, the National Qualification Framework and the Individual Skills Handbook were developed (Alves et al., 2020; Guimaraes & Mikulec, 2021). Similarly in South Africa, RPL is implemented

following the guidelines regulated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). This will be elaborated on further when the researcher presents the South African literature.

2.2.5. RPL Practices in Australia

Referencing prior learning (RPL) is defined by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) as the acknowledgment of existing capabilities, regardless of the context, timing, or method of acquisition. Bowman et al. (2003) states that competencies are defined by the AQTF as "a combination of formal or informal education and training, work experience, or general life experience" (p. 17). Prior to approving RPL, the assessor has to confirm that the applicant satisfies the validated industry competence requirements or course outcomes outlined in the Australian Qualifications Framework (Bowman et al., 2003). This is also the case in South Africa. During the assessment process, applicants for RPL are required to provide credentials, letters of recommendation from previous employers, testimonials from clients, and examples of their work. The next step is to satisfy the assessor that the evidence is sufficient, current, real, legitimate, and dependable.

2.2.6. The European Skills Agenda

To help individuals and companies get and use better and more sophisticated skills, the European Union has a five-year plan dubbed the European Skills Agenda. The incorporation of previously acquired knowledge is a part of it. The Skills Agenda stresses the importance of investing more money into training people. Encouraging lifelong skill development is central to the Skills Agenda. It includes upskilling paths, which teach adults basic reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as how to utilise technology effectively. Upskilling paths consist of three stages. A skills audit is the first step in establishing a plan to improve one's skill set. The second step is to propose a course of study or training to meet the specified skill requirements in a way that is timely and relevant to the job market. Thirdly, skill validation and recognition is provided to individuals. Upskilling pathways are already in place in several European countries, and these will continue to grow. The South African RPL implementation practices could

benefit from adopting the three-steps model in order to standardise the current practices that are more industry specific in current practices.

2.2.6.1. Turkey – A successful RPL and qualifications system

Turkey has come a long way in developing a system of qualifications that would equip workers with "up to date" credentials and recognise their own learning on the job. The validation of informal and non-formal learning has been the primary focus.

The Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) developed the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF), which is based on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and was approved in 2015. Osman Seçkin Akbiyik, a senior specialist at the VQA, was interviewed by the European Training Foundation. He stated that all new credentials were "developed from zero" and that labour market stakeholders were also involved. Instead of depending on skill identification and documentation and self-assessment methodologies, Turkish RPL applicants are required to show competences through theoretical and practical exams. This sets Turkey apart from many countries. Funding for Turkey's RPL system is shared between the public and private sectors, with a leaning towards the private sector (Akkök & Füsun, 2019; European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Turkey. Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. The system is primarily supported by employers and important players in the labour market, including unions and trade associations. RPL receives money from a variety of sources, including the state, corporate sector, groups, individuals who contribute to validation expenses, and special funds such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).

2.2.7. RPL Practices within African Countries: Namibia, Mauritius, Botswana

In the African context, numerous studies on RPL have been undertaken (Shaketange, 2018; Thobejane, 2016; Bolton et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2017 & 2018; Nduna, 2017). The available literature confirms that various African countries, including but not limited to Mauritius, Namibia and Botswana, have substantial experience with the RPL project. These countries have begun to introduce RPL policies. However, the RPL initiative is still little understood in other African countries (Thobejane, 2016). The RPL initiative will

be explored in the following paragraphs from the perspectives of four African countries: Namibia, Mauritius, Botswana, and South Africa. The RPL in Namibia is covered first in this portion of the text, then RPL in Botswana and Mauritius. According to the South African viewpoint, which will be provided later in this paragraph (LGSETA, 2016), RPL was initially intended to help those who, due to apartheid, were unable to take part in conventional training programmes and earn credentials.

2.2.8. RPL Practices in Namibia

Namibia, according to publicly available information, has progressed and passed a policy on prior learning recognition. Namibia's education and training sector experienced severe challenges after it attained independence in 1990. The reform of their educational system, which was required to solve the enormous difficulties left by the colonial authority, was a notable challenge. The government then built an educational system that is inclusive, equitable and learner-centred. The fundamental problem with Namibia's educational system is the widespread belief that traditional classroom instruction is inherently better than more informal forms of education like open distance learning, learning on the job, and life experience (Thobejane, 2016). As a result, Namibia's educational institutions established and adopted policies for RPL implementation. However, there were certain challenges in implementing RPL at the University of Namibia. Among the challenges were a lack of ontological understanding of what defines RPL, how RPL is evaluated and its validity and integrity. As a result, RPL failed to meet its obligations (Shaketange, 2018).

2.2.8.1. RPL Practices in Mauritius

The review of literature demonstrates that Mauritius is one of the African countries that uses RPL to provide previously disadvantaged people with access to education and training programmes, as well as to keep the skills they have already acquired from earlier work or life experiences. Further, RPL was created to sustain and build a competitive and skilled workforce capable of adapting to changing economic situations and labour markets and making informed decisions (Thobejane, 2016). This is consistent with the government's strategy on lifelong learning, which strives to identify and verify competencies obtained outside of traditional education and training. Since

Mauritius has limited natural resources and relies largely on its human capital, the demand for new talents and the opportunity to upskill individuals who are less employable is one of the country's most pressing concerns. The success of RPL implementation in Mauritius is a key finding from studies with a focus on Mauritius. The ILO, for example, observed that individuals who attended RPL obtained job advancements, while others received salary increases (ILO, 2018). The success was owing to well-defined policy and implementation methodologies. The RPL policy highlighted the many stages of the process as well as the benefits to stakeholders. It also emphasised quality assurance, with facilitators and assessors tasked with aiding various industries with RPL system implementation (ILO, 2018). The case of Mauritius was of significant interest in this study as it provided clearly documented success stories of the implementation of RPL in that country, which the researcher argues is lacking in the case of South Africa.

2.2.8.2. RPL Practices in Botswana

To better align training with the skill requirements of employers, Botswana's training institutions began developing a new curriculum that focuses on the Adult Basic Education Programme integrates fundamental skills training with practical job experience, while the Structured Job-Based Learning Programmes provide structured and hands-on learning opportunities. The programme is overseen by the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BOA). The implementation of RPL is regarded in the literature as a challenging and time-consuming process. As a result, in countries like Botswana, where RPL is still in its infancy, as little is known about the restrictions and success stories of RPL (Modungwa & Molwane, 2011).

2.2.9. RPL in South Africa

In the wake of apartheid's dismantling, the reconstruction of education and training in South Africa has been an intricate and expansive undertaking. Wheelahan (2003:1) posits that South Africa has embraced RPL more comprehensively than other nations. Harris (1999) affirms, RPL is an important part of redress since it may help people from historically disadvantaged backgrounds get the education and training, they need while also improving their qualification status.

South Africa's 2013 National Policy for RPL Implementation, meticulously delineates the procedures for RPL execution in South Africa. This policy is crucial in ensuring that individuals are duly acknowledged for the skills and knowledge accrued through workplace experiences and life endeavours Early explorations into RPL delivery within Further Education and Training Colleges (FETEC) revealed a phased and evolving implementation (Mukora, 2010). The challenges with RPL implementation were highlighted by Mahlangu (2013) and includes insufficient training, poor RPL comprehension, a lack of quality assurance methods, restricted access to practical workshops, and general unfavourable attitudes towards RPL. These findings provide important context for understanding the main challenges to RPL integration.

While RPL is conceptually beneficial, its efficacy is hampered by limited awareness and advocacy. PSETA (2017) highlights the intricate and confusing nature of RPL methods and processes. Thobejane's (2016) study on the constraints facing RPL execution in education revealed impediments such as a lack of comprehension about RPL procedures, delays in accrediting skills development providers and ambiguous policy requirements. Another investigation into the design of the RPL implementation model illuminated factors inhibiting its success, including candidates lacking essential examination skills and the implementers grappling with unclear national policies (Thobejane, 2016).

Remarkably, there is a scarcity of RPL research within the SETA environment. The LGSETA (2016) endeavoured to bridge this gap by developing a comprehensive RPL toolkit for the local government sector in collaboration with human resources professionals, including human resources officers and Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs). Municipalities, despite theoretical support for RPL, faced significant challenges in its implementation, including a dearth of accredited skills development providers and a general lack of awareness (LGSETA, 2016). The researcher argues that similarly to the LGSETA, the other SETAs should be leading with developing RPL implementation supportive tools for their respective sectors and advocate for the standardised implementation of RPL in sector specific modes.

Further insights into the public sector were gleaned from PSETA's (2017) evaluation of RPL procedures in government departments. The study uncovered widespread acceptance of RPL among policymakers and implementers, particularly within SETAs. However, the identified limitations included inadequate resources, a lack of awareness regarding RPL and its evaluation methods, and financial constraints. This particular study heightened the researcher's interest in gaining more understanding in the challenges and or enablers to implementing RPL in the public service sector and to document the findings accordingly in the current study.

Lackay's (2015) dissertation focused on the policing sector, offering a distinctive perspective on the benefits of RPL. Contrary to previous research, Lackay's study revealed that RPL played a pivotal role in the police sector by identifying skill gaps that could be addressed through targeted upskilling interventions. Moreover, it highlighted the positive impact of RPL on staff members, emphasising the role of training organisations in disseminating information about RPL and its advantages.

In essence, South Africa's journey in embracing RPL as a tool for education and training reconstruction post-apartheid is marked by both strides and stumbling blocks. The concerted efforts to institutionalise RPL across various sectors demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and redress. However, the persistent challenges, ranging from a lack of awareness to intricate procedural complexities, underscore the need for continuous refinement and advocacy to unlock the full potential of RPL in South Africa's transformative education landscape.

2.2.10. Legislative and Policy Framework Underpinning RPL in South Africa

In South Africa, the RPL system is regulated by several laws and policy frameworks. RPL in the South African context is viewed as a crucial tool for redress and expanding access to chances for career advancement and lifelong learning.

2.2.8.1. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution implicitly permits RPL implementation by addressing historical imbalances, among other things. All South Africans are

guaranteed the right to basic education, adult basic education, and higher education under Section 29 of the Constitution.

2.2.8.2. National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008 (Act 67 of 2008)

SAQA must establish guidelines and rules for RPL, assessment, and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) in line with the NQF Act of 2008, Section 13(1)(h)(iii). The Quality Councils and SAQA are each given distinct roles in relation to RPL under the Act. Part 13(1)(h)(iii) states that SAQA must establish norms and regulations for RPL, assessment, and CAT. In accordance with Section 27(h)(1), the Quality Councils must formulate and implement standards and policies, taking into account the standards and policies pertaining to evaluation, RPL, and credit accumulation that are addressed in Section 13(1)(h)(iii).

2.2.8.3. Higher Education Act of 1997 (Act 101 of 1997)

The Higher Education Act of 1997 creates an environment for the implementation of RPL. The Act reflects the need for redress as well as the creation of ideal learning environments, the advancement of moral principles and the encouragement of each student's and employee's full potential.

2.2.8.4. Skills Development Act of 1998 (Act 97 of 1998)

With the goal of enhancing the workforce's skill set, the Skills Development Act of 1998 establishes a system for implementing policies for skill development on a national, sectoral, and workplace level. The Act makes it clear in Section 2(1)(e) that educational and training opportunities must be provided to those who have experienced unjust discrimination in the past if they are to have any hope of regaining work.

2.2.8.5. General Education and Training Qualifications Act of 2001 (Act 58 of 2001)

It would seem that RPL is not addressed under the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Act of 2001 (GENFETQA) (Act 58 of 2001), as revised in Act 50 of 2008; nonetheless, there are mentions of assessment and accreditation.

2.2.8.6. Continuing Education and Training Act of 2006 (Act 16 of 2006)

RPL is deeply rooted in the Continuing Education and Training Act of 2006, which is founded on the principles of inclusive and diverse educational institutions that support progressive social and economic agendas, as well as the expansion of educational opportunities to all individuals, particularly those with disabilities and those who face barriers to traditional classroom settings.

2.2.8.7. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (November 2013)

The White Paper explicitly stipulates that RPL remains a key mechanism to redressing past injustices and recognising competence gained through practical workplace learning and experience. The Act further indicates that RPL will be applied more widely especially for young adults who wish to access programmes in colleges (DPSA 2021:20).

2.2.8.8. Public Service Act of 1994 (Act 103 of 1994)

The core objective of this Act is to provide for the organisation and administration of the public service of the Republic of South Africa, the regulation of the conditions of employment, terms of office, discipline, retirement and discharge of members of the public service, and related matters.

2.2.8.9. Public Service Regulations 2016

The Public Service Act gives credence to the Public Service Regulations of 2016. More importantly, the Public Service Regulations are intended to regulate the organisation and management of the public service, and related matters. The Public Service Regulations (2016) make provision for a Head of Department (HoD) in terms of sub-regulation 77 (1) (a) of the Public Service Regulations (2016), may require any person who is part of any of the categories contemplated in sub-regulations 65(9) (a),(b),(c) and (d) to undergo RPL Assessment if it is envisaged that doing so will assist such person/s to comply with any statutory.

2.2.9. South African Policies related to RPL

2.2.9.1. RPL Coordination Policy (Ministry of Higher Education and Training, 2016

The policy's stated goal is to make it easier for RPL to be developed and implemented at all levels of the NQF and in post-secondary education. In order to ensure that SAQA and the Quality Councils fulfilled their statutory responsibilities, the Recognition of Prior Learning Coordination Policy (DHET 2016:10) formally included RPL in the country's training and education plans. Noteworthy is that the RPL Coordination Policy (2016) was proposed to be replaced with the RPL Implementation Framework following a study carried out by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2022 and subsequent stakeholder consultations.

2.2.9.2. RPL Implementation Framework/National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (As amended in March 2019)

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Act 67 of 2008 mandates SAQA to develop, after consultation with the Quality Councils, National Policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). By updating the National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL in 2019, we want to solidify RPL's place in South Africa's education and training programmes and make sure that everyone involved in RPL knows their role and what they're responsible for. The intention of the amended Policy and Criteria is to facilitate change in the lives of RPL candidates, including workers and learners of all ages (both employed and unemployed), and other marginalised groups (SAQA 2019).

2.2.9.3. National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior

The purpose of the National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning, 2019 is to continuously entrench the RPL in the national education and training agenda and to ensure clarity and consistency regarding the roles and responsibilities of the role-players.

2.2.9.4. Directive on Policy Guidelines and Procedure for the implementation of RPL in the Public Service

The Directive on Policy Guidelines and Procedure for the implementation of RPL in the public service was developed to support departments and providers when developing

RPL processes and implementation policies in the workplace. The Policy Guideline provides a synthesis of the RPL policies and procedures in relation to the skills development environment, which includes the national legislation regulating RPL practices. It further assists departments in designing their own departmental and occupation specific RPL tools, documentation and processes that need to be implemented and adhered to (DPSA, 2021:17). It is noteworthy that there are several role-players and stakeholders involved in the national RPL implementation strategy, each with specific roles and duties.

2.2.9.5. Public Service Human Resource Development Strategic Framework

Cabinet adopted the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010–2030 (HRD-SA) in 2010 to direct all major aspects of human resources, such as recruitment, performance evaluation, professional development, and pay and benefits. A unified framework integrating critical components of the value chain for human resource development is the goal of this concerted effort.

2.2.9.6. DPSA Directive on Policy Guidelines and Procedure for the implementation of RPL in the public service

The RPL Policy Guideline has been developed for use in the public service to guide and to support departments and providers when embarking on RPL processes and implementation in the workplace DPSA (2021). The Policy Guidelines provide an overview of the RPL policies and procedures that exist within the skills development environment, which include the national legislation regulating RPL practices.

Figure 2.1: Recognition of Prior Learning Process in the public service
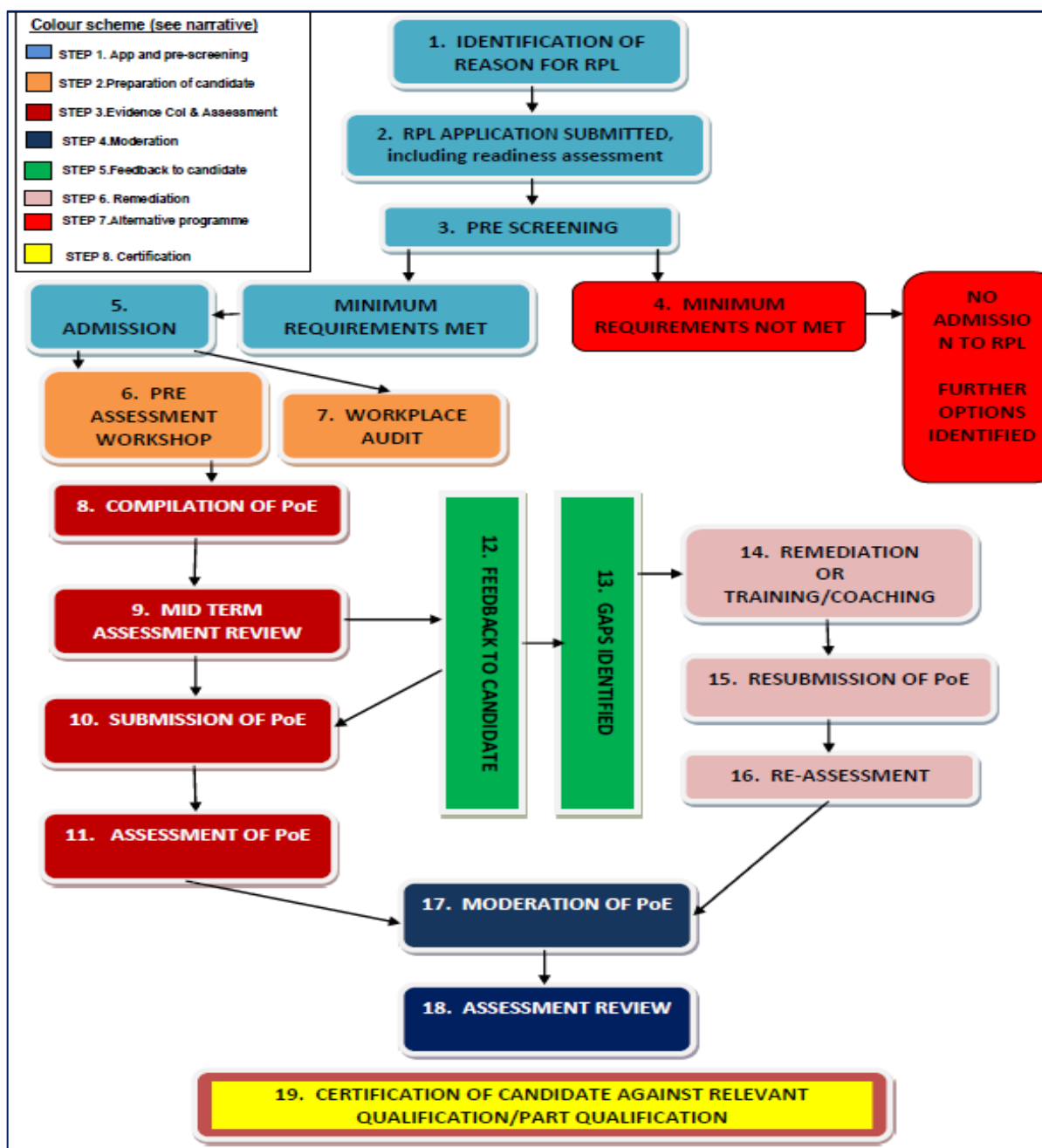
RPL in the public service (Source: DPSA 2021:29)

RPL systems differ in their design and scope, therefore, resulting in different processes and outcomes. Based on the specific system, the outcomes may result in a full qualification, partial qualification, credits towards a qualification, exemption from an academic prerequisite for entering formal education, or no recognition (ILO 2018:12).

2.2.10. Summary of Challenges of RPL in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries

Concerning the impact of RPL on development cooperation in LMICs, there is a lack of appropriate empirical data collected. Several comparative studies have focused on South Africa as an example (Cooper et al., 2017; Harris, 1999). Though several studies have looked at specific cases in India and Bangladesh, no comprehensive analyses of RPL programmes in those nations have been conducted (Maurer & Morshed, 2021). Despite the dearth of evidence, the next section will provide a synopsis of the difficulties encountered during the creation and implementation of RPL in LMICs (Maurer, 2021).

2.2.10.1. First Challenge: Not All Actors Support the Goal of Improved Permeability

Those who gain from exclusive access often fight against efforts to increase permeability, thus although RPL acknowledges that earning a degree is a luxury, it says nothing about doing so. For instance, RPL is often met with resistance from schools in South Africa until it is offered financial incentives. On the other hand, important players like as labour unions show no sign of embracing it. Considering that many stakeholders are opposed to RPL policy, there is a chance that the process of putting it into action will diverge from a more theoretical discussion of national policy that focuses on international principles and methods (Maurer, 2021). To better their position in the educational system and the job market, VET players in Bangladesh, for instance, were able to restrict RPL participation to a select group of beneficiaries (Zapp, 2019; Maurer & Morshed, 2021; Maurer, 2021).

2.2.10.2. Second Challenge: The development of RPL-related Qualifications is Demanding and Often Time Consuming

Despite considerable interest in RPL instruments (such as portfolio procedures) in LMICs, they have not been widely employed. Skill tests have gained in popularity among LMICs. They often only provide access to lower-level degrees with a focus on practical skills. New, more pragmatic credentials have been established in countries where such credentials are still absent, in part to open the door for RPL deployment. Such qualifications, on the other hand, frequently require time to establish. These challenges

exist not only in developing countries like Bangladesh, but also in OECD countries (Maurer & Morshed, 2021). Furthermore, governments may regard RPL as a common technique for lowering entrance barriers to improve access to degrees, which could harm the standing of current degrees (Maurer, 2021).

2.2.10.3. Third Challenge: The Added Value of Recognition is Often Limited

The primary goals of RPL initiatives are competency identification, increased access to training and higher education, and easier employment. On the other side, getting a good foundational education is usually a must for college admissions (i.e., lower secondary level). As a result, RPL courses are not helping those who should be (Maurer & Morshed, 2021). In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), vocational education and training (VET) credentials are not highly valued for their potential benefits in the job market. For example, in the arts and business studies, people's credentials and work history are often disregarded when making hiring and advancement decisions. Consequently, RPL marketing efforts should centre on fields where credentials are highly valued. Given this background, it might be possible to speed up the process of obtaining a credential in this area by acknowledging the work experience of returning migrants who have worked in the health sectors of other nations (Maurer, 2021).

2.3.   THE OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT OF RPL

In the realm of South African post-school education and training, RPL emerges as a crucial facet, governed by stringent regulations set forth by the government. The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) outlines the framework within which RPL operates, encapsulated within the Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF) of 2017. This comprehensive framework encompasses the triad of work experience, practical skills and theoretical knowledge, providing a holistic lens through which RPL can be applied in the pursuit of qualifications or partial qualifications.

The South African landscape recognises two distinct categories of RPL: RPL for credit and RPL for access. For Credit RPL, the SAQA and subsequently, QCTO adhere to the guidelines of NQF-registered qualification, granting acknowledgment and credit to applicants based on competencies acquired through informal, non-formal, or

experiential learning. Nevertheless, scholars like Cooper and Ralphs (2016:121) raise pertinent concerns about the QCTO RPL model, positing limitations for candidates with significant workplace experience. They contend that the compulsory disaggregated assessment of prior learning might not adequately capture the integrated and tacit understanding possessed by experienced workers, necessitating a more customised and integrated pedagogical approach to recognise their expertise.

In the pursuit of RPL credit, learners are required to fulfil the QCTO prerequisites, culminating in an External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA). SAQA underlines the foundational principle of credit acquisition toward an NQF-registered qualification. This journey involves a systematic process, articulated by SAQA (2014, p. 41), which encompasses:

i.   Identifying knowledge and skills: This involves discerning what the candidate already knows and is capable of doing.

ii.   Standard Matching: Next, the candidate's knowledge, experience, and abilities are compared to the relevant qualifying standards and evaluation criteria.

iii.   Evaluation in Relation to criteria: The candidate's performance is evaluated by comparing them to these criteria in a thorough manner.

iv.   Accrual Credit: When a candidate successfully completes an assessment, their prior formal, informal, and non-formal learning experiences are taken into account.

In 2011, a strategic objective from South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is in line with the overall goal of RPL in the country. With the aid of education and training, this vision hopes that RPL may develop into a completely unified system that everyone can get behind. The ultimate aim is to optimise the utilisation of knowledge and skills acquired by South Africans outside the conventional channels of institutional and workplace learning.

This strategic vision underscores a commitment to inclusivity, acknowledging that valuable expertise may be cultivated through diverse avenues beyond traditional educational institutions. RPL, therefore, stands as a bridge, connecting the experiential wealth of individuals with formal qualifications. It seeks to democratise the recognition

of skills and competencies, fostering a learning environment that values the varied trajectories individuals take on their educational and professional journeys.

While the current framework provides a solid foundation, ongoing reflections on its efficacy and responsiveness to the needs of diverse learners are imperative. Cooper and Ralphs' (2016) critique prompts a re-evaluation of assessment methodologies, particularly for seasoned professionals whose wealth of experience might transcend the granularity of the current RPL model. In envisioning a future where RPL seamlessly integrates into the educational fabric of South Africa, a commitment to adaptability and continuous improvement emerges as a key imperative.

2.3.1. Pedagogising Knowledge

To comprehend the organisation of information, one can employ Bernstein's (2000) concept of the pedagogic device, as suggested by Cooper, Harris and Ralphs (2018, p. 243). The instructional device illustrates how RPL might potentially question conventional notions of specialist knowledge, asserting that specialised information is not solely acquired inside academic contexts, but also within the workplace. As stated by Cooper et al. (2018), RPL should be seen as a specific type of border pedagogy that helps to connect experienced knowledge and codified knowledge.

Bernstein (2000), as cited in Gamble (2013), categorises knowledge into three distinct categories and argues that these knowledge domains influence our perception and understanding of knowledge. Bernstein outlines his pedagogic device, a framework of principles for translating knowledge into classroom instruction and curricular development. The pedagogic device comprises three domains: knowledge production, which involves the generation of knowledge that is esteemed by society; knowledge re-contextualisation, which involves the refinement and adaptation of information for effective delivery to the intended audience; and knowledge reproduction, which pertains to the content taught within the classroom. Cooper and Ralphs (2016) highlight that Bernstein argues that knowledge is situated within the domain of production and extends to the domains of curriculum and pedagogy.

2.3.2. RPL as a Specialised Pedagogy: Crossing the Lines

Since RPL is a highly specialised means of mediating knowledge, Cooper and Ralphs (2016, p. 35) argue that it cannot be seen as the conventional means of acquiring and transmitting information from a single epistemic authority. In order to theorise and compare the specialised nature and modalities of RPL in different contexts, Cooper and Ralphs (2016, p. 10) studied the affordances and constraints of different RPL practices. Their goal was to understand the "inner workings" of RPL as a pedagogic practice.

Regarding RPL as a specialised educational activity both inside and beyond the NQF knowledge limits, Cooper and Ralphs (2016, p.145) provide a conceptual framework and descriptive language. Within the contentious system of knowledge production and dissemination, their proposed paradigm situates RPL, along with the interrelated fields of knowledge creation, knowledge contextualization, and pedagogical practice.

According to Cooper and Ralphs (2016, p. 130), RPL stands out as an educational strategy because it deviates from the conventional model of knowledge transmission, acquisition, and evaluation that relies on a central authority figure or source (Figure 2.2 below).

Figure 2.1: RPL as a specialised pedagogy: inner workings and artistry
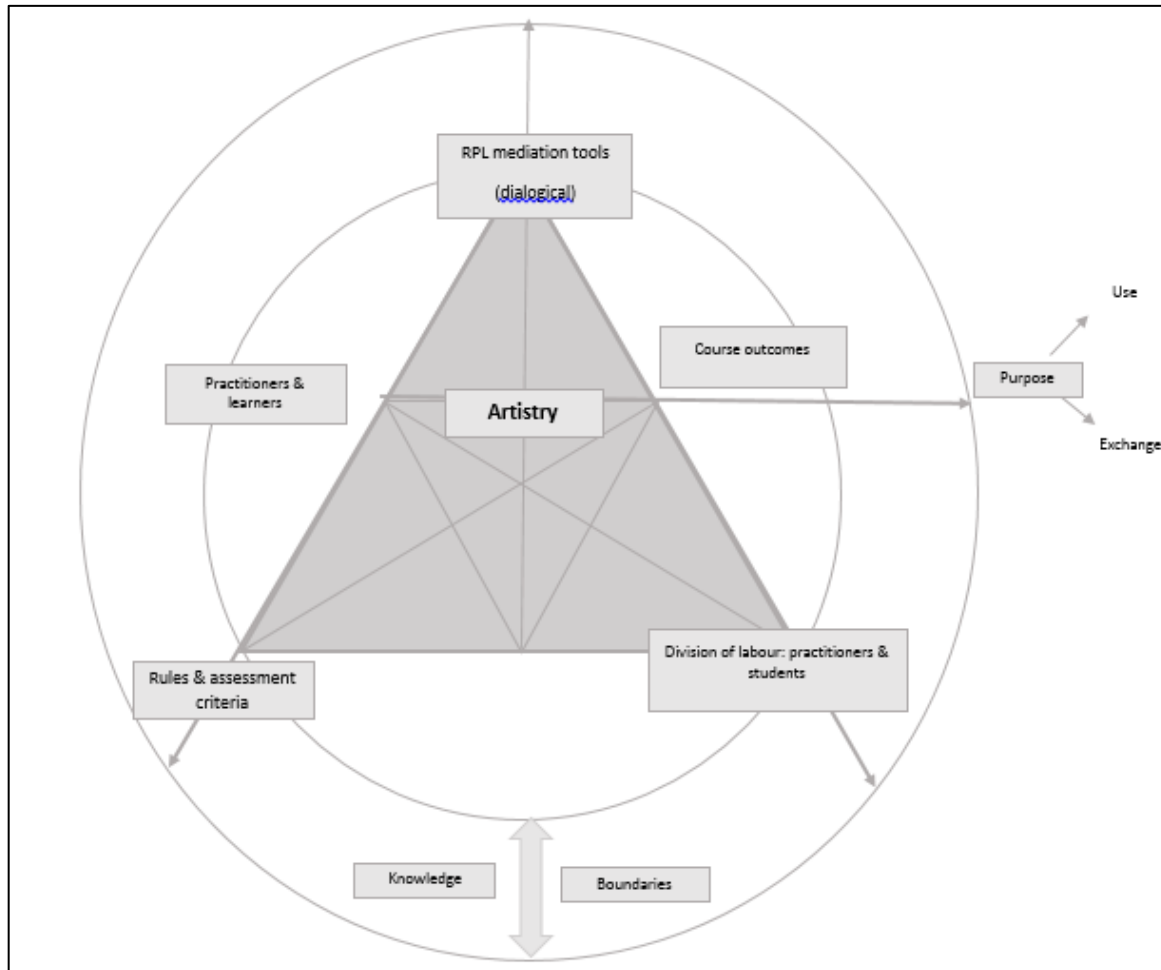
Source: (Cooper & Ralphs, 2016)

Knowledge claims based on the evaluation criteria specified in the curriculum of codified knowledge and claims originating from experiential learning are reconciled through RPL, according to Cooper and Ralphs (2016), who describe it as a separate and specialised process. This research will benefit from these concepts as they provide a framework for analysing implementation and providing elucidatory language. As per Cooper and Ralphs (2016), RPL is an approach to education that aims to expand the criteria for evaluating the tool. The RPL technique for knowledge production and sharing is shown in Figure 2. Attempting to identify the distinctive qualities of RPL as a specialised pedagogical practice, Cooper and Ralphs (2016) uncover important factors that create the unusual RPL tools and procedures within a dynamic and purposeful community of practice bound by certain rules and division of labour. This model, as stated by Cooper

and Ralphs (2016), offers a framework for comprehending the hybridised character of learning. Learners are positioned as both subjects, with the responsibility of acquiring and demonstrating the specialised knowledge and dispositions required for the qualification, and agents, with a crucial role to play in the creation and mediation of pedagogical knowledge within their respective organisations.

As a result, the concepts that underpin RPL as a specialised pedagogy can be classified into four domains, those being knowledge, pedagogy, institutional environment, and learner agency. The purpose of this study was to acquire insight into how knowledge, pedagogy, learner agency, and institutional contexts that contribute to facilitating or hindering the adoption of RPL in the public sector. Cooper and Ralphs (2016) conducted a study looking into the constraints of various RPL practices, among other inquiries, and they contend that the QCTO RPL model, which mandates a disaggregated assessment of prior learning, places restrictions on candidates with extensive work experience regarding RPL for credits. In response, they claim that competent and experienced workers have an integrated understanding of the complexities of their work practices, but that this understanding cannot be easily mapped onto the dispersed components of the QCTO curriculum framework, necessitating the use of a different assessment strategy for these workers. They argue that to acknowledge their prior learning, such candidates require a personalised and integrated pedagogical approach.

The literature illustrates the challenges connected with RPL implementation, and additional research in this field may allow us to better explain these challenges or find new ones.

2.3.3. RPL as Boundary Work

According to the definition provided by Harris (2001), boundary-work is an active, socially created activity that facilitates the re-enactment and re-negotiation of boundaries and locations. This method has been increasingly used for the purpose of mapping contemporary social practices. She maintains that boundaries and boundary work represent a more significant change in conceptualization and provide a potentially more nuanced perspective on the inner workings of RPL procedures.

Edwards 1997 (as cited in Harris 2001, p. 4) captures key outlines of enquiry concerning RPL as 'boundary work,' namely:

i.   What and where- making reference to the nature of boundaries and their degree of permeability, and where they are located;

ii.   What is in or out- referring to positioning and marginalisation;

iii.   Who or what sets boundaries and manages polices;

iv.   Who or what is managing the boundaries- making reference to shifting boundary identities and functions, and

v.   How the boundaries are being managed- referring to the interactions between boundary differentiation and dedifferentiation.

Therefore, the major lines of inquiry that have been discussed up to this point are appropriate for this research since they led the conceptualization of the nature of restrictions. In the context of this investigation, considering RPL to be boundary work will also make it possible to use analytical and critical techniques for the purpose of data gathering and analysis.

2.3.4. Understanding the Transitions between Work and Formal Qualifications

This literature emphasises the significance of RPL in helping individuals who are not adequately qualified owing to different situations to re-engage in the process of education. Cooper, et al. (2018) assert that the main foundation for the development of RPL is derived from Kolb's (1984) ELT, which originated from the cognitive and humanist psychology that was prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s.

2.3.5. Introducing Research on RPL

Anderson et al. (2013, p. 405) indicate that experts from different backgrounds have different ideas about what RPL is. They list these three backgrounds for RPL:

i.   In some cases, RPL can be the basis of admission, credit acceptance, or improved standing. This is especially true in secondary adult education and university education.

ii.   RPL in the labour market, where different kinds of RPL are being used in job services, for certain companies in certain trades and businesses.

iii.   Where RPL happens through free volunteer work, an area that is becoming more and more popular as people want to learn more about how valuable learning can be in this setting.

Although Kolb's ELT may be perceived as a sort of ideological theoretical foundation for a lot of RPL research, Anderson et al. (2013) argue that it limits the philosophy of examining RPL from other theoretical angles. In this regard, RPL can be thought of as a type of hybridised practical learning theory. A lot of different models of RPL practice have been put forward over the years, according to Cooper and Ralphs (2016). There is also a growing consensus among researchers regarding the necessity of taking a much closer look at the specialised nature and limitations of RPL practices.

2.4.   RPL Assessments

From the SAQA policy (2014), it is evident that the RPL process is made up of the following steps:

i.   Assessing out what the candidate knows and can do;

ii.   Comparing the candidate's skills, knowledge, and experience to certain standards and the qualifications that go with them;

iii.   Evaluating the candidate based on those standards;

iv.   Giving the candidate credit for skills, knowledge, and experience gained through formal, informal, and non-formal learning that happened in the past (National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior L

In the South African context, RPL is based on earning points that count towards or against a title that is listed on the NQF. Assessment is the process of collecting evidence of learner's work to measure and make judgements about the competence or non-

competence of specified NQF occupational standards or qualifications and part qualifications.

This study is guided by the theoretical framework of Kolb's ELT, as the main question is strongly linked to broader investigations into the process of learning through first-hand experiences. The significance of adult experience is regarded as a crucial means of learning in the context of adult education. Should this aspect be neglected, adult learners may perceive it as a dismissal of their individuality, as they derive their sense of self from their experiences (Knowles, 1990; Anderson & Harris, 2006).

2.5.   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter sought to demonstrate how the different viewpoints on learning, assessment, and RPL may work together to support the proposed RPL pre-assessment for the workplace that came out of this study. This chapter further synthesised theory and empirical data to trace the development of learning theory from its origins in behaviourism to its current iteration in the workplace. The main argument of the chapter was that there are major differences between classroom learning and learning on the job or workplace learning.

This chapter demonstrated that workplace learning is more contextual, more dependent on social activities and less regimented. Learning in the workplace is seen as more of a random occurrence than a deliberate effort, according to this perspective. Both classroom and workplace learning have their advantages and disadvantages; after all, they are merely different settings with different kinds of learners who come for different reasons. The boundaries between the two are really becoming more porous, and there are components of both the commercial world and the classroom almost every time. Theorists in the business and the classroom may be better understood via these linkages.

The chapter progressed from RPL literature to learning theory decision. Several benefits of RPL were addressed. As an example of a social justice advantage, it permits candidates to have their life experiences counted towards certification exit level outcomes, which means that their knowledge may be evaluated based on their diverse

backgrounds. The chapter also reviewed the literature's limitations and enablers, which together demonstrate that RPL is more complex than the legal and conceptual frameworks that policymakers have been led to believe.

To better understand RPL practices worldwide, this chapter synthesised the numerous settings for RPL implementation. It also demonstrated how RPL is utilised in diverse scenarios in South Africa.

This study inquiry is grounded on the conceptual and theoretical foundations that are provided in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3:
CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1.   INTRODUCTION

In the world of research, Liehr and Smith (2014) highlight the crucial role of a framework as a guiding tool for researchers. This framework serves as a roadmap, aiding researchers in addressing their research questions and measuring variables. Its importance extends to the planning of variable analysis and the establishment of limitations to comprehensively study the research subject. Once data are collected, the framework becomes a valuable tool for comparing findings to existing concepts, theories or the state of the art in the field. Imenda (2014) suggests that if contradictions arise, researchers should critically evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen framework in explaining the findings. Moreover, the framework serves another vital function by explaining the existence of the research problem, creating a cohesive link between variables or concepts.

Researchers can use a framework to help them answer research questions and measure variables more accurately (Liehr & Smith, 2014). It helps the researcher set boundaries for the study of the research topic and aids in the planning of variable analysis. Researchers can use the framework to compare their findings to previously established notions, theories or the state of the art when data collection is complete. If there are inconsistencies, the researcher needs to think about how well the framework explains the results (Imenda, 2014). Furthermore, by establishing connections between the variables or concepts, it clarifies the existence of the study problem.

A conceptual framework provides background and an integrated way to investigate the subject's key concepts and ideas (Liehr & Smith, 2014). Concepts and ideas related to a specific area of study are brought together in a coherent way. The purpose of constructing a conceptual framework is to gain a more comprehensive grasp of a topic by bringing together related ideas (Imenda, 2014). Therefore, recognition and certification of formal and informal knowledge gained through experience is the defining characteristic of RPL.

As espoused by Creswell and Poth (2018), a theoretical framework is a set of ideas or theories that researchers use to guide their work and ensure that it adheres to established theoretical norms (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In order to shed light on a phenomenon, provide an explanation for an event, or tackle a research topic, one might use a theoretical framework (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

When seen through the lens of the technical or labour market, RPL is an intervention that places an emphasis on economically relevant knowledge, abilities, and values. Learners are seen as consumers in this paradigm, which acknowledges that past experiences may be linked to certain learning outcomes via a standardised credit system. For instance, RPL plays a significant role in assimilating highly skilled foreign nationals or immigrants. The demand, inclusion, and integration of refugees or foreigners into a new workplace, labour market, and society should be heavily influenced by the prior learning of these individuals, whether it be from formal education or informal learning in qualified positions in their prior labour market (Andersson, 2021).

From a liberal or humanist stance, adult learners should value and draw from their past experiences as much as possible for their present and future education. Adult learners' desires and responsibilities are at the heart of the feminist approach's conceptual framework (Knowles, 1990). In this case, student motivation is increased when teachers acknowledge the significance of self-esteem and concentrate on students' strengths instead of their weaknesses. Nonetheless, an adult learner's profile is not autonomous or uninfluenced by factors like social context, social contact, and relationships; rather, it is shaped by these factors, according to situated learning and social learning theory. Social constructivism and learning communities provide an environment that is conducive to adult learners' success (Snyman & van den Berg, 2018).

Lastly, there is a critical and radical stance that is often supported by feminist, emancipatory, rights-based, standpoint, and social constructivist discourses. This stance holds that history is integral to both knowledge and experiences, that knowledge is contextual, and that knowledge is not limited to academic norms (Gair, 2013). Practical knowledge, women's knowledge, and indigenous knowledge are examples of outsider and marginalised perspectives that this paradigm will honour and highlight.

Similarly, this perspective shares the opinion that, when faced with a plethora of practical concepts, it is unnecessary to attempt a distinct critical evaluation of each of them due to the interconnectedness of these ideas (Jacobs, 2018).

It is abundantly evident from the aforementioned perspectives that adult learners bring a wealth of information to the table, including cultural and practical knowledge, wisdom, formal education, and contextual knowledge. Since RPL is all about recognising what people know and can accomplish, it makes sense to have a more comprehensive view of knowledge when doing so. This is due to the majority of theories on adult learning being too simplistic and fail to account for the complexity of adult learning. Transformative learning theory, on the other hand, is relevant to adult education since it posits that new insights can only be gained by critically reflecting on past experiences (Illeris, 2018). According to Snyman and van den Berg (2018), the most important kind of learning that happens in adulthood is transformational learning, which enables a deep learning experience that leads to a paradigm shift or change, or the creation of new meaning from one's own experiences.

A comprehensive theoretical approach is appropriate for this inquiry, according to the theoretical outline presented above. This is based on the fact that the researcher has first-hand knowledge from working in the area of post-secondary education and skills development. As such, she has observed first-hand the importance to educate and empower those who have been historically underserved in order to transform the job market and boost economic growth. To address all the unique characteristics of a diverse student body, it is recommended to take a comprehensive approach that incorporates theories from various fields, such as humanism, critical theory, experiential learning, and the labour market (Snyman & van den Berg, 2018).

3.2.   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Recognising what a person has learnt outside of formal schooling is a critical topic in workforce development debates. PLAR, and RPL are terms used to describe procedures that combine several techniques and instruments to recognise, record and

evaluate learning in non-formal educational settings and at work (Assinger, 2022). This is a method for evaluating life experience-based knowledge and abilities in order for qualification systems to formally recognise them (Miguel et al., 2016).

Most definitions of informal and non-formal learning come from within institutions, even if there are many more ways to tell them apart. It is critical to define non-formal and informal learning as they predate formal education and make up the great bulk of learning. Conversely, institutions like colleges and universities seem to have used credentials as an arrow and their visibility and tangibility as a bow to gain legitimacy in the conceptual fight in favour of formal education. So, to solve this problem and make non-formal and informal learning more visible, validation of these forms of education is being pursued (Souto-Otero, 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, several scholars have emphasised the transformative aspect of RPL, which pertains to the life and work-related knowledge and skills that adult learners accumulate (e.g., Illeris, 2018; Snyman & van den Berg, 2018; Lodigiani & Sarli, 2017). On the other hand, national adult education programmes and Europe have both highlighted the practical aspect (Guimares & Mikulec, 2021). As an economic and social policy tool and a means of developing the workforce, RPL is seen as a saviour narrative within the European Union's (EU) lifelong learning (LLL) regulations and the development of the European and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) (Mikulec, 2018). Recognition is a workplace pedagogical practice that encourages participation in activities with a goal (e.g., learning at work). There are three orientations: performance, developmental and occupational, as well as two recognition methods: validation and interpellation. The process of recognising, documenting and evaluating learning and skill growth is known as validation. Managers, supervisors, mentors, or co-workers verify knowledge and abilities as part of routine interactions or observations, or in a specific situation such as a performance appraisal, where tools such as psychometric tests, conversational guidelines, or qualification matrices are used. As a result, an invitation to discuss, debate or negotiate a worker's abilities, expertise, performance, or advancement may be viewed as validation. Interpellation, on the other hand, refers to a situation in which a worker's talents are required and their application is facilitated by the availability of chances that require active engagement in goal-oriented activities.

This occurs when an employee is assigned a new task or responsibility, is given the opportunity to participate in discursive forms of organisational development or is given the opportunity to engage in novel experiences, whether in their current workplace or in a new work team or department (Assinger, 2022; Billet, 2016).

RPL Candidates are often of mature age, have professional experience and have family and other obligations outside of the workplace (Snyman & van den Berg, 2018). Because of their advanced age, expertise and experience, older students have different requirements and obligations than younger students, according to the National Centre for Education Statistics. In an RPL procedure, these applicants are identified as "learners" and submit applications for recognition of prior learning (SAQA, 2013).

This study is underpinned by Kolb's ELT and supported by the most influential learning theories in education, which are discussed further in the next section. Because it touches on the subject of internal experience, the study benefits tremendously from Kolb's ELT, which calls for additional examination and discussion.

3.3. THEORIES OF LEARNING

Learning theories provide a conceptual framework for understanding how knowledge is taken in, processed and retained during the learning process. According to Shuell (2013), learning is the ability to behave in a particular way or an enduring change in conduct that comes from experience or other forms of practice. Although different interpretations exist, these stem from the different ways of understanding learning theories. Teaching and the use of various resources are informed by learning theories, according to Shuell (2013). Therefore, the goal of social learning theories is to decipher how people think and what factors impact people's actions and surroundings. Although it draws on social and constructivist theories of learning, experiential learning theory centres learning around actual experience. So, it's reasonable to say that learning is all about the significant experiences that people have.

3.3.1. Influential Learning Theories

Every learning theory holds that past learning is the seed for new learning; however, the question that remains is how the old learning is turned to new. The basic learning

theories as described by Mergel (1998) are behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. In the same vein, Billet (1998) concurs with these three significant earning theories, referring to them as historical waves of development within the field of learning and that these should include situated learning. A brief description of each of these waves follows in the below sub-section.

Figure 2.1: Learning Theories
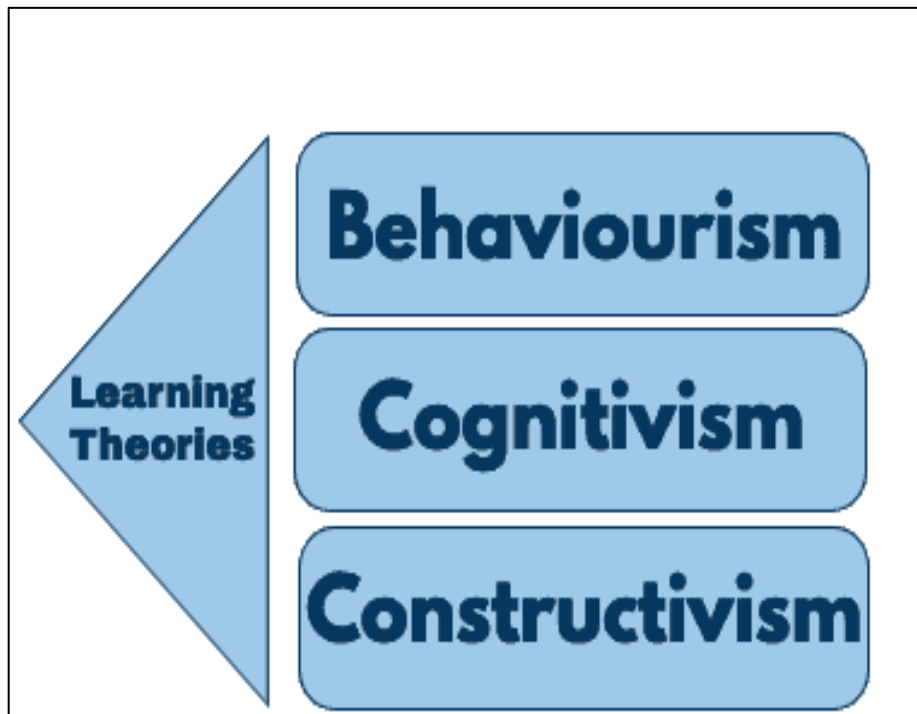
Source: [educationcorner.com 2023]

3.3.1.1. Behaviourism:

Billet (1998) and Mergel (1998) argue that behaviourism focuses on the directly observable actions of an individual. According to this idea, a novel behavioural pattern is frequently practised until it becomes automatic or habitual. This occurs as a consequence of its connection with a particular stimulus, leading to the repetition of the behaviour. According to Billet (1998), this body of knowledge is devoted to the examination of observable and quantifiable behaviours. Yet, according to behaviourism, students are "passive, reactive, and non-agentive" towards their learning. (Harris, 2000, p. 4), it can be contended that behaviourism is a learning strategy that is well-suited for standardised, system-wide systems such as South Africa's NQF. Systems based on

national qualification frameworks have standardised qualifications that include predetermined criteria and results for assessing performance.

Continuous assessment is an essential part of the system, ensuring that learners have a significant likelihood of success. This is because they are given the opportunity to repeat the behaviour until they achieve correctness (SAQA, 2003). The implementation of the NQF in South Africa incorporated the notion of RPL to ensure that candidates are evaluated according to nationally established criteria and that the assessment outcomes are universally recognised. Therefore, the NQF, a behaviourist framework, is the main catalyst for RPL. However, RPL practitioners may contend that RPL is influenced by a more humanistic perspective (Michelson, 1996a).

3.3.1.2. Cognitivism

Unlike behaviourism, cognitivism emphasises the notion that students engage in information processing rather than merely reacting to a stimulus, as is the case with behaviourism. In contrast, cognitivism focuses on the cognitive processes that occur between an individual's stimulus and response, or the "what" of the learning process (Atkins, 1993, p. 257). This theory acknowledges the idea that learning is improved by the learner's personal interpretation and impression of formal instruction, rather than solely relying on factual information (Piaget, 1953). Cognitivism, also known as symbol processing theory, emphasises the independent processing of information by the person, regardless of their environment. The individual acquires sensory data on their environment. The process is clearly linear, and learning is contingent upon the individual's pre-existing knowledge and symbol systems (Harris, 2000). Cognitivism is distinguished by its focus on standardised and universal curriculum, where students are educated gradually based on their cognitive readiness. Several taxonomies, including those defined by Bloom (1984), Gagne (1987) and Piaget (1952, 1953), are based on cognitivist theory. Advocates of traditional RPL may see these taxonomies as useful since they allow students to be categorised at a certain level and assessed according to the information they should have if they were truly at that level.

Both cognitivism and behaviourism consider persons to be passive in their pursuit of objective and logical learning. However, the later learning theories, constructivism and

situated learning, postulate that learning is influenced by the specific circumstances in which it occurs and consider individuals as active contributors to their own education (Mergel, 1998). According to Harris (2000), the combination of an objective-subjective concept of knowledge and the passive-active perspective of the individual resulted in a less significant shift in instructional design from behaviourism to cognitivism compared to the transfer from constructivism to cognitivism. In the following theories, the emphasis shifts towards learning theories that consider the individual as a more proactive participant in the learning process and the focus to learning theories that see the individual as a more active player in the process of learning.

3.3.1.3. Constructivism

The foundation of constructivism is the idea that we create new concepts by drawing on our own experiences and past knowledge. Therefore, each learner's experience of learning is distinct. The goal of constructivism, as stated by Mergel (1998), is to help students become more adept at solving issues when faced with uncertainty. Learners in a constructivist classroom are characterised as purposeful, goal-oriented, and driven by an inner drive for meaning and growth. Context-specific and adaptable RPL practices are, therefore, made possible by this perspective on learning.

3.3.1.4. Situated Learning

According to this theory, learning can only occur in a situation where the context explicitly influences the nature and course of the learning process. This is in contrast to the individualistic approach to learning that was previously emphasised by behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism (Cobb, 1999). Billet (1998) posits that situated learning posits that human knowledge is inherently interconnected with the sociocultural environments in which it is obtained. These two elements are interdependent (Billett, 1998). Situated learning originates from the fields of social anthropology and sociology, specifically influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development. Learning is fundamentally regarded as a social practice, distinct from prior learning theories that view it as a pedagogical method. The symbol processing perspective on learning is derived from humanistic psychology. Vygotsky's 1978 theory posits that learning takes place within social contexts and is facilitated by interactions

with others. The learner then internalises this knowledge at a later stage. This implies, in contrast to Piaget's view, that active participation in social interactions fosters the advancement of cognitive abilities. The preceding historical analysis of various learning theories elucidates significant differentiations and associated concepts among the multitude of philosophical stances concerning the origins and advancement of knowledge and learning.

3.3.2. Experiential Learning Theory

All three of these authors—Kolb (1984), Weil and McGill (1989), and Boud et al. (1994)—conceptualized an Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). When compared to behavioural theories grounded in empirical epistemology or implicit theories endorsing conventional educational practices grounded on rational idealist epistemology, Kolb (1984, p. 20) argues that ELT offers a unique perspective on the learning process. The best theoretical foundation for explaining RPL is ELT, or Experiential Learning Theory. The idea behind this notion is that transforming experiences is the key to creating new knowledge. According to Kolb (1984), one gains knowledge via the transformation of experiences; this process is known as experiential learning. According to Kolb (1984), learning by doing usually involves actively engaging with the phenomena, not just passively observing it.

According to Kolb (1984, p. 38), there are four important parts of learning that are based on experience. Firstly, learning is about adapting to new situations rather than just absorbing new information. Secondly, knowledge is not an isolated object but rather an ongoing process of transformation. Thirdly, experience can be transformed into both objective and subjective forms. Lastly, understanding learning requires an appreciation of the nature of knowledge.

Two fundamental principles—interaction and continuity—form the basis of the experience theory of learning. Based on studies conducted by Neill (2010), Ahmed (2010), and Illeries (2007), continuity is defined as the link between important events and their historical context and the present and future ramifications of those experiences. An individual's present environment, as well as their interactions within it, are shaped by their prior experiences, according to Illeries' (2007) definition of

interaction. According to Dewey, the guiding concepts of continuity and interaction are what ultimately decide the quality of an educational experience (1938:42). A four-stage cycle may shed light on Kolb's (1984) contention that four distinct aptitudes are required for effective learning. (1) Engages in a tangible activity or undergoes a specific encounter that forms the basis for (2) the learner's examination and self-reflection on the event and their own reaction to it. Subsequently, these observations are incorporated into a conceptual framework or linked to other ideas in the learner's existing experience and knowledge to derive conclusions for practical application; and subsequently, they are subjected to testing and utilised in diverse contexts.

Figure 3.2 is an explanation of Kolb's (1984) learning cycles and is shown below:

Figure 3.2: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle
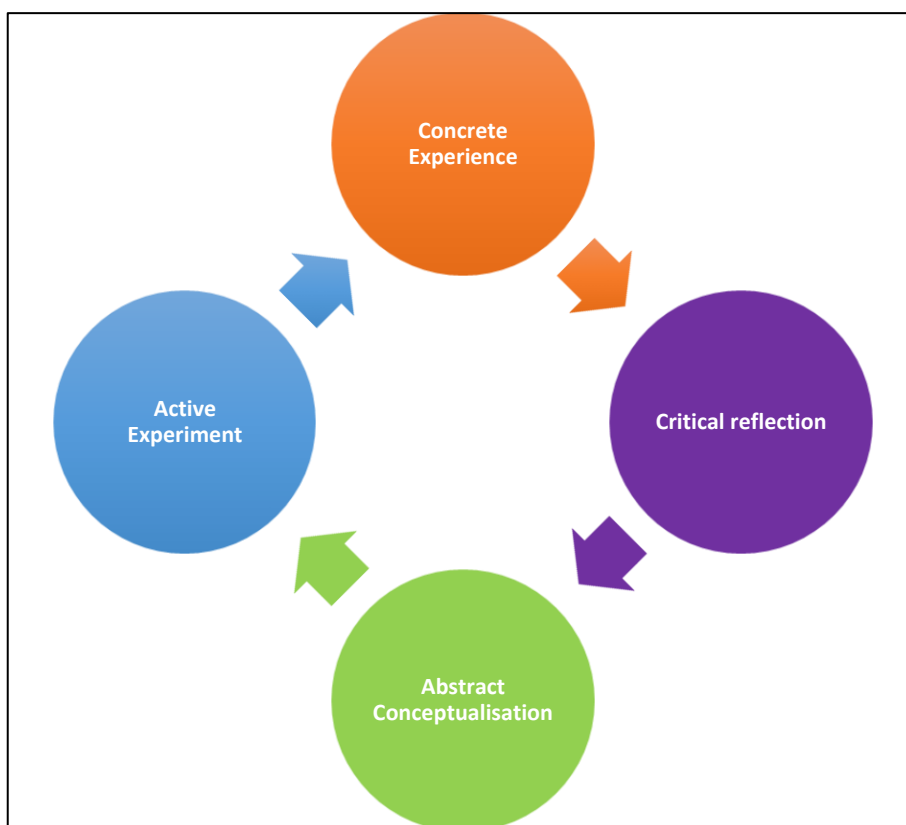
3.3.2.1. Stage 1: Concrete Experience

Kolb (1993) holds that observations and reflections should come from actual experience. Kolb argues that learning occurs when an individual deals with a new, real experience or reinterprets an already-existing experience. According to Schellhase (2006), memory,

personal application, understanding, and abstract notions are all tested and validated by experience. In the RPL (for credit) context, the candidate is assessed against the exit level outcomes of unit standards within a qualification to validate what the learner can do and/or knows for the award of credits against a qualification if deemed competent.

3.3.2.2. Stage 2: Reflective Observation

In reflective observation, learners base their opinions on their own ideas and reflections on what they have learned. According to Honey and Mumford (1992), reflective observation is the process of revisiting or thinking back on a recent experience with an emphasis on the experiencer's meaning.

3.3.2.3. Stage 3: Abstract Conceptualisation

According to Kolb (1984), reflection produces original ideas or modifies pre-existing abstract concepts. Therefore, in order to solve problems, the learner develops theories. Additionally, the learners will discuss their concerns and problems that arose from the experience and how the experience was carried out.

3.3.2.4. Stage 4: Active Experimentation

At this stage, the learner goes beyond just observation and instead engages in planning and implementing what they have learned. They put their newfound knowledge to the test by implementing and evaluating various techniques; then, they build upon their successes and failures to refine their approach. Students handle a situation that could be similar to or different from their current situation by using what they have learned, relying on both their prior experiences and the present environment. Participants will also engage in discussions on the practical application of the acquired method to various situations.

The researcher examined the evaluation and acknowledgment of workplace learning in the public service sector, challenging these notions. According to Cooper et al. (2018), workplace learning often employs a combination of different approaches to encompass diverse types and aspects of knowledge. Investigated by Cooper, Harris, and Ralphset al. (2018), this study seeks to determine how much RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) can aid in the formation of a holistic understanding of the connections between various

knowledge and expertise cultures, education, employment, and social change. To decipher this association, Cooper et al. (2018) use Bernstein's (2000) concept of the instructional tool. The pedagogical tool illustrates how RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) questions long-held assumptions about the nature of specialised knowledge and proposes that its development happens in contexts outside of academia as well. RPL should be regarded as a particular approach to boundary pedagogy, aimed at managing the differences between practical knowledge and structured or codified knowledge, rather than solely as an assessment method (Cooper et al., 2018).

3.3.3. Justification of the use of the Experiential Learning

ELT stands as a fundamental and indispensable element within the realm of PSET, driven by a myriad of compelling rationales. Cantor (1995) underscores its universal acceptance across diverse domains, positing that the theory resonates across varied experiences, offering heightened prospects for the practical application of theory – a phenomenon exemplified in the study's exploration of RPL.

Valkanos and Fragoulis (2007, p. 2) articulate a cogent case for the integration of experiential learning into educational frameworks, spotlighting pivotal reasons that resonate within the dynamic landscape of modern education and training. The omnipresent influence of technology emerges as a primary impetus, demanding the continual acquisition of novel knowledge, skills, and the adept implementation of innovative methods and processes. In a world where technological advancements shape the contours of work, the ability to adapt becomes paramount for effective job performance.

A significant chasm often exists between theoretical concepts and practical application, exacerbated by corporate consolidations and mergers that give rise to novel job roles. Valkanos and Fragoulis (2007) highlight this gap, emphasising that the evolving nature of the professional landscape necessitates a seamless transition from theoretical understanding to real-world implementation. In this context, experiential learning becomes a linchpin, bridging the theoretical-practical divide and preparing individuals for the demands of newly created positions arising from organisational transformations.

Organisational dynamics, including shifts in culture, alterations in work content, and evolving methodologies, propel the imperative for addressing multifaceted challenges. Experiential learning, with its immersive and participatory nature, equips learners with the adaptability required to navigate the complexities arising from such organisational shifts. It serves as a proactive response to the dynamic nature of contemporary workplaces, fostering a learning environment that is agile, responsive and aligned with the evolving demands of the professional landscape.

In essence, the incorporation of ELT into the fabric of Post-School Education and Training proves indispensable. Its ability to harmonise theoretical understanding with practical application, adapt to technological advancements, and cater to the dynamic nature of organisational changes positions it as a linchpin in preparing individuals for the multifaceted challenges of the modern professional landscape.

3.3.4. Constantly changing conditions require job positions with Assessments in Experiential Learning

One way to gain information is via experiential learning, which involves drawing on one's own personal experiences in a meaningful way. On the other hand, recalling previously acquired knowledge competencies gained in a variety of contexts, whether official, informal, or non-formal, may be evaluated and validated using RPL. There are two primary types of educational settings recognised by the Centre for Teaching and Learning: classroom settings and field-based settings. The term "Recognition of Prior Learning" (RPL) encompasses a variety of contexts in which students may put what they're learning into practice, including but not limited to field-based scenarios and business settings.

Assessment, an integral component of experiential learning, plays a crucial role in validating and evaluating the learning and growth that occurs during the process. Cantor (1995) outlines a comprehensive framework for incorporating assessment into experiential learning activities. This framework involves assessing the needs of the learner population through analysis, identifying suitable activities for the learners, and recognising potential challenges associated with integrating experiential learning.

Cantor (1995, pp. 80–85) elucidates various approaches to integrating assessment into experiential learning activities. Firstly, it involves analysing the needs of the learner population, ensuring that the activities are tailored to meet their specific requirements. Identifying appropriate activities for the learner population is another facet, ensuring that the experiences are relevant and contribute to meaningful learning outcomes. Finally, Cantor (1995) underscores the importance of recognising potential challenges with integrating experiential learning, highlighting the need for proactive problem-solving to enhance the effectiveness of the learning experience.

RPL, on the other hand, is centred around validating learning outcomes derived from personal experiences, particularly those acquired in work settings. This process acknowledges the knowledge gained by the candidate through their experiences and awards credit accordingly. The emphasis is on acknowledging and authenticating the skills and competencies that individuals bring from their prior experiences, contributing to a holistic and inclusive approach to education and skill development.

In conclusion, experiential learning and RPL are intertwined processes that contribute significantly to the acquisition and validation of knowledge and skills. Experiential learning involves engaging learners in real-life scenarios, while RPL focuses on crediting individuals for the knowledge gained through their experiences. Assessment plays a pivotal role in both processes, ensuring the quality and authenticity of the learning outcomes. The dynamic interplay between experiential learning and RPL underscores the importance of acknowledging diverse learning pathways and fostering a comprehensive approach to education.

3.3.5. Key components for the assessment of RPL are:

According to ILO (2018) RPL Learning Package, the key components for the assessment of RPL are that:

- To prove what you've learned before, you have to show it in the right manner. Evidence of the competences or learning outcomes obtained must be shown by the applicant.

- Qualified and experienced counsellors and evaluators who can educate the applicant, provide direction in gathering evidence (pertaining to the difficulty of RPL professionals' abilities), and give useful criticism.
- Candidates, especially those from marginalised communities, should have access to flexible assistance and counselling services.
- The candidate's genuine skills and the documentation of those abilities.

It makes no difference whether the applicant is seeking a job, a credit, a qualification, or any other kind of occupational title; what is important is that there be clear criteria for both the candidate and the assessor. It is also important for an evaluation to have a distinct goal. Please be informed that assessments are designed to measure certain learning or performance objectives. This information is important for both applicants and organizations/institutions. In summary, ILO (2018) advises that RPL assessment should be transparent, valid, and reliable.

3.3.6. Pitfalls in Experiential Learning

While experiential learning has many advantages for individuals, the workplace and higher education, it is, however, not without challenges. Through practical work or hands-on experience, experiential learning gives learners the opportunity to apply their knowledge and engage with tasks hands on while also learning new information that they will eventually apply to their study field. Some notable challenges as noted by numerous authors are:

- The possibility of failure and interpersonal conflict that frequently arise when working in unfamiliar settings and with other individuals.
- Difficulty in assessing the significance of hands-on learning. Reports, questionnaires, and portfolios of evidence are just a few of the many ways that experiential learning may be evaluated. According to Cantor (1995), assessing these activities presents educators with a unique difficulty. Therefore, different evaluation procedures are necessary to evaluate success.
- According to Tsui (2013), evaluating students' experiential learning is one of the most understudied and difficult aspects of higher education. Despite the widespread belief that experiential learning has its limitations, Cantor (1995)

maintains that it offers a great foundation for organising instructional activities, and that it can be helpful in guiding the understanding of learning disabilities, career counselling, and academic advising.

- Examining the Experiential Learning Theory: A Critical Review 3.3.7

- Other writers have criticised Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT), despite its widespread acclaim as the most important theory in the fields of management and education.

- Pickles (2005) argues that the experiential learning model does not apply to all situations. Pickles (2005), contends that Kolb's scheme "has been useful in assisting to plan all learning activities and in helping to check simply that learners can be effectively engaged." However, Pickles argues that this scheme fails to address the topic of reflection and that the experiential learning model is not applicable in every situation. The fact that the four learning styles fit snugly into the various components of the experiential learning model does not prove that they are valid. Information absorption and memorising are two of the choices he mentions. Each of them may be applicable to various scenarios.

- There have not been enough studies that attempted to evaluate or investigate the concept, according to Kayes (2002), since the original study base was small. Keyes goes on to say that the Lsi can't tell you how well your learning styles mesh with your existing body of knowledge, and that the theoretical constraints strip away important context from your education. Another thing Keyes says is that there are a lot of factors that affect learning, but the Lsi can only measure how well they work together. According to Kayes (2002), all of these arguments against learning's focus on individual experience have one thing in common: they neglect psychodynamic, social, and institutional factors in favour of the following:

  i. Psychodynamic factors: There are five drawbacks of ELT that Kayes (2002) highlights. To start, there's the fact that ELT ignores important contexts of power relations including gender, culture, and social standing. Secondly, the impact of these power differentials on learning is under-recognized in ELT. Thirdly, ELT places too much emphasis on looking backwards and not enough on the "here and now" of an experience. Fourthly, ELT does not take into account the potential "unconscious" learning processes or defensive

mechanisms that can impede learning. Lastly, the ELT fails to provide a sufficient "second order" or higher meta-learning process, such challenging the assumptions of learning communities.

ii.   Social factors: In contrast to Kolb's four learning styles that include experience, reflection, conceptualisation and action, Kayes (2002) contends that learning is a process that cannot be separated from the social and historical position of a learner.

iii.   Institutional factors: A third group of critics centres on the humanist epistemology of ELT, arguing that it is based on a limited interpretation of Lewin, Dewey and Piaget. It is further argued that the different theoretical underpinnings of ELT depart from its agenda as it seeks to find a home in higher consensus domains. ELT is nonetheless vital for advancing any one profession, according to Kayes (2002), despite lacking the strong institutional standing required to contribute to codified knowledge. Kayes (2002) critiques of ELT in contending that the theory has neglected psychological, social and institutional dimensions of learning in favour of emphasising the individual's experience as fundamental to learning.

It should be observed that the model does not give much consideration to the cultural experiences or conditions. Notwithstanding the noted criticisms, what remains relevant in Kolb's ELT is that the learners are not passive participants in the learning journey as they are able to reflect on the knowledge gained from experience and make their own interpretations.

3.4.   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explored the most important theories of learning, including experiential learning theory, its applications, evaluations, challenges, and both supporters' and detractors' arguments against it. In spite of all the issues and critiques, these ideas continue to work in higher education. Because of the technological support it offers, experiential learning should be relevant to the students' existing knowledge. To learn is to undergo a metamorphosis with the goal of addressing the challenges faced by

society. Therefore, the learning theories discussed in this chapter are important and applicable to this research because they provide students with the information and abilities necessary for personal growth, agency, and workplace change.

CHAPTER 4:
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

In Chapter 3, the theoretical frameworks addressed the most famous theories of learning, including experiential learning theory ELT. The current chapter discusses the data collection methods used to investigate the challenges in the implementation of RPL for credit policy within the South African public service sector. The methodology includes the approach used, research design, unit of analysis, study setting, study sample and sampling procedures, data collection tools, ethical issues, and inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Research methodology refers to the process of acquiring information, data, or evidence for the purpose of analysis for research objectives. (Cohen, Manion, and Morrisonet al., (2018, p. 3). The purpose of research methodology is to develop knowledge or grasp of a subject (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). According to Kapur (2018), the research process is the path that researchers must take to complete their study, describing their goal and problem and presenting their conclusions based on the material gathered during the inquiry. Publication, research, interviews, questionnaire s, and other research processes, as well as current and historical content, may all be part of the methodology. (Malhotra and & Birks, (2012). The research methodology describes how the research will be carried out. According to Brynard and Hanekom (2006), it is a reflection on the design, organisation, and execution of the research in order to meet the demands of truth, objectivity, and validity. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are three major types of research: mixed approaches, which integrate the two prior research methodologies, qualitative and quantitative. These are mentioned briefly below and vary in their definitions and characteristics.

4.1.1. Mixed Methods

According to Kapur (2018), successful triangulation is made possible by utilising mixed methods. Mixed methods entail integrating the collection and analysis of both

quantitative and qualitative data. Research using mixed techniques provides a comprehensive picture of the problem and enhances study results. According to Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri (2021), mixed approaches integrate positivist and post-positivist philosophical frameworks with qualitative and quantitative data to effectively explain research phenomena.

4.1.2. Quantitative Methods

According to Jameel, Shaheen and Majid (2018), quantitative research employs statistical representations and numerical variable measurement to assess concepts. Enyioko and Akujuru (2019) elaborate on the concept of quantitative research by stating that it employs statistical techniques to evaluate numerical data, enabling the measurement of variables and the establishment of correlations between them. Tables and graphs can be used to visualise this kind of data. With the use of systematic questionnaire s, meta-analyses, counting scales, timing devices, and laboratory equipment, this research approach promises to generate impartial and objective results.

4.1.3. Qualitative Methods

A qualitative research strategy is one of the many research designs that use a variety of designs, including grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies, among others (Creswell & Poth, 2016: 35). Qualitative data, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Aspers and Corte (2019), refers to non-numerical information that is centred around identifying patterns. It is an interpretive, naturalistic and multimethod approach to studying a particular subject. Qualitative research is categorised as inductive, indicating that the researcher seeks to uncover significance and insights within a given scenario (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2019). To gain deeper insights into recurring and challenging experiences and their associated meanings in individuals' lives, researchers employ several methods to collect data. These methods include conducting case studies, drawing on personal experiences, engaging in introspection, analysing life narratives, conducting interviews, making observations, doing historical reviews, studying interactional processes, and analysing visual texts. Based on these principles, qualitative researchers carry out their research in the authentic settings of their

participants with the aim of understanding or interpreting events based on the significance that people attribute to them (Jameel, et al. 2018).

Data collection at the site where participants interact with the subject being studied is an essential element of qualitative research methodology (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2019). Researchers infrequently extend invitations to individuals to participate in laboratory experiments, which take place in controlled environments. Similarly, the distribution of tools such as questionnaire s for persons to complete is not a common practice among researchers (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2019). While the distribution of qualitative questionnaires is uncommon in qualitative studies, the researcher deemed it a more feasible option to conduct qualitative questionnaire with RPL candidates who were not available on-site when she was at the department to conduct semi-structed interviews with the departmental RPL coordinators as well as the provincial coordinator. Qualitative researchers collect comprehensive data in the natural environment by engaging in direct talks with individuals and monitoring their behaviour and actions. This involves face-to-face interactions over an extended period of time. Therefore, qualitative researchers gather data through the examination of documents, observation of behaviour and conducting interviews with persons (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2019:27).

Similarly in this study, the researcher collected data in the form of semi-structed face-to-face interviews, (guided by an interview guide Appendix I) directly from participants (RPL coordinators) at the sampled provincial department where RPL candidates were requested to complete the qualitative questionnaire. This approach resulted in the data collection process being successfully concluded within two days. Data was collected from the departmental RPL coordinators and RPL candidates on the first day, while the provincial coordinator was interviewed on day two of the researchers visit to the province.

4.1.3.1. Phenomenology

The goal of a phenomenological research approach is to obtain thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, it aims to provide a sufficient explanation for the individuals under examination's lived experiences. This qualitative study design

articulates the significance connected to the lived experiences of several individuals with a particular phenomenon (Emiliussen, Engelsen, Christiansen & Klausen, 2021).

4.1.3.2. Ethnography

Another qualitative research design that focuses on examining individuals and social and cultural groups in their natural environments is ethnography (Bell & Wynn, 2021:3). The ultimate objective of ethnographic research, according to Bell and Wynn (ibid), is the in-depth explanation and interpretation of a cultural aspect of a particular social grouping.

4.1.3.3. Case study

A case study, as described by Crossman (2020: 2), is unique in the social sciences as it concentrates on a single subject, which may be an individual, a group or organisation, an occasion, an action, or a circumstance. A case study (person, group, event, or community) is defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as having five components: questions, propositions, an analytical unit, figuring out how the data relate to the requests, and standards for interpreting the results. Case studies, in accordance with Erickson (2018:57), evaluate a particular project or policy and allow for generalisations. Yin and Campbell (2018:19) define case studies as a qualitative research technique that develops a theory that can assist researchers in understanding other similar occurrences, phenomena or situations and observe effects immediately. According to research (Hayes, Kyer, and Weber, 2015; Creswell, 2016), there are four possible formats through which a case study may be conducted, which are:

- **Illustrative case studies:** are utilised when describing a situation, a group of circumstances, or a phenomenon, to explain what is happening and why.
- **Exploratory Case Studies:** are employed when a researcher wants to determine research questions and study methodologies for a large, complex study.
- **Cumulative Case Studies:** researchers can draw conclusions from completed case studies and to assist them in drawing generalisations from similar investigations.
- **Critical Instance Case Studies:** which concentrate on one or a small number of sites, are preferable for analysing a particular event or circumstance. The critical

instance case study is a type of inquiry that is best suited for analysing a particular occurrence or circumstance, concentrating on one or a small number of sites, as described by Hayes et al. (2015: 12).

Accordingly, this study adopted the case study lens by conducting an investigation in one out of the five Eastern Cape provincial departments that have implemented RPL for credit against the Public Administration qualification.

The researcher deemed the critical instance case study suitable for this study in order to thoroughly examine the experiences of RPL coordinators and candidates in the implementation of RPL for credit against the Public Administration qualification in one provincial department. The motivation to adopt the critical instance case study as the research design was owing to its advantages and disadvantages. Such advantages and disadvantages are as tabulated in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Advantages and disadvantages of critical instance case studies

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allows for a detailed examination of a particular instance of a phenomenon as opposed to a generalisation.	Since the evidence gathered from one instance may not apply to another, this kind of study cannot be utilised to make generalisations.
Data collection methodology is contingent upon the phenomenon under investigation and is not entirely determined by the researcher.	It is important for a researcher to ensure that they meticulously collects data from all accessible sources.
A thorough explanation of the phenomenon under study should be provided by the researcher.	It may be tempting for a researcher to prematurely conclude the investigation due to the collection of a seemingly sufficient amount of data, even if there are still data sources that have gone unexamined

Advantages	Disadvantages
The report should include a thorough description and explanation of all the data gathered throughout the investigation. The researcher should provide a thorough justification for any gathered data that is left out of the report or results.	Conducting a Critical Instance Case Study requires a researcher to be very certain about the study's objectives.

Source: Adapted from: Hayes, Kyer, and Weber (2015: 12)

The participants from the sampled department were deemed to be information-rich to provide very useful insights in this case study as they were active participants in RPL implementation. The researcher concentrated just on one department in order to complete this type of case study successfully and prevent extrapolating the findings to the entire population.

4.2. THE RATIONALE FOR THE ADOPTION OF A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

As noted by Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 3), qualitative research encompasses a range of material and interpretive approaches that bring the world to life. In keeping with long-standing practice in the social sciences, and more especially in education, this study used a qualitative research strategy (Cohen et al., 2018). The purpose of this research was to analyse how the public service sector in South Africa has used RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) as a credit policy. According to previous studies (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Enyioko & Akujuru, 2019), qualitative research was deemed the best approach for this study due to the insightful data it produced and the ease with which it could be shared with the right people. The purpose of this study is to add to what is already known about RPL and to provide credence to initiatives aimed at bettering the post-school education and training (PSET) system in South Africa. This entails giving public servants the chance to get credentialed for their work and recognising those who have become knowledgeable via informal or non-formal ways.

A qualitative questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were the methods used to gather data for the research. There were two phases of data collection for this investigation. This study gathered data from two primary sources. Utilising an online questionnaire was administered for the participants who were unable to be physically present on-site and face-to-face interviews for those on-site, primary data was collected. The former comprised a questionnaire with closed-ended questions related to the primary research questions, whereas the latter focused on open-ended questions by administering a semi-structured interview schedule to obtain the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the lived experiences of RPL Candidates before drawing any conclusions, it was justified to use a case study within a phenomenological research technique. The qualitative research was able to address the following objectives to:

i.   investigate the enablers and/or constraints in the application of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa.

ii.   access the best practice model(s) for the effective contribution to the implementation of RPL.

iii.   determine the views and experiences of the key role players in the implementation of RPL by government departments.

iv.   identify the constraints (if any) to implementing RPL for credit in the public service sector

v.   provide recommendations on RPL for credit assessment tools to be considered by implementors in the public service sector.

4.3.   RESEARCH DESIGN

As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), research designs are the strategies used by researchers to collect data for the purpose of analysing and answering the research question. Research designs provide a framework and methodologies for conducting research studies, according to McGregor (2018). These designs might be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approaches. An overarching framework for data collection, organisation, and analysis is provided by the chosen study design. The study

design's aspects, such as the paradigm, population, sample, and data collecting, will be covered in the following subsections.

4.4.   RESEARCH PARADIGM

In the field of educational research, the term "paradigm" denotes the researcher's "worldview" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This worldview encompasses the perspective, method of thought, school of thought, or shared set of perspectives that govern the interpretation and understanding of study findings.

As Makombe (2017) explains, a researcher's paradigm is their point of view. In order to choose the best research methodology and data analysis strategy to use, the researcher uses this conceptual framework to examine the study's methodological components. Contrarily, as pointed out by Bhatta (2018), a study paradigm embodies the researcher's worldview, both as it is now and as it should be. According to Loan Nguyen (2018:2), abstract ideas and principles make up a researcher's paradigm choice, which in turn influences their understanding, behaviour, and perception of the environment.

In order to understand the subjective world of human experience, this research was grounded on an interpretivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), this method delves into the ideas and views of the study participants in order to grasp their viewpoints and the importance they attach to the topic. The focus lies in understanding the distinct individual and their perception of their surroundings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The researcher employed an interpretivist paradigm in this study to examine how participants in their department interpreted and responded to the introduction of the RPL for credit policy. The researcher aimed to gain insight, comprehension and investigate the participants' perspectives. This paradigm facilitated the researcher's analysis and understanding of the obstacles faced by departments in implementing RPL, which in turn affects the support provided to RPL candidates throughout the implementation process. Moreover, the paradigm facilitated the researcher in acquiring comprehensive insights into the attitudes, actions and motives of the RPL candidates.

4.5. RESEARCH APPROACH

The study was conducted utilising the qualitative research approach. The aforementioned approach prompted the researcher to opt for individual semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire for the data collection of data. The following sub-sections deliberate on the reasons and justifications for the choice and suitability of the approach, research design and research methods adopted for data collection.

4.6. STUDY SETTING, POPULATION AND SAMPLING

4.6.1. Site Selection

The sites were purposefully selected as the researcher is familiar with the cultural and professional approaches within this province, although it is not in close proximity to the researcher. The sites selected were two offices within the sampled department, an East London office and a Regional Office in Gqeberha which are both situated in the Eastern Cape Province. Figure 4.1 depicts a map of the Eastern Cape Province, showing the location of the research site.

Figure 4.1: Map of the Eastern Cape province

(Source: adapted from Google- AfriGIS, 2023)

4.6.2.   Study Setting

According to Pilot and Beck (2017), the place where a study is going to be carried out is called the study setting. One key aspect of qualitative research that Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018) elaborate on is the practice of studying or investigating people in their own environment. Two government department offices, home to RPL stakeholders, served as the context for this research. The researcher designated Office A as "EL" and Office B as "PE" for the sake of this investigation. It was decided that these two government positions would be called "EL" and "PE" respectively. The reason these two offices were given such diminutive names is since they are located in two cities in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa—Gqeberha and East London—which are also known by their respective short names.

Using qualitative questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the researcher gathered data from fifteen individuals at these locations.

4.6.3.   Study Population

The study population is the collection of all the instances in which the researcher is interested (Polit & Beck 2017). Each component of a population is referred to as an element by Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018). Polit and Beck (2017) also advise researchers to establish inclusion criteria, which are the characteristics that distinguish the population.

The five provincial departments that have been exposed to RPL implementation in their respective departments and two policy departments were the study's target population. The respondents were divided into four groups: policymakers, employers who are policy implementers, RPL coordinators, RPL beneficiaries, and members of organised labour who are members of departmental training committees.

The first phase of the study involves the scoping of literature, with the elements of interest being sources relating to the implementation practices of skills development providers, candidate throughput rates, and the contributions, experiences, and recommendations of employers and funders.

4.6.4. Sampling

Sampling is the act of picking a group of people from a larger population in order to get an accurate picture of that group as a whole (Polit & Beck, 2017). According to Babbie (2021:715), sampling is a method of selecting units that allows researchers to answer their research questions to the best of their abilities. The goal is to help us understand the population that the sample was taken from better. "A subset of the population," according to Nieswadomy and Bailey (2018), is the definition of a sample. The phrase "purposeful sampling" refers to a method of data collection in which certain features of the target population are considered before drawing a sample. The non-probability sampling strategy did not perform very well in terms of internal and external validity; hence no generalizability claims can be made for this research (Malterud & Siersma 2016). Because it would make it possible to identify specific research participants who meet the predetermined requirements of the study, this strategy would be suitable for use in this investigation. The RPL role players were selected from the predetermined group using the purposive sampling strategy as indicated in the previous paragraph (Saunders, et al., 2019). The specific sample for this study consists of a specific department in the Eastern Cape Province that has implemented RPL for credit against the Public Administration qualification registered at NQF Levels 5 and 6 between the years 2019 and 2022. Hence, the participants in the study were chosen based on a set of criteria that have been established in advance.

The two fundamental forms of sampling are probability and non-probability sampling. The study's important informants were chosen through purposeful sampling.

4.6.4.1. Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling is most suitable for qualitative research, where a small number of examples are examined in depth to provide deeper understanding of the subject (Babbie, 2021

A non-probability sample selected according to demographic criteria and the study's objectives is known as a purposeful sample (Crossman, 2022). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that researchers may benefit from purposeful sampling since it helps them choose individuals who can provide unique perspectives or lighter on the study subject.

Purposive sampling helps researchers address their queries in qualitative research. It comprises picking people or places that are a good fit for the study's aims (Babbie, 2021).

Attributes and relevance to the research subject informed the categorization of the study's participants. A predetermined objective informed the selection of the volunteers. The researcher aimed to choose individuals and a site based on the insights they might provide to this study; therefore, they used an approach called purposeful sampling.

4.6.4.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

According to Casteel and Bridier (2021), inclusion criteria are the traits that the researcher wants to see in their study's sample. Porzsolt, Wiedemann, Becker, and Rhoads (2018, cited in Casteel & Bridier, 2021) outlined the exclusion criteria as possible participant characteristics that might affect the reliability of the findings.

Researchers were able to choose study participants based on their specific responsibilities in carrying out and coordinating the RPL. The inclusion of one of the five provincial departments in this research was justified since that department has applied RPL to the Public Administration qualification at NQF levels 5 and 6 in 2021, making it one of the five departments. Researchers carefully selected RPL candidates who took part in the 2021 RPL implementation (SAQA qualification ID: 50060, NQF Level 5 and Public Administration, SAQA qualification ID: 57897, NQF Level 6). This included RPL coordinators from the chosen departments, who were chosen for their accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate in the study. In addition to the two offices already mentioned, EL and PE, the chosen department also adopted the RPL. Those in charge of RPL at the chosen department have extensive expertise with the programme and are happy to provide any data needed for the research. Although not included in this research, these coordinators do provide RPL peer assistance to the province's other departments that are using RPL.

4.6.5. Sampling Procedure

The RPL Coordinators and RPL Candidates were hand-picked for this study because they have extensive expertise in the field, a strong interest in the topic, and a track record of success in coordinating RPL implementation within the department (Babbie, 2021).

The researchers in this study set out to interview 26 RPL applicants to get a good cross-section of the pool. After careful consideration, the researcher settled on a subset of RPL candidates for the sample because they were most likely to have the necessary background knowledge and expertise to contribute to the department's RPL implementation. As a result, the researcher would be able to learn a great deal about nuances that are crucial to addressing the research problem identified in this study from the selected sample.

4.6.5.1. Study Sample

According to Blanche, Durkheim and Painter (2009), sampling is the process of selecting research participants from a population as a whole. It entails making decisions on which individuals, settings, events, behaviours, and/or social processes to observe. A study sample, according to Majid (2018), is a subset of data that a researcher has selected, using a predetermined selection technique from a larger population. The small group of participants selected as a sample from the target population enables the researcher to gather information about the phenomenon (Shukla, 2020).

The 26 participants that were sampled for this study were identified based on their involvement in the RPL process, either as RPL candidates or RPL coordinators, would be familiar with the RPL policy and legislative frameworks to enrich this study.

These key informants of the study were selected from national and provincial departments as follows:

- Two officials from the national policy departments: DHET and DPSA to ascertain any policy amendment to the existing policy frameworks reviewed in the literature review chapter.
- Four RPL coordinators in the Eastern Cape provincial departments that have

implemented or are implementing RPL for credit against Public Administration qualifications.

- Twenty RPL candidates who have undergone RPL assessments against the Public Administration qualifications.

At the time of data collection, however, not all the sampled participants could be reached owing to numerous unforeseen circumstances.

This study was, however, able to gain insight into implementation of the RPL policy on the ground by conducting interviews with RPL Candidates and RPL Coordinators as outlined in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Tabulated Data collection

Sample	Number	The data-collection method employed
RPL Coordinators	3	Semi-structured interviews
Provincial Coordinator	1	Semi-structured interview
RPL Candidates	19	Qualitative questionnaire s
SDFs	3	Qualitative questionnaire s
Total	**26**	

4.7.   DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURE

Data collecting serves the objective of guaranteeing the dependability of the investigation's conclusions (Nieswiadomy & Bailey 2018). Polit and Beck (2017) assert that the data collection approach is influenced by factors such as the study's design, the quantity of available data and the research objectives. This inquiry involved two distinct rounds of data collection. This study gathered data from two main sources. Primary data was obtained by employing an online questionnaire for the participants who were not available on-site and conducting face-to-face interviews, with the option of telephone interviews if needed. The former comprised a questionnaire containing closed-ended inquiries pertaining to the main research inquiries, while the latter emphasised open-ended inquiries utilising a semi-structured interview schedule to gather the participants'

experiences and viewpoints. To enhance the reliability of the replies, the instruments underwent a pilot phase including a limited sample size of two participants, and further adjustments were made to the questions based on the pilot results. To enhance the response rate, a series of SMS and email reminders will be dispatched.

During the pilot phase, two pilot interviews were conducted to assess the comprehensibility and clarity of the questions to elicit meaningful and relevant responses. The pilot study participants were RPL coordinators form a different department who had also implemented RPL in the province to ensure that they would be exclude from the actual study. The pilot participants were provided with the questionnaire and interview guide for them to respond to. In the case of the interview guide the RPL coordinators were contacted on a virtual to engage with the researcher, while the questionnaire was sent to the electronically for completion. The pilot participants advised that the interviews would be best conducted in-person as the departments in the province often experience connectivity challenges. In relation to the data collection tool developed for RPL candidates, the pilot highlighted that the tool was lengthy, and the tool was accordingly revised. The input provided by the pilots assisted the researchers in making nuanced adjustments to the interview schedules. The post-pilot research tools (Appendix I) were then presented to the Supervisor for approval prior to the field data collection process.

Questionnaires and interview instruments were developed to determine the viewpoints of RPL candidates and RPL coordinators. The questions addressed the development and execution of RPL policies in the selected departments, as well as the advantages of RPL for the department and its recipients.

In collecting data, the researcher followed the respective departmental protocols and consent to my request to conduct research in the departments. When she was granted consent by the relevant officials, the RPL co-ordinators secured interview time-slots with the selected RPL candidates within the departments. When conducting interviews in East London, two participants fell outside of the scope of the research study as these participants were beneficiaries of the RPL pilot project of 2014 and their response could not be included in the report. The researcher had anticipated that human error and/or

miscommunication could occur in the process of the field work, including the possibility that not all identified participants would be available for the interview as it was stressed that their participation was completely voluntary. The researcher conducted the interviews in the East London and Bhisho (where the provincial coordinator was located) on 30 and 31 October 2023 respectively.

Each participant was presented with and signed the consent form prior to the commencement of the interviews. In East London the relevant Public Administration qualification participants were individually interviewed in the HRD boardroom in their department for ease of access. The participants in Gqberha were then presented with questionnaires to complete as they could not physically attend the interviews as scheduled. The provincial coordinator was interviewed in Bhisho as this was most convenient for her.

4.7.1.   Instrumentation and Data Collection Techniques

According to Polit and Beck (2017), researchers use a certain set of processes known as research methodology to gather and assess data that is relevant to their research topics. Research paradigms should guide the research process, as Polit and Beck (2017) demonstrate. Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018) note that participants' subjective experiences are crucial to qualitative research. According to Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018), narrative data is produced via qualitative research that uses a small sample size, is conducted in an authentic environment, and follows established protocols. In addition, participant interviews and data classification are elements of qualitative research, according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2018).

In addition, as pointed out by Silverman (2020), a mix of methods for gathering data, including interviews and document analysis, is typical in qualitative research. The author calls this approach to collecting data from multiple sources a "multimethod qualitative research methodology." According to Mik-Meyer (2021), the multimethod research design integrates multiple qualitative research strategies. A scoping review of policy documents was combined with an exploratory descriptive qualitative strategy for analysing documents and interviews in this study. Silverman (2021) shows that using multiple qualitative methods allows for a more thorough analysis of the study. Moreover,

Silverman (2021) maintains that employing a multimethod qualitative research strategy helps to decrease bias and improves the reliability of the research. in the same vein, Mik-Meyer (2021) concurs that the use of multiple methods allows the researcher to gain an understanding of data that would not have been accessible using a single approach (2020).

Additionally, the researcher also opted to collect data through a questionnaire to collect data from RPL candidates for the following reasons: the questionnaire was cost-efficient as it was administered online for off-site participants, reducing the possibility of interviewer bias (since it has been shown that different interviewers elicit different responses owing to the emphasis they place on different words in questions) and the questionnaire provided more complete data than an in-person interview alone.

4.7.2. Semi-structured and In-depth Interviews

To supplement the RPL coordinators' questionnaire answers, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with them. To ensure an accurate recording of the respondents' comments, the interviews were audio-recorded.

The participants were interviewed through face-to-face and open-ended interviews as these afforded participants the opportunity to provide factual accounts of a matter as well as their views on them (Yin, 2009). Also, semi-structured interviews were run on different days for the departmental coordinator from that of the provincial coordinator. The semi-structured interview method was employed by the researcher to enable the participants to discuss the topic at hand in general terms. Nieuwenhuis (2012) affirms that an open-ended interview frequently takes the shape of a conversation with the participants in which the researcher aims to examine their opinions, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes around particular events or phenomena.

4.7.3. Document Analysis

The researcher undertook a more in-depth analysis of the DPSA RPL policy which guide the public sector's implementation of RPL and RPL practices. In so doing, relevant published and unpublished literature was utilised to obtain secondary data. The former included books and articles published in journals while the latter includes government

reports, policies and planning documents. These include the SAQA Bulletin RPL articles, DPSA National RPL Strategy and Implementation Policy, Procedure Guidelines for Implementing RPL, DHET RPL Coordination Policy and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. The documents were analysed to verify findings or corroborate evidence from the interviews.

4.7.4. Qualitative Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to the RPL candidates from the sampled government department in the Eastern Cape that have participated in the RPL programme. The reason for employing a questionnaire was to ensure that the researcher reaches as many respondents as possible. This in consideration of the view that interviewers are viewed as eliciting different responses due to the emphasis they may place on some words in the interview questions, to this end, the researcher included the questionnaire which sought to provide more complete data than an in-person interview solely.

4.7.5. Face-to-Face Interviews

As defined by Nieuwenhuis (2012: 87) a face-to-face interview is "a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participant questions to collect data and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant". Interviews are also deemed particularly appropriate for exploring sensitive subjects including where participants may not want to talk about such matter in a group environment (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008: 292). The researcher conducted an individual face-to-face interview with the EC RPL provincial coordinator as well as the RPL coordinators from the sampled department. The departmental RPL coordinators were interviewed to share their first-hand experience in the implementation of RPL for credit in their department. The provincial RPL coordinator has vast knowledge on RPL implementation in the province as she plays the oversight role in the implementation of skills development interventions rolled out by provincial departments in the province. The researcher also deemed the provincial coordinator a valuable participant in the current study as she was involved in the rollout of the pilot RPL for credit project in 2014 that was led by the DPSA. As the interview questions were open-

ended, the researcher was able to use follow-up questions where a question was not answered clearly. The participants were thus able to clearly articulate their experiences and noted challenges experienced during the implementation of RPL for credit in their department and the province, respectively. The face-to-face interviews lasted a duration of about 20 minutes each.

4.8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter discusses the data analysis techniques employed for this study and thereafter delves into the data presentation and its interpretation. Aspers and Corte (2019) define data analysis as the systematic application of techniques to summarise, compress, evaluate, and explain data. Additionally, data analysis is defined by Ravindran (2019) as the summary of collected data used for logical and analytical reasoning to identify trends, connections or patterns.

Data interpretation is the last stage of the investigation after the data have been analysed. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), data interpretation is the process of deriving meaning from information by thoroughly evaluating the themes, assertions, patterns, explanations, and causal processes unearthed in qualitative data. Data interpretation is also described by Lester et al. (2020:95) as the process of analysing data and drawing conclusions that make sense through a variety of analytical techniques.

4.8.1. McMillan and Schumacher's Method of Analysing Data

When it comes to data analysis, McMillan and Schumacher provide a thorough explanation (2013). Those of McMillan and Schumacher who describe the procedure for data analysis, as seen in Figure 4.2, and subsequently a brief description of each step is outlined.

Figure 4.2: McMillan and Schumacher's six steps of analysing data

1	• Organising data
2	• Transcribing data
3	• Coding data
4	• Forming categories
5	• Discovering patterns
6	• Determining the plausibility of patterns
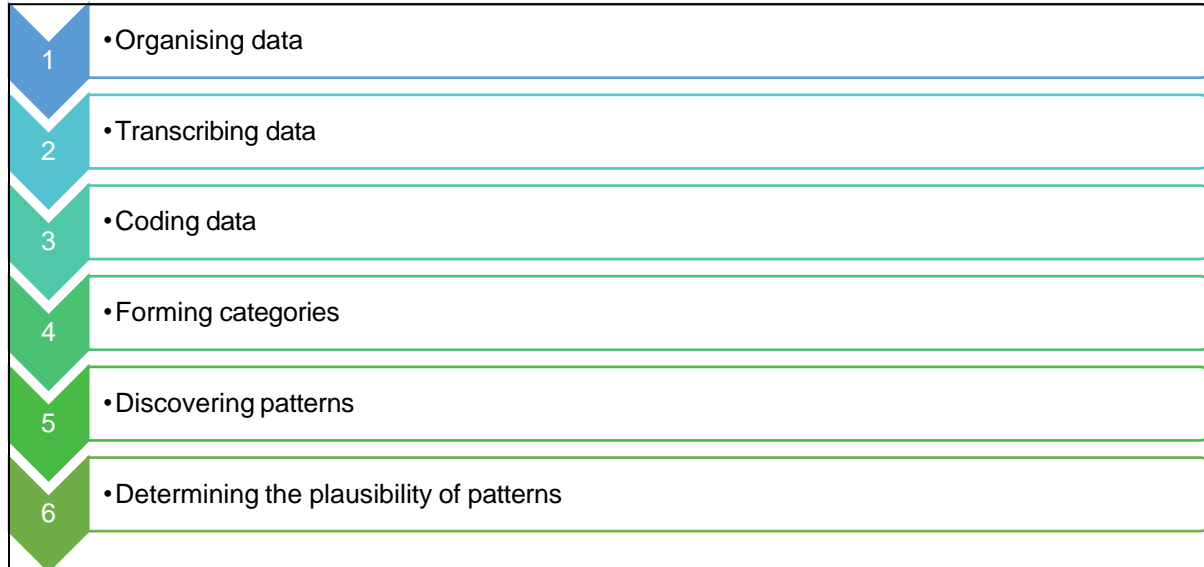
Source: McMillan and Schumacher (2013)

- **Step 1: Organising Data**

The first step is organising the data. Organising data involves placing data into computer files, index cards or file folders. For it to be analysed, the data must be converted into files, such as phrases or words. Additionally, McMillan and Schumacher (2013) note that qualitative approaches can produce large amounts of data. Therefore, to organise the qualitative data, researchers should create an inventory of labels (McMillan & Schumacher, 2013). An easier way to get data would be to base this labelling on a notational system.

- **Step 2: Transcribing Data**

The second step entails transcribing data. The process of transcription entails writing down notes of the audio recordings. The act of transcribing data enables the researcher to fully engage with the information. To facilitate efficient data coding, McMillan and Schumacher (2013) stressed that transcripts need to be thoroughly prepared.

- **Step 3: Coding Data**

In step three, the data are then coded. Data coding, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2013), is the process of organising, classifying and allocating codes to the gathered data. Codes are, therefore, be created and applied as labels or tags to the data that have been transcribed.

- **Step 4: Forming Categories**

The fourth step involves categorising the data. Forming categories is a qualitative data analysis technique that is used to find ideas, similarities and contrasts in information that participants provide to the researcher during the interview process (Smit & Scherman, 2021). By categorising data, a researcher can more easily describe the features of a category and group similar data into categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2013). This step, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2013), entails the process of reviewing all the coded data and then creating categories for the analysis stage.

- **Step 5: Discovering Patterns**

At this stage, the researcher observes the trends in the data that has been collected. Analysing qualitative data, such as replies to qualitative questionnaire s or semi-structured interviews, involves going through the data gathering process to establish and define patterns in the meaning of the data. The researcher might derive meaning and a story from the data by formulating themes from the acquired data. The research questions, aims, and methodology for analysing qualitative data shape the tone of this story.

- **Step 6: Plausibility of Patterns**

Finally, the researcher must determine if the themes are plausible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2013). Here, the data topics are evaluated for their use and importance. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2013), researchers might engage with emerging themes by seeking out other rational interpretations of the data and their connections. There could be competing explanations; hence, it is incumbent upon the

researcher to seek out, name, and explain such explanations, while also making an effort to demonstrate why they are the most likely (McMillan & Schumacher, 2013).

Following data collection, the researcher must examine the material in order to draw conclusions based on the study's context and the aforementioned six processes. In order to facilitate data interpretation and discussion, the data was transcribed, categorised, and grouped into distinct themes (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014). The information gathered from the participants' qualitative questionnaire s was entered into Microsoft Excel documents. The study's qualitative questionnaire responses and interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Sentence structure and spelling errors were accurately recorded and not edited, and the responses analysed against the primary research questions in these spreadsheets.

After reading each study section several times, codes were assigned. The theoretical frameworks and research informed to the coding of data. As the data were coded, these were further clarified and expanded upon. The researcher was able to create frequency tables, graphs and pie charts as a result of this process, which was used to graphically illustrate information obtained from the ground. Additionally, a category was formed from the comparable patterns discovered throughout the data analysis of this research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2013). The data was double-checked for obvious mistakes and any incorrect entries were corrected for context before any analysis was conducted. The researcher found and corrected only minor, superficial mistakes in the data gathered. A thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data. For this investigation, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The information gleaned from the questionnaire was translated into numerical data, with a score of one indicating that a respondent strongly disagrees or poor and a score of five indicating that they strongly agree, or excellent. In addition, semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants were conducted so as to solicit and validate the views expressed by the respondents.

In line with the modified six steps of data analysis described by McMillan and Schumacher (2013), the researcher transcribed, organised and analysed the data from

the individual in-depth interviews and questionnaires into themes for presentation as guided by the six phases tabulated in Table 2.

Table 4.3: The six phases of the researcher's data analysis process

PHASE	RESEARCH ACTIVITY
Phase 1: Organising Data	The researcher familiarised herself with the data by transcribing the audio recording and analysing the data collected during interviews. The researcher ensured that the data collected was reliable and appropriate for the analysis objectives. This was done to ensure that the data was clean, accurate, and structured in a way that facilitated meaningful analysis. This allowed for thorough analysis, leading to more accurate and actionable insights.
Phase 2: Transcribing Data	The researcher created initial codes.
	The researcher converted the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews, into written text. This process was crucial for ensuring that the data was accurately captured and could be thoroughly analysed. The researcher's aim was to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate, reliable, and ready for qualitative analysis, ultimately enhancing the validity and depth of the research findings.
Phase 3: Coding data	The researcher identified common themes. This involved systematically categorising and labelling of data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. This process was particularly crucial in this study as the goal was to derive meaning from data collected in the interviews, open-ended responses from the interview guide, and field notes. This allowed the researcher to systematically organise and interpret

PHASE	RESEARCH ACTIVITY
	data, leading to robust and insightful findings that contributed to the research objectives.
Phase 4: Forming categories	The researcher reviewed and thematised responses. The researcher organised and grouped data into meaningful categories or themes based on common features or patterns. This process assisted the researcher in simplifying, summarising, and interpreting the data.
Phase 5: Discovering Patterns	The researcher defined and allocated headings to the themes. This phase involved organising and grouping data into similar categories or themes based on common characteristics or patterns. This required continuously reflecting on the categorisation and revising these categories as new insights emerged. This assisted with effectively categorising their data, making it possible to analyse and draw meaningful conclusions that contributed to the research objectives.
Phase 6: Plausibility of patterns	The researcher attempted to draw insights and conclusions from the analysis. Determining the plausibility of patterns and themes involved a careful and systematic approach to ensure that the identified patterns were credible, reliable, and meaningful. This rigorous approach enhanced the overall validity and impact of the research. The researcher refined the analysis and developed the final research report.

4.9. CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with trustworthiness as a measure of research rigour. To determine the degree of trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability are regarded as the four components that determine the degree of trustworthiness.

4.10. CREDIBILITY

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012:125), affirm that credibility is a critical element of qualitative research design as it informs whether the study findings provide accurate information from the perspectives of the researcher, participants and the reader. Credible research findings are those that are "true, credible and believable," (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa, et al., 2018). This indicates that such results will not make sense to the research audience. The validity of study findings is increased when research approaches are triangulated. Credibility requires that researchers use reputable study procedures (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2019). In this study, the researcher used qualitative questionnaire s and interview guides to obtain qualitative data for the study to increase the credibility of the research findings. A study must also have participants who can respond to research questions to be trustworthy (Kyngäs, et al., 2019). This study used legitimate research techniques and document them to ensure legitimacy. The credibility of the data was further enhanced by cross-referencing the interview transcripts and the researcher's handwritten field notes to whether the respondents' viewpoints were accurately represented in the data interpretation.

4.11. DEPENDABILITY

According to Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018), dependability is a research audit issue that necessitates an auditor to evaluate the research process and its results. They point out that by making the study's audit trail very apparent, dependability can, therefore, be increased (ibid). Dependability is centred on methodological consistency and rigour to provide research reports and findings that the research community can accept with confidence (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Continuity is concerned with the "recording of steps completed, and judgments made during analysis" (Gray & Groove 2020). The

researcher will outline all the steps and techniques used in the study methodology to assure reliability.

The researcher in this study meticulously documented and recorded the methods used for data collection, ensuring precision in the collection, examination, and evaluation of the data. Both the sampling strategy and data collection procedures were determined. Afterwards, a comprehensive and systematic explanation of the strategies used for data analysis and interpretation was provided. To ensure the transferability of the research results, the researcher presented comprehensive guidelines on the collection, recording, coding, and analysis of the study's data.

4.12. TRANSFERABILITY

Research findings from qualitative investigations are considered to be of high quality if they can be extrapolated to apply to other situations (Forero et al., 2018). Data saturation improves transferability (ibid). Therefore, the researcher provided a thorough account of the background of her work to support transferability as asserted by Polit and Beck (2017). A researcher can apply findings to various contexts by using saturated data that encompasses as many perspectives of the topic of interest as feasible (Forero et al.,2018). This principle was adopted and be complied with in this research.

4.13. CONFIRMABILITY

The degree to which third parties can accept research findings as accurate is known as confirmability (Forero et al.,2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability is defined by Kyngäs, et al. (2019) as the degree to which research findings are supported by gathered data. Confirmability is reached when data collected can show that a study's findings and conclusions are accurate.

The confirmability of this research was established by a comprehensive evaluation of the methodologies used. This endeavour was conducted to aid other participants involved in RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) who may have an interest in comprehending the methodology used in this research on the institutional execution of RPL for credit. This could assist RPL stakeholders understand the many scenarios in

which the results of this study may be institutionally modified, thereby enhancing its possibilities of replication (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

4.14.   PRE-TEST PILOT STUDY

The purpose of the pilot study is to determine whether the semi-structured interview schedule/guide and a questionnaire could successfully collect the necessary data from the participants. The interview guide was tested with two research volunteers as part of the pilot study. The identified research volunteers who fit the requirements for the sample inclusion participated in the pilot study after the ethics clearance was granted. The two volunteers, thereafter, were excluded from the research study. The pilot study assisted in the refinement of the questions and ascertained the reliability of the interview guide.

4.15.   RESEARCH ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure the safety of study participants, researchers are guided by ethical principles or laws known as ethical guidelines (Foundation for Professional Development, 2020). Ethics, according to Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018), centres on norms of conduct established by society. "What a researcher ought to do when conducting, disseminating, and putting into practice outcomes from academic inquiry or systematic investigation," defines research ethics (Fitzpatrick & Wallace, 2013). Questions of whether participants were harmed, whether informed consent was obtained from participants, whether participants' privacy was invaded, and whether participants were misled are common examples of ethical violations in social research (Bryman, 2014). Adherence to ethical standards strengthens the reliability of the research.

4.16.   ETHICAL REVIEW AND AUTHORISATION

It is the duty of researchers to ensure that the studies they undertake adhere to ethical standards (Polit & Beck, 2017). In light of this, ethical review committees at institutions where research is commonly conducted give the crucial external appraisal of study programmes (Polit & Beck, 2017). The researcher applied for ethics clearance from the Unisa College of Education Ethics Review Committee and was granted approval to

conduct this research with the ethics reference number: **2023/08/10/38936607/37/AM**. The ethics approval was granted for the period from 2023/08/10 to 2028/08/10.

Hence, the researcher thoroughly addressed all pertinent ethical factors that may potentially affect the well-being of the participants and the credibility of the study results. The researcher ensured that the participants' involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and not coerced, in strict compliance with ethical guidelines throughout the research procedure. Moreover, a formal request was made and subsequently granted to carry out research by the government agency that was selected for sampling. Prior permission was acquired from relevant government authorities, and the researcher ensured strict anonymity when interacting with the study participants. Beneficence, respect for human dignity and justice are the three main ethical principles that guide ethical conduct in research and are outlined in the Belmont Report, according to Polit and Beck (2017); Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018).

4.16.1. Beneficence:

The beneficence principle requires researchers to minimise risks and maximise rewards. The right to be free from damage and suffering as well as the right to be safeguarded against exploitation are both included in this principle (Polit & Beck, 2017). The researcher has a duty to minimise, prevent and avoid any maleficence or harm that research participants may experience to ensure that their right to freedom from hurt and discomfort is upheld. Further, according to Polit and Beck (2017), there should be no discomfort for study participants at any time. In this study, participants will be interviewed, and there is no expectation that the study will cause any kind of harm. According to Polit and Beck (2017), such harm can be financial, emotional, physical, or social in nature. Scientific misconduct is a part of the non-maleficence problem (Fitzpatrick & Wallace, 2013). Scientific misconduct, according to the authors (ibid), is defined as deliberate dishonesty, such as data fabrication, plagiarism and other behaviours.

To uphold the right to be free from exploitation, it is essential for the researcher to guarantee that participants do not experience any negative consequences as a result of their involvement in the study (Polit & Beck, 2017). Furthermore, Polit and Beck (2017)

recommend that the researcher explicitly reassure participants that their involvement in the study would not result in any negative consequences, in order to prevent any potential exploitation. Two rights are included in respect of human dignity: the right to self-determination and the right to full disclosure (Polit & Beck, 2017). According to Polit and Beck (2017), the basis for informed consent is the right to full information and the right to self-determination. Right to self-determination, according to Gray and Grove (2020), posit that the researcher must recognise that people have the capacity for autonomy and that, as a result, they are free to choose their paths without interference from other forces. Gray and Grove (2020) maintain that the right to self-determination is protected in research by disclosing to participants their right to leave at any time, giving them the option of participating or not, and explaining the purpose of the study. In accordance with Gray and Grove's (2020) recommendations, the study notified all participants of their right to withdraw at any point, should they wish to discontinue with the research and the researcher duly obtained the participants' agreement, after she provided them with a free withdrawal option.

4.16.2. Full disclosure:

As part of full disclosure, participants were made aware of the study's goal, nature and opportunity to withdraw at any time (Polit & Beck, 2017). Gray and Grove (2020) also point out that the researcher must be open and honest about the study's objectives, as well as the advantages and possible hazards of participating. In the context of this study, there were no hazards associated that could harm the participants.

4.16.3. Justice:

Justice is the third ethical precept discussed by Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018). The right to fair treatment and the right to privacy are the main rights that must be upheld to sustain the idea of justice (Polit & Beck 2017). According to Polit and Beck (ibid), the issue of fair treatment is particularly evident in sample selection, and it requires the researcher to fairly distribute the risks and benefits of the research. In defending the right to fair treatment, Polit and Beck (ibid) issue a further warning against bias towards study participants who choose not to participate. The researcher selected a fairly representative sample for participants. However, some opted not to continue with the

interview and the researcher emphasised their right to choose not to participate. At that point, some of the initially sampled participants declined to continue.

The second right embedded in the justice principle is the right to privacy. Gray and Grove (2020) define the right to privacy as the freedom of individuals to decide when, how much and under what conditions their personal information may or may not be shared. This private information comprises views, practices, attitudes, and records, as stated by Gray and Grove (2020). Polit and Beck (2017) advise maintaining the strictest confidentiality while managing personal information, which includes preserving anonymity, to safeguard the right to privacy. Participants will not be obliged to divulge their identities in this research, and all interview recordings will be maintained confidentially in password-protected files that are known only to the researcher to uphold this privilege. The participants were informed that their contributions would be treated with utmost privacy and as such, the researcher did not request any names to be disclosed on the questionnaires.

4.16.4. Informed Consent:

Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2018) note that in order to guarantee that all of the rights of participants are protected, it is essential to ensure that they fully understand the research and voluntarily consent to participate. According to Nieswiadomy and Bailey (ibid), the informed consent also includes information about the researcher's contact information, a statement outlining the participant's right to withdraw at any time, a description of any potential risks, benefits of participating, and how confidentiality will be maintained. In addition, Gray and Grove (2020) note that obtaining informed consent requires disclosing information about the research procedures and promising to respond to any queries the participants might have. The researcher obtained written informed consent and disclosed all the relevant information about the research procedures and responded to all queries raised by the participants before administering the questionnaire and conducting the interviews. By having participants sign a written consent form, Polit and Beck (2017) show how it is possible to demonstrate that they gave their informed consent.

4.17. DATA INTERPRETATION

Data interpretation, as defined by Babbie (2021), entails meticulously scrutinising the data patterns in order to ascertain the relevance of the study results and/or conclusions. Hence, data interpretation involves the identification of factual information that elucidates the patterns or correlations present in the provided data (Berli, 2021).

In this study, the researcher analysed the qualitative data in accordance with the study's goals, which are to examine the factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa.

i.   To obtain the optimal framework(s) for effectively contributing to the implementation of RPL.

ii. To ascertain the perspectives and first-hand encounters of the primary stakeholders involved in the execution of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) by governmental agencies.

iii. To ascertain the limitations, if any, in adopting RPL for credit in the public service sector.

iv. To provide suggestions on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) credit evaluation techniques that should be considered by implementers in the public service sector.

Policy papers, among other secondary sources, were used throughout data interpretation to complement the core data of the research. To gather primary data for the empirical study, interviews and qualitative questionnaires were administered, while document analysis was utilised to gather secondary data. The following five sub-questions of this study guided the researcher towards the empirical findings:

i.   What enables or hinders the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?

ii. What models of practice have been successfully utilised to aid in the implementation of RPL?

iii. How do candidates perceive RPL assessment processes?

iv. What are the constraints (if any) to implementing RPL for credit in the public service sector?

v.   What guidelines and or assessment tools can be developed to ensure the successful and uniform implementation of RPL?

The empirical research findings inform the response to the main research question: *What factors facilitate and/or hinder the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?*

4.18.   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the research design, and techniques were also outlined. The study used a case study design and a qualitative research methodology. The research methodologies and procedures used to gather, analyse and evaluate the data for this study were described in depth, along with an explanation of how purposive sampling was utilised to create the study's sample. This chapter further unpacked the types of data collecting techniques: qualitative questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and secondary data; along with how the study used these in the data collection phase of the research process. To provide assurance in the research process and the preservation of the study process, trustworthiness and reliability in terms of qualitative methodologies were also examined. The significance of ethical considerations and protocols and the manner in which ethical considerations were handled in this investigation were also discussed. The target population was identified and justification for the sampling techniques used for this study was also discussed in detail. Data gathering tools and the justification for using such were also covered. The subsequent chapter delves into the interpretation of data and the presentation of empirical research findings.

CHAPTER 5:
PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter (Chapter 4) outlined the research methodology and design used to examine the implementation of the RPL for credit policy in the South African public service sector, specifically through a case study. This study used an interpretivist research paradigm and a qualitative methodology to guide the gathering and interpretation of data, as discussed in the previous chapter. To collect primary data for the empirical research, interviews and qualitative questionnaires were undertaken, while document analysis was used to acquire secondary data. The five sub-questions below produced the following empirical findings:

    i.   What factors facilitate or impede the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?

    ii.   Which practice models have effectively facilitated the deployment of RPL?

    iii.   What is the applicants' perception of RPL evaluation processes?

    iv.   What limitations, if any, exist for adopting RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) for credit in the public service sector?

    v.   What criteria and evaluation tools can be created to guarantee the effective and consistent application of RPL?

The results reported in this chapter provide insights into the elements that either support or impede the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa. These findings directly address the primary research question.

This chapter commences with the biographical presentation of the research participants who willingly consented to participate in the study. Thereafter, the empirical results are presented in accordance with the themes and sub-themes that arose from the data analysis.

Finally, this study's entire data interpretation process produced logical qualitative findings that were used for the development of an **Institutional RPL pre-assessment Guide** to assist potential RPL candidates in the application process of RPL.

5.2. DATA INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

5.2.1. Biographical information of the participants in the study

The biographical data of the participants who were sampled is presented in this section. A sample of 26 participants, comprising RPL candidates and RPL coordinators who agreed to participate in the study. The RPL candidates presented next have been certified as competent against the National Certificate: Public Administration NQF Level 5, SAQA ID: 50060 and NQF Level 6, SAQA ID: 57897. This means that these RPL candidates have been successfully awarded credits against the aforementioned full qualifications as they have fulfilled the necessary assessment requirements against the full qualification.

To collect the data, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants in EL and while an online questionnaire was administered with the participants based in PE. The gender breakdown of the participants formed a 40% representation of male employees and 60% of female employees that were interviewed as presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Biographical data of the participants in this study

Category	Criteria for inclusion in Sample	Motivation for inclusion in Sample	Size of Sample Total (%)
1. Provincial Coordinator	EC OTP as the HRD coordinator in the province	The official provided provincial specific insights on the RPL strategy and policy for the sector	1 Official

Category	Criteria for inclusion in Sample	Motivation for inclusion in Sample	Size of Sample Total (%)
2. RPL Coordinators	Eastern Cape Provincial Department	The officials representing the employer, provided insights on how they managed RPL process in the province	3 officials
3. Officials: RPL candidates	RPL beneficiary who completed the RPL programme	These officials provided insights on the motivation for their choice of pathway to RPL, as well as the nature of support that their department provided in the facilitation of their RPL journey	13 RPL candidates in East London 6 RPL candidates in Gqeberha
4. Skills Development Facilitators	Skills Development Facilitators	The SDFs provided practical insights on how RPL for credit assessments were conducted.	3 SDFs
Total Number of Participants			**26 (100%)**

The 26, which represent 100% of participants for this study encompassed RPL Candidates who were successfully assessed for RPL against PSETA accredited Public Administration qualification and RPL Coordinators who facilitated the implementation of the programme within their department. Data collection from the East London participants was done through in-depth face-to-face interviews while the participants in Gqeberha were provided with questionnaires to complete and submit to the researcher

This study relied upon purposive sampling techniques, where the participants were selected based on the expert knowledge of the researcher who decided upon the features that are vital to be present in the sample. In this instance, a sample of the beneficiaries and coordinators of the RPL programme were selected. This sampling approach suited the current study, as it was not aimed at generalising its results to the whole population.

5.2.2. Gender distribution of RPL Candidates

Of the total of 19 RPL Candidates who participated in the study, 37% were male and 63% were females as illustrated in figure 5.1 below. All the candidates have been in the employ of the department for over 10 years.

Figure 5.1: Gender distribution of RPL Candidates
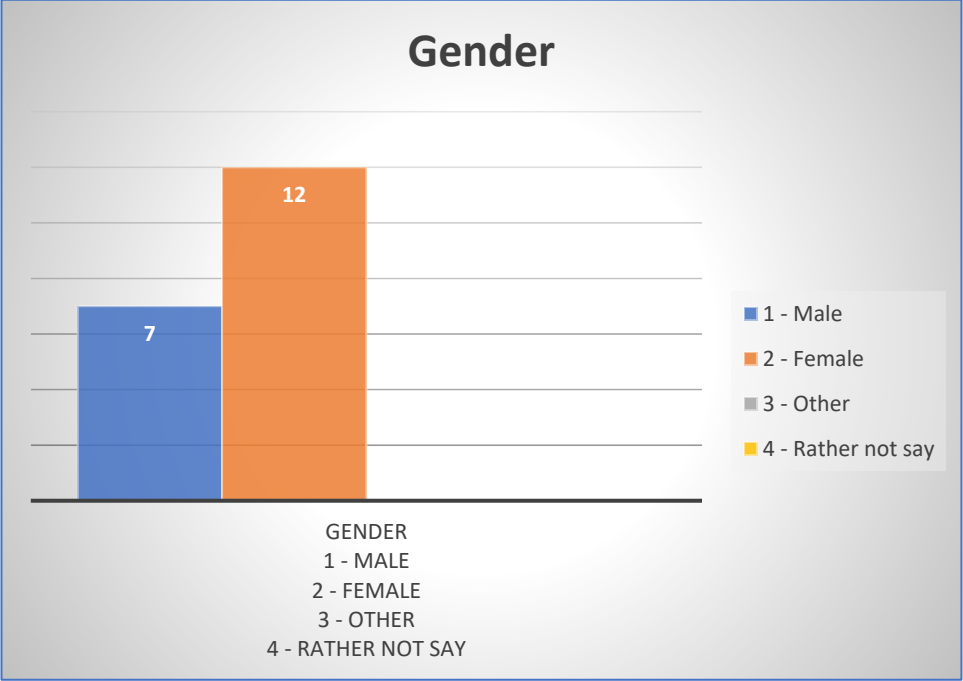
5.2.3. Age Profile

The age profile of the participants as presented in Figure 5.2, ranges from 25 years to 54 years of age.

Figure 5.2: Age profile of RPL Candidates
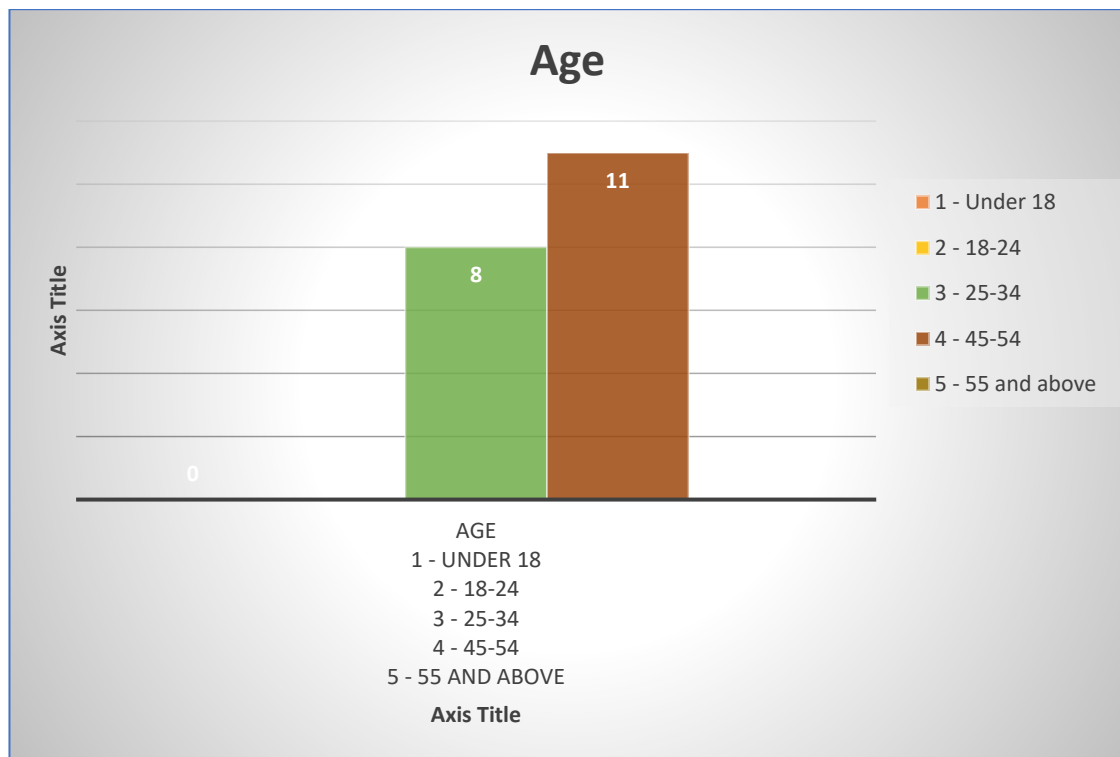
5.3.   PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The empirical results of the study, which were gathered through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and a qualitative questionnaire, are presented in the subsequent sub-sections. Table 5.3 summarises the themes and sub-themes derived from the data. In order to systematically generate and refine themes and sub-themes, providing a clear structure for analysing qualitative data, the researcher read through the data multiple times to immerse herself in it. The themes and sub-themes were derived from the six phases of the data analysis process as detailed in chapter 4, above. The principal data for the study was the primary data collected from the RPL Candidates, RPL Coordinators and the SDFs who responded to the respective interview guides and questionnaires developed for the study. The study gathered responses from a total of 26 participants. Responses from the participants were captured on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The researcher then went through the descriptive responses provided by the respective respondents to each question, from these responses broad themes that reflect meanings were developed. The transcripts of all the interviews informed the

themes under which the data was classified under. In cleansing the data, selected segments of text and phrases which were seen as relevant to the research questions were placed under relevant themes.

The process culminated in the researcher attempting to draw insights and conclusions from the analysis. Determining the plausibility of patterns and themes involved a careful and systematic approach to ensure that the identified patterns were credible, reliable, and meaningful. This rigorous approach enhanced the overall validity and impact of the research reported thematically as presented in table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Themes and sub-themes

	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1.	**Understanding and Support**	• Clear Understanding of RPL • Lack of Official Policy • Capacity Challenges
2.	**Implementation Challenges**	• Best Practices • Lack of Clear Policy Guidelines • Limited Awareness
3.	**Departmental Challenges**	• Funding Constraints • Limited Resources
4.	**Recommendations for Improvement**	• Advocacy and Awareness • Funding Support • Monitoring and Support

The subsequent sub-sections provide a detailed presentation of the key findings emanating from the themes and sub-themes outlined in Table 5.2 above.

5.4. QUALITATIVE RESULTS, DATA INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS FROM THE INDEPTH INTERVIEWS

5.4.1. THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT

The theme of **Understanding and Support** dealt with matters in line with the research question, which sought to investigate "what enables or hinders the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?" Two sub-themes emerged under this theme. The two sub-themes within each of them highlighted the understanding of the RPL policy by RPL coordinators as well as policy issues and capacity constraints experienced by the department. As depicted in Figure 5.3, there were mixed responses from RPL candidates when reflecting on the degree to which they felt supported by the department in their RPL journey.

Figure 5.3: Departments willingness to support RPL candidates
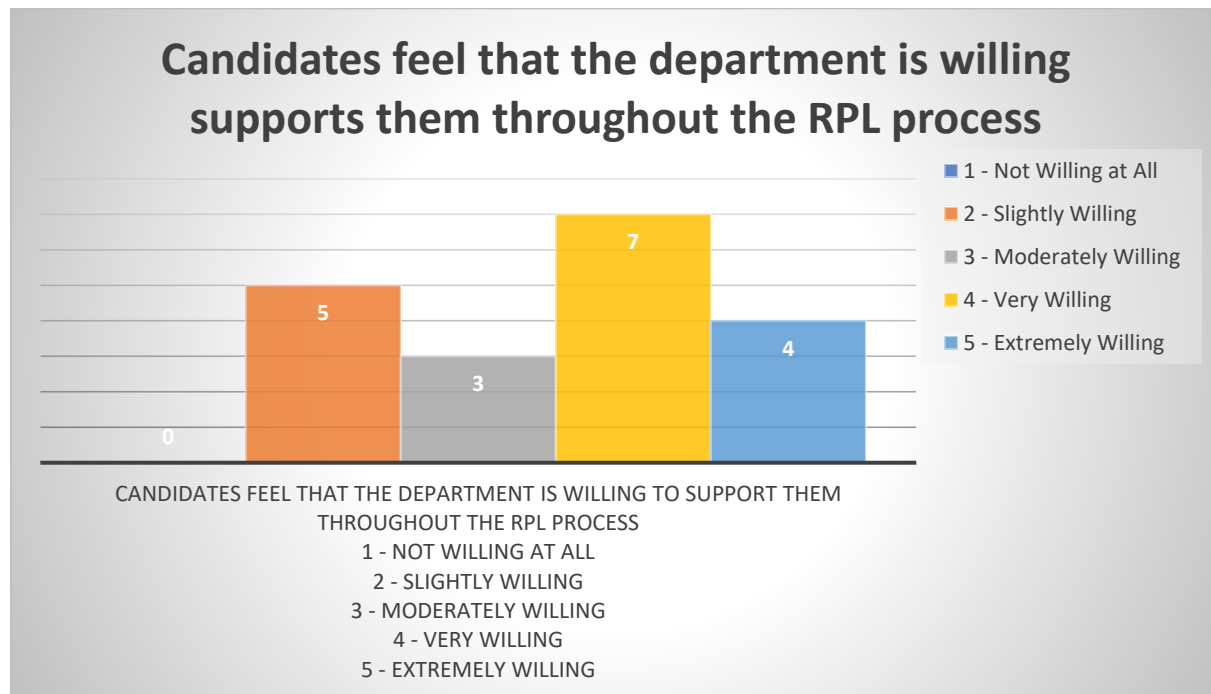
RPL Candidates expressed varying perceptions on the department's willingness to support candidates throughout their RPL journey. However, when further probed about how the department supported them in their RPL journey, they expressed the following: "The RPL Coordinators were able to coordinate the SDP and call the SDP for a week to help us when we had challenges with assignments and collection of evidence. We were

assisted individually, there were one-on-one sessions with the SDP, individual attention was provided to us. The department supervisors gave us time to collect evidence. The line managers gave us their blessings. They were also sharing with us information as a way of assisting us".

The RPL Coordinators also opined that the supervisors also greatly assisted with providing motivations as testimonials for the supervisory experience that the Candidates carryout in their respective roles.

In relation to the "Understanding and Support", sub-themes, the findings emanating from the in-depth interviews with the RPL coordinators are presented below.

When asked whether there was sufficient support provided in terms of understanding RPL and the requirement of compiling a portfolio of evidence, the RPL Candidates expressed that they experienced challenges when it came to answering assessment question and compiling a portfolio of evidence, however, commended the efforts of the SDFs in assisting them in aligning their daily work activities against the assessment questions. During initial discussions with the researcher, prior to the completion of the structured questionnaire, respondents, particularly among RPL Coordinators and SDFs expressed a clear understanding of RPL within their organisations. *The interpretation that can be drawn is that* a foundational understanding of RPL among key stakeholders could facilitate seamless implementation of the RPL programme.

The candidates further affirmed that they understood RPL as a programme aimed at assisting employees with many years of service without qualifications to formalise their knowledge gained in the Public Service. One respondent noted: *"Without a qualification your experience in the Public Service is nullified, so this programme aims to close this gap".* They also admitted that they had a misconception about how RPL works, as had envisaged that upon completing the application process, they would then be awarded the Public Administration qualification. It then transpired during the induction process that there was intense work to be done before a Candidate may be certified. As a result of how intensive the assessment process was, some Candidates disclosed that they had considered dropping out in the middle of the programme, however, were tied by the contracts they had signed.

Organised Labour Support was cited as an enabler to the implementation of RPL in the department. The respondents affirmed that organised labour generally supports the process of RPL and its implementation in their department.

The support from organised labour is a positive factor that can be contributed to the success of RPL implementation as organised labour representatives within departments can encourage their constituencies to apply for RPL opportunities when they are available. In the South African context, organised is a key stakeholder in skills development. The policy document analysis also supports the importance of organised labour in the SETA Grant Regulations, Gazette No. 35940, of 3 December 2012, which further amplifies the role of organised labour as key stakeholders to be consulted and subsequently to endorse workplace skills plans within organisations. In the context of this study, organised labour support of the RPL intervention is significant as it aligns with the DPSA RPL policy that advocates RPL as a useful and alternative route for the capacity building of public service officials.

The constraints cited around policy by RPL candidates revealed that there seems to be unclear and insufficient policy guidance the implementation of RPL. This is evident considering the inconsistent policy responses offered by RPL candidates in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: RPL Policy Guidelines
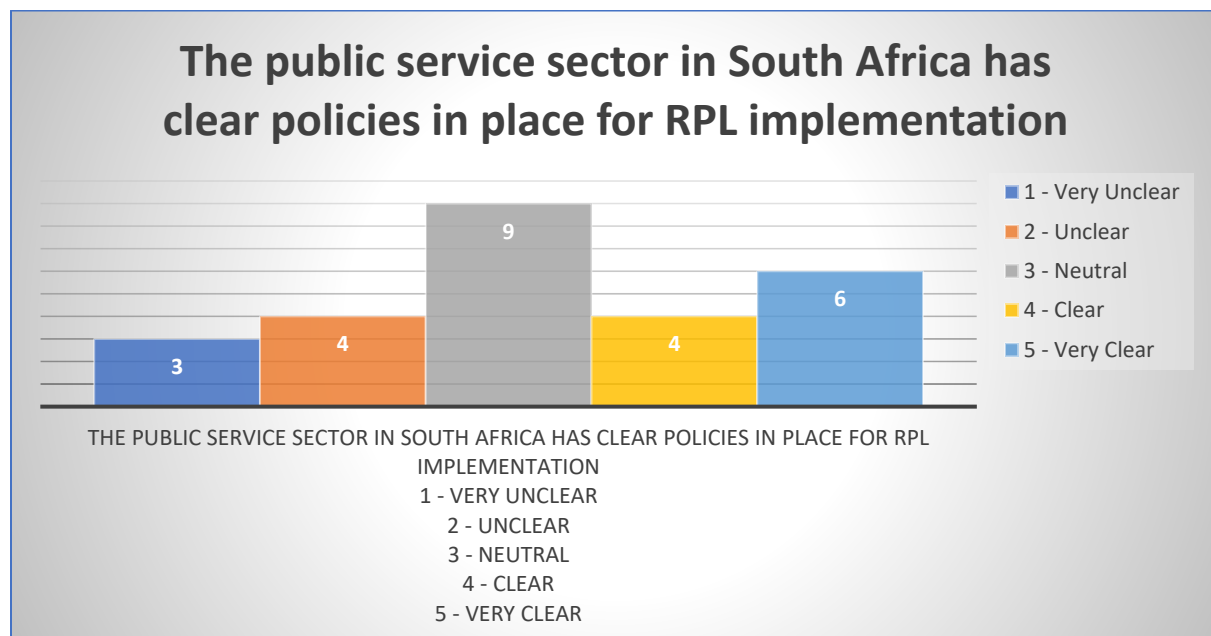
When asked whether there were clear RPL policies in place in the sector, the data revealed that some departments have an absence of an institutional formal RPL policy, which in turn hinders the structured implementation of RPL.

Additionally, the participants shared that there is currently no RPL policy within the Department, however, consultation was done with the Office of the Premier (OTP) to provide guidance on the policy development. Noteworthy is that in the absence of an institutional RPL policy the SDFs were advised that the HRDC unit should follow the principles of the RPL implementation as guided by the DPSA and not wait for the institutional policy development process.

Based on the insights shared, it may be construed that there is a satisfactory comprehension of the RPL policy within the department. However, the absence of clear institutional policies may create challenges in providing consistent guidance and support for RPL.

In response to the policy question: *"are departments' RPL procedures clearly outlined and easy to follow?"* Coordinators expressed the following views:

- Coordinator *A: "The DPSA guidelines are clear; the department used those guidelines."*
- Coordinator *B: "Yes, even though they are not from policy."*
- Coordinator *C: "Yes, through HRD and SDC."*

It is evident from skills development legislative provisions, that RPL is one of the tools meant to facilitate change in the South African education and training sector. The study's results, however, revealed that the department is guided by the DPSA National RPL Strategy and Implementation Policy and Procedure guidelines for implementing RPL.

The challenges related to capacity and support were identified as constraints as they impact on the effective coordination and implementation of RPL within departments.

To this end, RPL Coordinator C, opined that *"A policy must be implemented and what hinders us is to have a policy that we can't implement due to lack of funding (no funds)."*

The RPL coordinators further submitted that *"their department does not have an official RPL policy in place, however, they utilise the generic national RPL policy that is not sector specific."*

As amplified in the policy document analysis conducted by the researcher, the policy commitment to RPL is also reflected in the DHET White Paper for Post-School Education and Training which emphasises the role of RPL as a key approach to redressing past injustices and recognising the competence gained through practical work experience. In addition, the DHET created the Recognition of Prior Learning Coordination Policy, which calls for creating a supportive atmosphere to address the challenges and approaches to implementing RPL.

5.4.2. THEME 2: IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

5.4.2.1. RPL IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESSES

Theme 2 sought to address the research question: "What models of practice have been successfully utilised to aid in the implementation of RPL?"

A range of questions were posed to RPL candidates in the qualitative questionnaire to solicit their perception on the support they derived from the department in the RPL assessment processes. Additionally, the researcher expanded on the questions in a semi-structured interview format. In reflecting on their individual RPL journeys, the RPL candidates revealed a variety of experiences as presented in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.53: Willingness of department to support RPL candidates

Candidates feel that the department is willing to support them throughout the RPL process

- 1 - Not Willing at All
- 2 - Slightly Willing
- 3 - Moderately Willing
- 4 - Very Willing
- 5 - Extremely Willing

CANDIDATES FEEL THAT THE DEPARTMENT IS WILLING TO SUPPORT THEM THROUGHOUT THE RPL PROCESS
1 - NOT WILLING AT ALL
2 - SLIGHTLY WILLING
3 - MODERATELY WILLING
4 - VERY WILLING
5 - EXTREMELY WILLING

When detailing the factors which made them feel supported by the department during RPL, the candidates noted among others that they were afforded time to attend gap training and also had a WhatsApp group with the SDP for frequent guidance, which contributed to the success of their experience. Noted below are some verbatim success factors which were highlighted by the Candidates:

> *"It's not easy for public servants to attend formal courses in HEIs, a programme like this assists public servants to acquire qualifications based on the experience they have gained over the years in the Public Service".*

> *"Given time away from work to collect and submit evidence in relation to the programme".*

> *"The support received from facilitators as well as support received from knowledge management unit".*

> *"For district students, transport was provided by the department".*

During the in-person interviews, the RPL candidates expressed their satisfaction with the department's ability to adequately explain the requirements for their RPL status and the process of gathering their evidence for their PoE for assessments. Based on data, it can be construed that the department is appropriately using RPL for social justice, economic development, and social transformation, even though the implementation is still limited in scope. This demonstrates a strong institutional intent.

In reflecting on the perceived best practices and successful RPL cases in the department, the candidates expressed how much value they derived from the RPL journey which suggests the existence of potential best practices in this regard.

In contextualising their experience, the RPL candidates stated that the programme validated knowledge they already applied in their everyday work and that the procedure seemed like a short course reviewing and updating previous studies. However, the only difference is that the knowledge was not acquired in the classroom.

> *"The programme gave me an opportunity to understand policy implementation in public administration, as well as decision making in the Public Service"*

> *"The programme gave me self-assurance that this qualification will open doors for me in future and will allow for mobility of employees to apply for other jobs in the Public Service sector"*

This eloquently illustrates the connection between experience-based learning and the knowledge required to obtain credits towards the credits of the qualifications listed on the NQF. The RPL candidates also accentuated that they are still to advance to higher NQF levels of study to further develop themselves.

5.4.2.2. RPL IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Lack of Clear Policies: The absence of clear and consistent policies provisions, was cited as a challenge affecting the implementation of RPL in the department. This can be construed to mean that the lack of policy guidance may lead to inconsistent practices and potential confusion among stakeholders.

Figure 5.6: Inconsistent policies across departments create challenges in RPL implementation
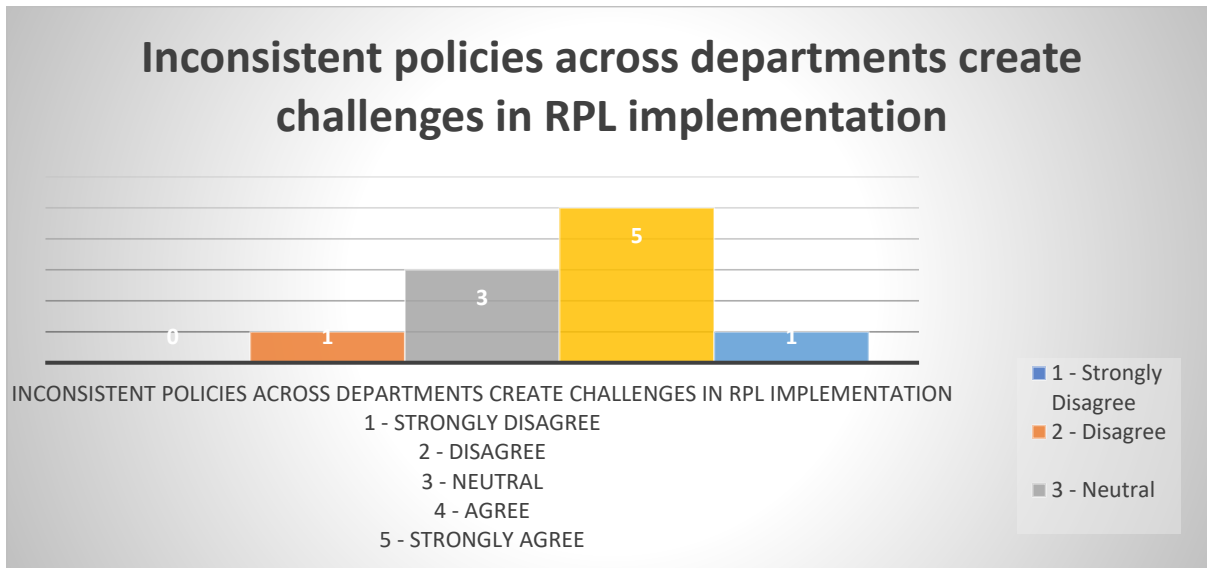
As can be observed from the data, while there is some awareness of RPL policies, the understanding thereof varies among participants as depicted in figure 5.6 above. The participants further cited that their department relies on the National RPL policy, in the absence of a departmental RPL policy as part of Human Resource Development interventions.

In response to additional questions about the DPSA's institutional foundation for systematic RPL implementation, the Coordinators opined that there were very limited strategic directives from the DPSA enforcing the implementation of RPL. The RPL Coordinators added that the DPSA had earlier sought input on the draft policy from the provinces through the Offices of the Premiers. In the absence of such a departmental policy, the Head of Department recommended that the HRD Department follow the recommendations of the National RPL policy, in anticipation of the ratification of the DPSA policy guide directive which is currently in draft status.

Limited Awareness: To this end, varying levels of awareness and understanding among participants may impact the effective implementation of RPL, as implied by the data. This challenge can be remedied by continuous communication and awareness

campaigns to enhance understanding about RPL and to increase its uptake in the sector. The study's results, however, revealed that the participants feel that the department is not given sufficient guidance when it comes to developing and implementing its own institutionally contextualised RPL policy. To this end, as reviewed in the literature, the DHET has also developed Recognition of Prior Learning Coordination Policy, which calls for the creation of a supporting environment in an attempt to address the difficulties and methods of implementing RPL. Therefore, the department could also utilise this policy document to further guide them in overcoming implementation challenges. Noteworthy, is that the data revealed that there seems to be a lack of capacity within departments and limited support, which in turn hinder institutional RPL policy development. Consequently, strengthening national policy influence is crucial to providing a more systematic and structured approach to RPL.

Continuous Improvement of Assessment Tools: Finally, when asked about the importance of the continuous improvement of the RPL assessment tools, the majority of participants affirmed the importance of the review and improvement of RPL assessment tools to remain relevant. Below the RPL Coordinators' responses to the thematic line of enquiry around the continuous improvement of RPL assessment tools are as presented in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7: Continuous improvement of assessment tools

Continuous improvement of assessment tools is a priority for RPL implementation

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS IS A PRIORITY FOR RPL IMPLEMENTATION
1 - NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL
2 - SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT
3 - MODERATELY IMPORTANT
4 - VERY IMPORTANT...

1 - Not Important at All
2 - Slightly Important
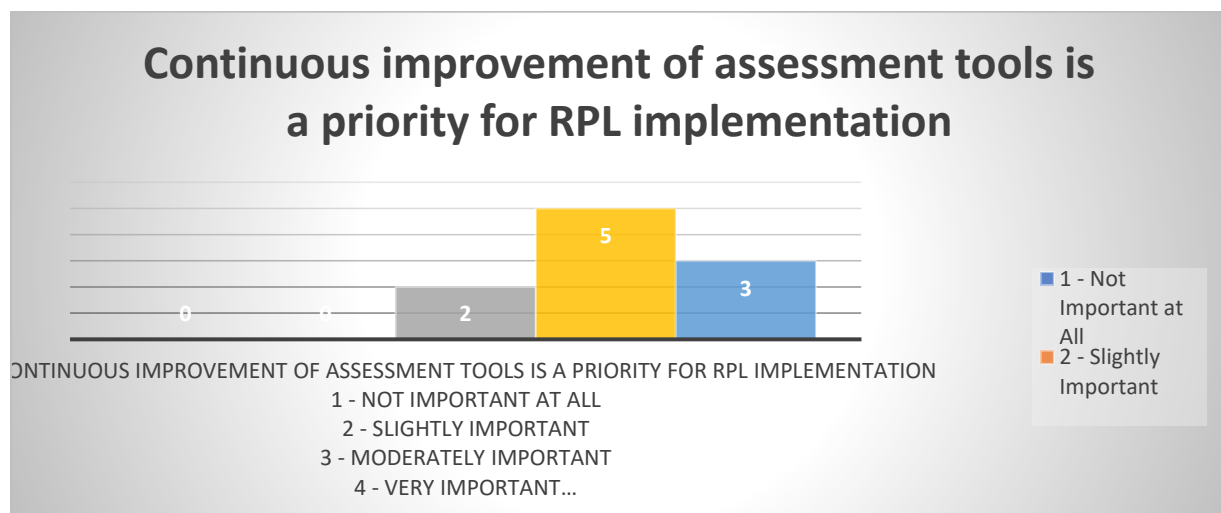
The participants also opined that the standardization of assessment Tools would foster uniformity in the assessment process. Further, in the semi-structured interviews, the participants expressed that skills development providers structured their assessments in such a way that it allowed for candidates to align their portfolios of evidence to the knowledge they apply in their daily work activities and those that they had learned in their previous positions. This bolsters the main claim that experiential learning improves knowledge and skill transferability and comprehension. This is consistent with Cooper's (2006) claim that when implementing RPL, the choice and application of specialised assessment tools is critical in determining whether or not the RPL assessor can effectively "unlock the knowledge" that learners potentially bring with them.

The RPL coordinators expressed that further support for RPL was required. They were further questioned about the specific areas that needed improvement to ensure the successful implementation of RPL in the public sector. The RPL coordinators expressed their belief that the public service sector needs defined methods for implementing RPL, and they suggested that DPSA should issue a directive specifically addressing the standardising of RPL in this matter.

The responses that emerged from the data provided a valuable mode of enquiry into the RPL Coordinators' experiences with RPL implementation techniques.

5.4.3. THEME 3: DEPARTMENTAL CHALLENGES

It was imperative under Theme 3 to establish what constraints (if any) exist to implementing RPL for credit in the public service sector. The respondents highlighted funding constraints and limited resources within departments to accelerate the implementation of RPL. As illustrated in figure 5.8 below, the participants expressed that there is insufficient infrastructure to roll-out RPL on technologically advanced or digital platforms due to network instability in the department.

Figure 5.8 Inadequate infrastructure and technology hinder RPL implementation

Inadequate infrastructure and technology hinder RPL implementation

5

3

2

0   0

INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND TECHNOLOGY HINDER RPL IMPLEMENTATION
1 - STRONGLY DISAGREE
2 - DISAGREE
3 - NEUTRAL
4 - AGREE
5 - STRONGLY AGREE

■ 1 - Strongly Disagree
■ 2 - Disagree
■ 3 - Neutral
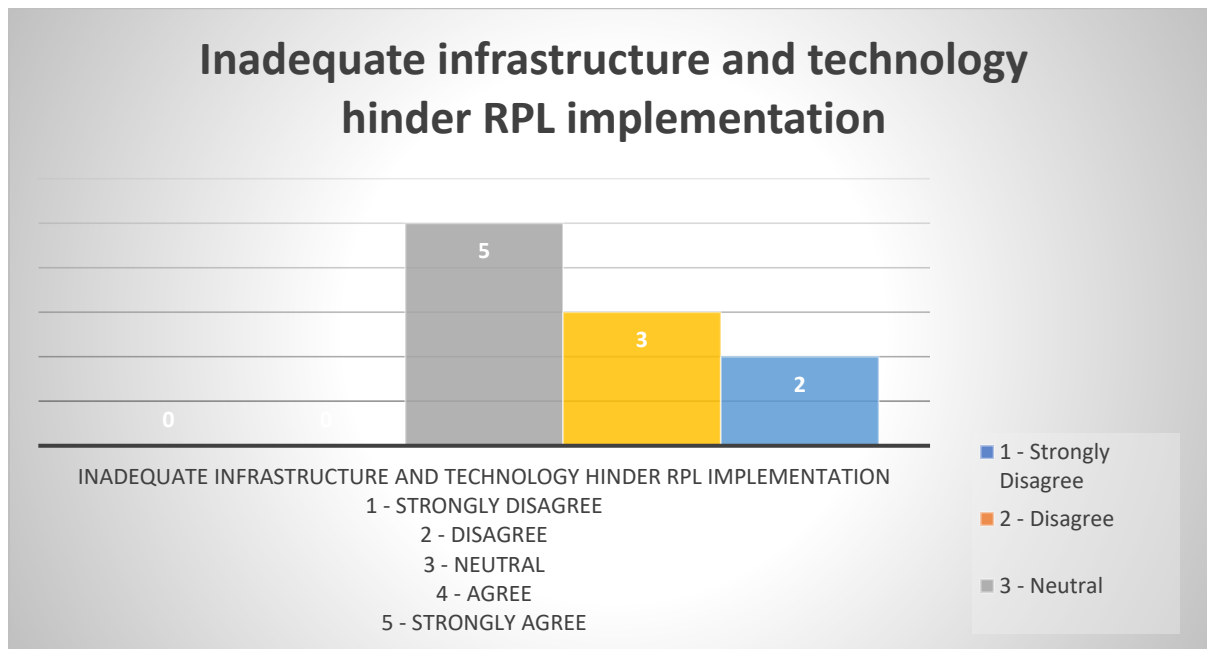
In this regard the participants expressed the following glaring comments:

Coordinator A*: "During the programme availability of resources for online learners was a challenge".*

Coordinator B: "*Unavailability of material, physical resources, network challenge".*

Coordinator C*: "Infrastructural challenges: electricity and loadshedding. This also affects network".*

5.4.3.1. Funding Constraints:

Funding challenges, especially for online learning, emerged as a consistent nuance. The respondents highlighted limited financial resources which pose a significant challenge, particularly in the context of expanding the implementation of RPL to online platforms. While the researcher acknowledges that the public service sector has embraced digitalisation, it should be noted that the data in this study revealed that the sector does not have sufficient capacity to support online RPL/ e-RPL implementation owing to bandwidth limitations as cited by the respondents.

The RPL coordinators further cited the following constraints to RPL implementation:

Coordinator A: "*No buy-in from Senior Management, no funds to implement the programme, no funds to implement online learning, no availability of resources for RPL candidates.*"

Coordinator B: "*Limited funding is the major one.*"

Coordinator C: "*Non-availability of RPL guidelines and standard operating procedures. Limited awareness of RPL to managers and government leadership. No funds and resources.*"

5.4.3.2. Limited Resources

The department cited resource constraints affecting RPL candidates which clearly demonstrates that insufficient resources, both financial and material, may hinder the overall success and accessibility of RPL interventions.

In an attempt to further explore the challenges experienced by department, the RPL coordinators were asked what kind of support their department provided to RPL candidates during the pre-assessment phase?

Coordinator A: "*Formal briefing. Availability of resources and support with preparing the officials for the assessment and the evidence required.*"

Coordinator B: "*Capacitation workshops regarding what is expected, and resources required.*"

Coordinator C: "*Assisted all candidates for logistics. Access to online platform requested computer for studies.*"

The data revealed that in order for RPL to be fully realised as part of an innovative learning programme, it requires distinct expression in departmental policies. As depicted in Figure 5.9 below, the respondents also cited there are limited training and development opportunities afforded to RPL coordinators in this regard.

Figure 5.9: Training of RPL coordinators
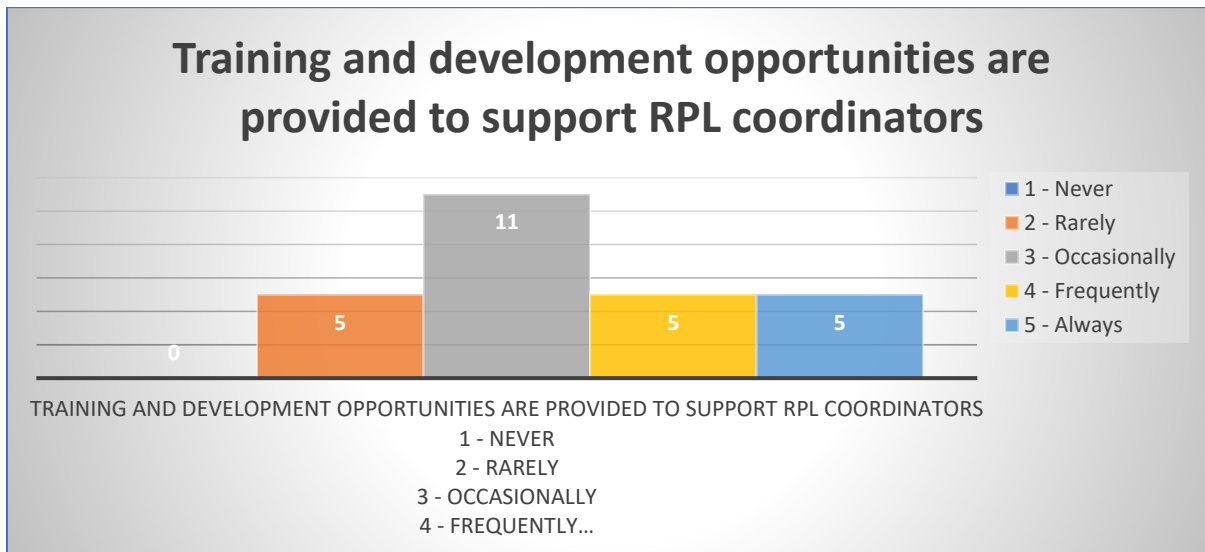
Training of RPL Coordinators in order to guide Candidates and manage RPL enquiries was explicitly expressed in the interviews. It was further cited that the RPL Advisor training that was implemented for SDFs in the sector was insufficient for adequately capacitating these officials to coordinate the RPL programme.

In a probe to understand whether any mitigating factors could be implemented to enable the department to implement RPL effectively, the respondents opined that:

> Coordinator A: "*If there could be funds available and standardisation of implementation processes by skills development providers.*"
>
> Coordinator B: "*PSETA and other SETAs must continue to fund it (offer discretionary grants).*"
>
> Coordinator C: "*Formulate RPL policy and guidelines. Provision of funding and other resources. Train RPL coordinators and mentorship.*"

The data collected from RPL Candidates demonstrated that, regardless of their gender, age group, or position, had an intrinsic drive to get the Public Administration certification. The Candidates viewed the RPL coordinators as sufficiently capacitated and had done a good job of explaining the benefits of RPL as well as guiding the in the process. A more complex picture of the qualitative data was painted by the developed interpretations, which drew attention to the benefits and drawbacks of the RPL for credit policy's application in the South African public service sector. These findings have the

potential to inform future research and stakeholder interactions that aim to enhance RPL implementation.

5.4.4. THEME 4: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In attempting to solicit inputs to answer the research question: "What guidelines and or assessment tools can be developed to ensure the successful and uniform implementation of RPL," the findings revealed three sub-themes as presented next.

5.4.4.1. Advocacy and Awareness:

The data strongly demonstrated that the participants recommend advocacy, awareness campaigns and clear policies to support RPL. As such, they emphasise the importance of communication and education to enhance the implementation of RPL.

To further understand the participants' views on the areas of improvement, they were asked: "How do you see the RPL uptake being improved?" and in their responses, the RPL coordinators asserted that:

Coordinator A: "More advocacy and availability of resources."

Coordinator B: "Deployment of experienced SDP to orientate learners first by conducting it face-to-face and not virtual, especially for NQF level 5."

Coordinator C: "Proper induction and orientation. Experienced SDPs and RPL Advisors, hence RPL guidelines, physical sessions will be more effective."

5.4.4.2. Funding Support:

Continued funding support from entities like PSETA is deemed crucial as financial support is distinguished as a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of RPL implementation.

Notably, in the in-depth interviews, the following assertions were also made with regards to whether the department has had any successful RPL cases and how these were derived:

Coordinator A: *"Three participants who participated were found competent."*

Coordinator B: *"The department was funded for ten employees to do RPL level 5 and majority of them continued to level 6 after being found competent. Currently, some employees want to proceed to level 7 and we will appreciate if PSETA can prioritise us for discretionary grant."*

Coordinator C: *"Yes, 3 groups. List provided. 2 groups- NQF level 5 and 1 group- NQF level 6."*

In all the successful implementation cases cited, the RPL coordinators confirmed that these cases were derived through external funding from the PSETA in cases where RPL was implemented against the Public Administration qualifications. When tested against the policies reviewed for this study, the above inputs support the legislative provisions that DHET is responsible for the funding and resourcing of RPL. Notably, SETAs as entities under the DHET as an Executive Authority are actively funding the implementation of RPL in their respective sectors.

5.4.4.3. Monitoring and Support:

The participants cited ongoing monitoring and support mechanisms as essential for maintaining quality in RPL. Upon further probing, the participants were asked whether the department has a monitoring and evaluation instrument for RPL in place. Their responses were captured *as follows:*

Coordinator A: *"The evaluation is not formal; however, there is post-evaluation that is done."*
Coordinator B: *"No."*
Coordinator C: *"Not an instrument, but we use the monitoring practices used by the state."*

Table 5.10 below sought to solicit the participants' perceptions on the importance of monitoring and evaluation of RPL in their department. The importance of monitoring and evaluation of RPL was highlighted as "very important" by candidates. The monitoring and evaluation of RPL seeks to provide stakeholders with confidence of the programme, as it promotes transparency in how RPL decisions are made. It further ensures that the

assessment criteria are applied consistently and fairly to all candidates, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Figure 5.10: Monitoring and evaluation of RPL
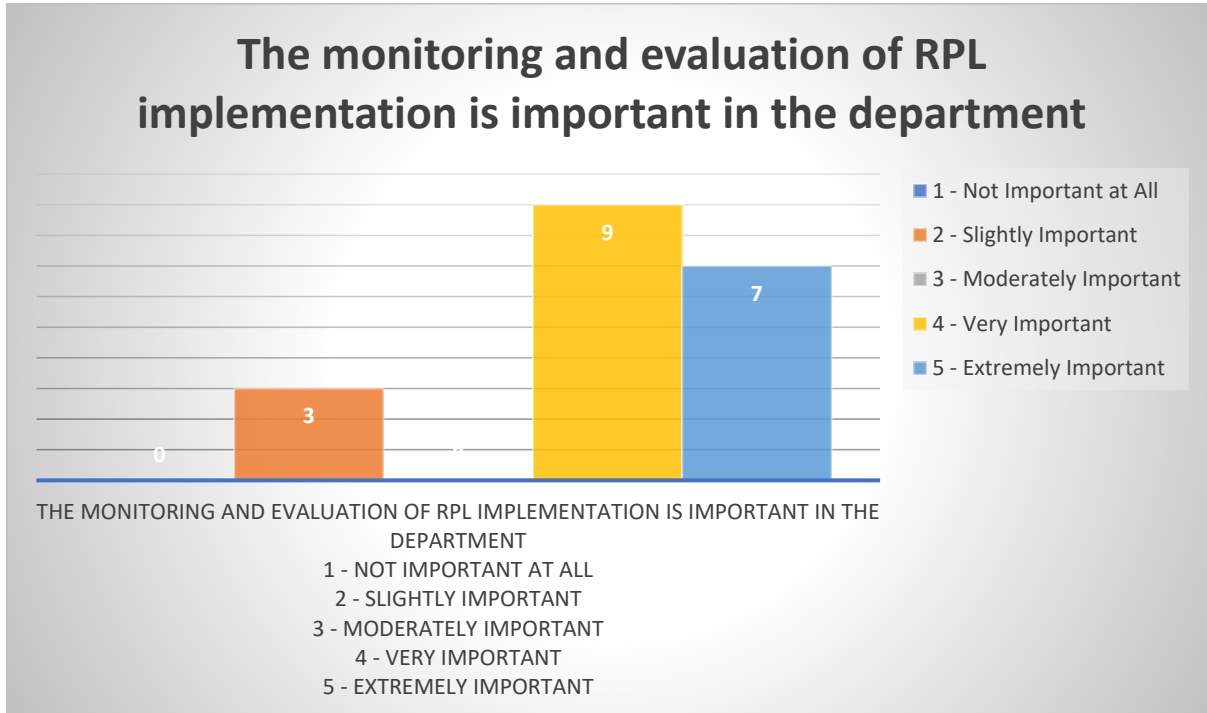
The RPL Coordinators were further requested to reflect on the kind of support their department provides to RPL Candidates during the pre-assessment phase, to which the replied:

> *Coordinator A: "Formal briefing. Availability of resources and support with preparing the officials for the assessment and the evidence required."*
>
> *Coordinator B: "Capacitation workshops regarding what is expected, and resources required."*
>
> *Coordinator C: "Assisted all candidates for logistics. Access to online platform requested computer for studies."*

The participants shared that there are various forms of support provided by the department in this regard, which prompted the research to probe further with the follow up questions listed next.

What kind of support does your department provide to an RPL candidate during the assessment processes?

> *Coordinator A: "Provide the official with any resources needed to compile the PoE."*
>
> *Coordinator B: "Proper working tools i.e. laptops. Consultation with programme managers to assist and release them when needed."*
>
> *Coordinator C: "Consultation with programme managers for support on areas like change management and other areas of expertise."*

What kind of support does your department provide to an RPL candidate at the assessment feedback process?

> *Coordinator A: "If there are any gaps that need support, the department supports the official: prepare the official for the feedback as it may be positive or negative."*
>
> *Coordinator B: "Liaise with skills development providers on their (candidates') behalf regarding results, etc."*
>
> *Coordinator C: "Doing a follow-up with SDPs for results or outcomes."*

With the wide array of assessment-related contributions by RPL coordinators, further probing around the aspect of assessments was explored as it became apparent that the method of assessments employed focused on the compilation and submission of portfolios of evidence.

To this end, the RPL coordinators were further investigated on who assists the candidate in the development of POE? The results pointed to unstructured/ non-uniform methods of PoE compilation support as reported below:

> *Coordinator A: "Supervisor and HRD official (candidate)."*
>
> *Coordinator B: "Departmental RPL coordinators, together with the facilitators/ service provider appointed."*
>
> *Coordinator C: "RPL coordinators, supervisors and mentors. RPL advisors also provide guidance. RPL advisor also provides guidance."*

In providing additional inputs on the PoE development process, the participants added that the SDP had utilised various assessment methods and tools, which included

interviews with RPL Candidates on the subject matter, written questionnaire completion by the Candidates, oral interviews, written assignments, workplace observation, knowledge assessment, case studies, and projects (where applicable). The assessors utilised assessment tools that they had deemed appropriate for the assessment and evidence they wished to collect.

It is to be acknowledged that all the above assessment activities as carried out by the skills development provider are aligned to SAQA's definition of assessments, which states that "Prior learning is made explicit through assessment and/or other methods that engage the intrinsic development of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired" (SAQA, 2014:8).

Despite some shortcomings in the PoE compilation and submission process, the RPL coordinators stressed the need of prioritising RPL implementation as a means to expedite skills development in the public sector. Therefore, they argued that highly experienced officials in the public service have been hindered in their career advancement due to the stringent minimum qualification requirements in the sector, despite their extensive knowledge in public sector administration.

Based on the data that was analysed for the research titled "Investigating the implementation of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for credit policy within the South African public service sector," The next subsection presents a summary of the research findings along with any implications that the sector might wish to consider.

5.5.   SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This sub-section of the thesis provides a high-level overview of the key themes and findings from the data collected. Further analysis and targeted research may be necessary to address specific nuances and implications for policy and practice in the public service sector.

5.5.1.   Positive Understanding and Support:

The study revealed that there is a generally positive understanding of RPL within the South African public service sector, particularly among HRD officials. This indicates that

there is a solid foundation of understanding of RPL, which provides a sound basis to assume that there is potential readiness for the implementation of RPL policies in the public service sector. The support of organised labour as a critical stakeholder in workplace skills planning, further supports the process of RPL and its implementation. In compliance with the SETA Grant Regulations, having support from organised labour can contribute to the successful implementation and acceptance of RPL in departments.

In the semi-structured interviews, the beneficiaries expressed that they found the application process to be easy. This may serve as a motivating factor for future applicants. The data collected indicated that the candidates displayed a good grasp of the potential benefits associated with the RPL programme. The positive understanding may also be attributed to the factors that kept the candidates motivated to complete the programme, together with the support provided by the department. Further, the applicants expressed gratitude for the time afforded to them by the department for compiling PoEs and acknowledged and valued the overall support they received from line managers.

5.5.2. Lack of Official RPL Policies:

The data revealed that there is a lack of RPL policies in the department. The participants voiced concern that a uniform and consistent approach to RPL implementation may be hampered by the lack of explicit departmental RPL policy. In response to the constraints to the implementation of RPL in their departments, the RPL coordinators identified policy related constraints and barriers such as the lack of an approved policy direction and strategy for standardised implementation of RPL in the public service. The lack of special funding mechanisms to prioritise the implementation of RPL in the public service given the great demand for this intervention was also highlighted. The dearth of administrative direction from the Sector Education and Training Authority in the Public Service sector (PSETA) in guiding the sector adequately in the implementation of RPL by standardising assessment practices was cited as well. The participants further pointed out that skills development providers (SDPs) utilise their in-house policies presents glaring shortcomings in how the RPL programme is implemented, as this clearly indicates a lack of uniformity and standardisation to how the RPL programme is implemented in the Public Service sector. By implication this may be construed to imply

that various SDPs in the Public Service sector are at liberty to utilise their own policies in implementing the RPL programme. This sharply points out the lack of process standardisation in a sector that is portrayed as highly regulated. Further this profoundly highlights the void in the DPSA leading voice in this regard.

To this end, on 29 April 2022, the DPSA issued a notice for public comments in Gazette 46288 for the public to submit their comments on the draft policy guidelines on the implementation of RPL by 31 May 2022, however at the time of writing this thesis the RPL policy was still in draft status.

5.5.3. Successful RPL Cases:

Instances of successful RPL cases have been reported in the department as all the candidates that had been nominated for RPL had successfully completed and deemed competent against the Public Administration qualification. Identifying and disseminating successful examples could serve as a blueprint for other departments, demonstrating the possible advantages of RPL. When probed about what worked well in implementing RPL in the department, participants cited that it was the willingness and commitment of the RPL Candidates that made it possible to have 100% completion rate in the department. They also noted that there was also increased career growth prospects as one candidate had left the department for a higher position in another government department on completion of the RPL programme.

The data strongly demonstrated that the participants also benefited from confidence boost derived from the RPL programme as they feel more confident in their respective roles in the departments and other even intend furthering their studies in future.

Considering that students (RPL and academic) must put in equal effort to prove their competency in relation to a qualification, the RPL candidates contended that there is no fundamental distinction between the competency levels of those who obtained their qualification through an academic path and those who were evaluated through RPL. The reflections of the RPL candidates above resonate with the objectives of the NQF that underpin the importance of developing enabling mechanisms to facilitate access to, mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; and to accelerate

the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and development opportunities the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specific qualification, in this case credits against the Public Administration qualification registered on the NQF (SAQA 2019).

5.5.4. Limited Awareness and Understanding of RPL

Varying levels of awareness and understanding of RPL was demonstrated by the participants. The candidates were asked of their understanding of RPL purpose and benefits, the candidates noted that they understood RPL as a programme aimed towards assisting employees with many years of service without qualifications to formalise their knowledge gained in the Public Service. As expressed by another participant: *"Without a qualification your experience in the Public Service is nullified, so this programme aims to close this gap".* This advocates that more lobbying and awareness-raising campaigns are needed in order to boost comprehension of and participation in RPL programmes.

5.5.5. Funding Constraints:

The participants contended that funding challenges, specifically for the rolling out of online RPL would pose constraints to mass implementation of RPL in the sector. Limited financial resources may pose challenges to the expansion and accessibility of RPL interventions, especially in the online learning/ e-learning domain in the context of the public service sector. The participants' reflections on the limited support provided by the department supports the body of literature that argues that there is currently no formal systematic funding for RPL in South Africa. However, departments should treat RPL learning interventions in the same way as they would other learning programmes that are planned and implemented for the employed. It this case, the DPSA directive on the utilisation of training budgets is equally applicable to RPL interventions.

5.5.6. Resource Constraints:

The RPL Coordinators cited resource constraints such as training of RPL as affecting the level of support provided to RPL candidates. The implication underdeveloped RPL Coordinators may impact the overall success and coordination of RPL interventions.

RPL coordinators expressed that standardisation of RPL implementation processes in the sector is necessary, suggesting that DPSA issue a directive which specifically guides RPL standardisation in this regard. The RPL coordinators underscored the need to give priority to the implementation of RPL as a means of expediting the attainment of qualifications within the Public Service. They noted that the over emphasis on academic qualifications has hindered the career advancement of long-serving officials, despite their extensive knowledge of Public Service administration. The data revealed that the department seeks a strengthened leadership role to be demonstrated by the DPSA in this regard.

The data effectively highlights the necessity of capacity building interventions directed towards RPL coordinators within the sector to guarantee standardised RPL procedures and a shared comprehension of the intended principles of the RPL policy.

5.5.7. Recommendations for Improvement:

In investigating what needs to improve for RPL to be implemented effectively in the public sector, the participants recommend advocacy, awareness creation campaigns, clear policies, continued funding support, and monitoring and evaluation for effective RPL implementation. This implies that the key RPL role-players recognise that certain aspects require more focus to improve the success and sustainability RPL implementation.

According to the data, RPL implementation requires adequate resource allocation and clear expression in the policies and practices of post-school of education and training stakeholders. According to the NQF's guiding principles, RPL is meant to be utilised as a tool to help foster social justice and redress national policy goals, which aim to expand participation and open access for students who were previously marginalised in the education and training system of this country. According to the SAQA RPL policy, RPL

practices need to explicitly address the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment (SAQA, 2019).

5.6.   ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH FINDINGTO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research findings in this study demonstrate the linkages between Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory in RPL Practices. Chapter 2 of this thesis details Kolb's (1984) learning cycle stages, which can be effectively connected with RPL methods to ensure a thorough assessment of prior learning, as evidenced by the literature.

In the portfolio development process, RPL Candidates compiled their portfolios that documented their experiences (CE), reflected on their learning (RO), aligned their experiences with theoretical knowledge (AC), and demonstrated their skills (AE).

The workplace assessments conducted by the skills development provider incorporated assessments that required candidates to perform tasks and solve problems relevant to their areas of work, demonstrating their practical abilities and conceptual understanding.

The reflective assignments and interviews conducted further enabled the Candidates to articulate their learning journey by linking their experiences to formal knowledge frameworks. While the project work the Candidates were assigned allowed them to engage in simulations or projects that required the application of their prior learning in new and challenging contexts.

5.7.   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter included a detailed presentation and interpretation of the study's qualitative findings. The key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis were connected to the main research findings. The data revealed that government departments require institutional RPL policies and pre-assessment tools to assist RPL candidates to adequately prepare themselves for the RPL journey. The findings from the data suggest a nuanced landscape in the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the South African public service sector. The findings further revealed that continuous capacity building interventions are required for RPL coordinators to assist them in supporting the RPL candidates in the RPL process. Funding constraints were also

highlighted as a possible hindrance to the effective implementation of RPL in the public service sector. While there is a solid basis of understanding and support for RPL, it is to be noted that issues with capability, resource availability and policy development require attention. The recommendations that follow in the concluding chapter, Chapter 6, offer insightful information about potential interventions to enhance the RPL implementation process.

The following chapter provides a synthesis of the results of the study with reference to the literature review presented in Chapter 2 and theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 6:
SUMMARY, SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, the qualitative findings were analysed and presented in depth, backed up by findings from interviews, qualitative questionnaire data and relevant documents. This chapter summarises the findings after synthesising the empirical important findings of the study through cross-referencing with the preceding chapters. The layout of this final chapter presents the study's goal as well as a synopsis of the previous chapters. The data and conclusions were used to create an institutional RPL pre-assessment guide for RPL candidates. The chapter also makes empirical study recommendations to government departments on how to improve RPL uptake and support its implementation in the sector. The chapter proposes recommendations for further research, as well as highlighting the study's limitations and conclusions.

6.2. THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study guided by the main research question: "What enables or hinders the implementation of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa?" resulted in the development of an institutional RPL pre-assessments tool to assist potential RPL candidates in preparation for the RPL process. From the findings and the literature reviews in this study, it was established that RPL coordinators and candidates require clear institutional policies for the effective implementation of RPL. Therefore, to aid RPL implementation at institutional level, the researcher attempted to develop a cogent institutional RPL pre-assessment guide that would attempts to support RPL candidates in preparation for the RPL journey,

6.3. SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

This study investigated the implementation of RPL for credit policy within the public service sector in South Africa. A synopsis of the previous chapters is presented in this section.

Chapter 1 presented the position of this research study by outlining the background from which the research was conceptualised.

The issue description and the rationale for investigating the use of RPL for credit in the public service sector were both completed at the same time. Also presented in this chapter were the overarching research topic and the sub-questions that would serve to bolster it.

In order to frame this research study, Chapter 2 highlighted the literature that was examined. How RPL is used on a global and African scale was the focus of the literature review. The researcher also provided policy documents that govern RPL implementation in South Africa and, for sectoral context, policy documents that guide RPL implementation in the public service sector. This helped to build a country-specific understanding of RPL.

Chapter 3 laid forth the theoretical groundwork for the study and offered the researcher's perspective on the RPL for credit idea. This chapter lays out the study's theoretical foundations, including the researcher's adoption of and reasoning for using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) in this context, as well as the specific aspects of ELT that are applicable to RPL.

The technique and design of the empirical inquiry were detailed in Chapter 4. Methods described in Chapter 4 for data collection from key informants included document analysis, structured qualitative questionnaire s, and semi-structured interviews. This chapter also provided background on the data analysis process and described the characteristics of the approach used by McMillan and Schumacher in their investigation. Chapter 5 presented the findings of the study beginning with the biographical details of the participants. Subsequently, the study's empirical findings were presented from data collected via semi-structured interviews, formal qualitative questionnaire s and document analysis. Verbatim comments from the key informants supported the findings that were presented thematically as drawn from the data. The following section provides a synthesis of the research empirical findings.

6.4. SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS/SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

A mixed picture emerges from the analysis of the use of RPL for credit policy in the South African public service sector. The findings indicate that there are implementation obstacles, such as a lack of official RPL policies, capacity issues and financial limits, which hinder the implementation of RPL, even though organised labour supports it and HRD officials understand it well.

Effective RPL cases are a source of positive experiences and should be highlighted to educate the industry on the benefits and possible advantages of using RPL. However, there is room for improvement given the disparities in staff awareness and the limitations of available resources.

In summary, although the public service sector has a basis for RPL, strategic interventions are required to address current issues and maximise the successful implementation of RPL in South Africa's public service sector.

6.5. SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

The sub-section summarises the findings that were detailed in Chapter 5, by linking them to each of the research objectives of this study to highlight the critical areas uncovered under the research topic: "Investigating the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning for Credit policy within the public service sector in South Africa. Further, a synthesis of the themes that emerged from the data analysis, semi-structured interview, the qualitative questionnaire data, and the document analysis which were detailed in Chapter 4 is also presented. The data from the themes are mapped to the research objectives as briefly summarised next.

6.5.1. Research Objective 1:

To investigate the enablers and/or constraints in the application of RPL for credit policy in the public service sector in South Africa.

The findings revealed that there is a positive understanding of RPL in the department. The support from organised labour is a notable enabler for RPL. The department

demonstrated some successful RPL cases. The lack of formal RPL policies, capacity challenges and funding limitations emerged as constraints.

The investigation revealed a nuanced landscape with both positive enablers and significant constraints in the application of RPL for credit policy. Addressing policy gaps and capacity challenges is crucial for a more effective and equitable implementation.

6.5.2. Research Objective 2:

To access the best practice model(s) for the effective contribution to the implementation of RPL.

The department demonstrated successful RPL cases which could serve as potential blueprints for effective implementation. The lack of clear policies and varying levels of awareness among RPL candidates is noteworthy.

Identifying and disseminating best practices, especially successful RPL cases, emerged as critical. Addressing policy gaps and awareness disparities can contribute to the development of effective RPL models.

6.5.3. Research Objective 3:

To determine the views and experiences of the key role players in the implementation of RPL by government departments.

The key role players demonstrated a positive understanding of RPL. The continued support derived from RPL coordinators/HRD officials and organised labour were highlighted as enablers to RPL implementation. Varying levels of awareness among public service officials, resource constraints and capacity challenges were reported.

RPL Stakeholders, particularly HRD officials and organised labour, hold positive views about RPL and the benefits derived from the programme. Consequently, addressing challenges related to awareness and resources was expressed as essential for effective implementation.

6.5.4. Research Objective 4:

To identify the constraints (if any) to implementing RPL for credit in the public service sector.

The lack of official institutional RPL policies, capacity challenges, funding limitations, and varying levels of awareness about RPL. The pockets of excellence as demonstrated by the successful RPL cases were acknowledged.

The study highlighted multiple constraints but also acknowledged the instances of successful RPL cases. Addressing the identified constraints was noted as crucial for achieving a more widespread and effective implementation of RPL in the public service sector.

6.5.5. Research Objective 5:

To provide recommendations on RPL for credit assessment tools to be considered by implementors in the public service sector.

Paying careful attention to addressing policy gaps, capacity building, advocacy, funding strategies, and continuous monitoring and evaluation were reported as imperatives for the sector. Funding constraints and limited resources emerged as prevalent challenges. Practical recommendations on the standardisation of RPL assessment tools were proposed by the participants, as well as the need for continuous capacity building interventions for RPL coordinators and the exploration of sustainable funding strategies.

6.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study primarily relied on Single-Method Approach (qualitative data), which could be viewed as limiting the depth of exploration. The study's findings were derived from a specific target group of EC RPL coordinators and candidates, potentially limiting the generalisability of the results to the broader public service sector. Further, the findings presented are context-specific to the South African public service sector and therefore may not be entirely applicable to other sectors. The investigation could only take place within one provincial department in the province of the Eastern Cape and consequently the results may not have implications for other provincial agencies. The study's scope was confined to the Eastern Cape province, namely to RPL Coordinators and RPL

Candidates working within that department. The case study research was confined to just one of the five provincial departments that have implemented RPL for credit towards the public administration qualification in the province. Notably, there is a dearth of peer-reviewed academic material applicable to the South African setting for the reason that RPL is still an emerging field of study, and its practical application is highly dependent on industry and context, this research employed a case study methodology. As contended by Tywabi (2019), although RPL for credit has been utilised by several government departments in South Africa, the practice is still in its infancy with regard to transversal skills. Considering the above limitations, there remains room for further research in this specific knowledge area.

6.7. UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The research contribution of this study is in line with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) as it sheds light on the steps necessary to adopt RPL, including first-hand experience, reflection, analysis, and experimentation. This contributes to the practical application of experiential learning principles in a unique and specific workplace context.

Particularly, this study aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) by recognising and validating the continuous, transformative process of learning through experiences, emphasising the importance of understanding both the learning process and the nature of knowledge. This study seeks to contribute to the transformation and professionalisation of the public service sector by advocating for the adoption of RPL as a transformative tool for recognising and awarding credits to public service officials who have acquired learning through experience in the workplace. The current study advances that the approach to RPL in the workplace is compatible with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) as the domains of the Kolb's pedagogic device are applied in the RPL for credit assessment processes.

Kolb (1984) pedagogic device comprises three domains, namely: knowledge production, which involves the generation of knowledge that is esteemed by society; knowledge re-contextualisation, which involves the refinement and adaptation of information for effective delivery to the intended audience; and knowledge reproduction, which pertains to the content taught within the classroom. Cooper and Ralphs (2016)

further highlight that Bernstein argues that knowledge is situated within the domain of production and extends to the domains of curriculum and pedagogy.

The researcher proposes through the contribution of this study, that by considering the 4 stages of Kolb's learning cycle, RPL assessments could be more holistic, as the assessments would not just be assessing what learners know, but also, how they have learned and applied their knowledge.

Since Kolb's theory emphasises the value of experiential learning, it supports the idea that valuable learning occurs outside traditional academic environments, and in the case of RPL the learning would have been acquired in the workplace, in the department. By recognising that individual learning styles and preferences are different, the RPL process can tailor assessments to better suit each candidate, making the recognition process more effective and meaningful. This also supports Cooper and Ralph's (2016) conviction that RPL is a specialised pedagogy. RPL encourages lifelong learning by validating the continuous cycle of learning through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation.

By integrating Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory into the RPL process, skills development providers and departments can create a more inclusive and comprehensive recognition system that values and validates all forms of learning, fostering greater appreciation for lifelong and experiential learning.

The study further contributes to implementation science by offering practical recommendations for overcoming barriers to RPL implementation. It adds empirical evidence to the understanding of factors influencing the successful adoption of RPL policies within the public service context.

The unique contribution of the study lies in its comprehensive exploration of the challenges and successes in implementing RPL for credit policy in the South African public service sector. By offering practical insights and recommendations, the study not only adds to the existing theoretical frameworks but also provides actionable guidance for policymakers, practitioners and researchers involved in the RPL policy implementation.

6.8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Additional research on the unique difficulties faced by departments lacking RPL regulations and the effect of budgetary constraints on online learning would be beneficial for the public service sector. In-depth research like this one could offer focused ideas for resolving certain problems and enhancing RPL implementation tactics. To ensure a more comprehensive and equitable implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy in the South African public service sector, these ideas aim to further guide strategic initiatives.

These additional research opportunities can further enrich the understanding of RPL implementation challenges and contribute to informed policy and practice decisions in the South African public service sector.

6.9. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE KEY FINDINGS

Premised on a rigorous evaluation of policy analysis, data analysis, and findings as guided by the study's objectives, the researcher provides the following guidelines for RPL implementation techniques in the public service sector.

To ensure that administrative personnel is capable of handling RPL applications, the SAQA RPL policy (2019) makes it clear that evidence facilitators must get training. The researcher therefore strongly advises that departments train their RPL Coordinators to perform the role of evidence facilitator in accordance with SAQA guidelines.

Government departments need to address the capacity challenges revealed by the data through targeted training and the capacitation of RPL coordinators. Building the capacity of RPL coordinators would foster a more robust and effective RPL implementation environment.

Continuous RPL advocacy and awareness creation campaigns in the sector should be prioritised to enhance participation in RPL programmes, creating a more inclusive and informed environment.

Continuous systematic RPL monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms should be established. Regular monitoring and evaluation could ensure the ongoing effectiveness of RPL programme, enabling timely adjustments and improvements to implementation pitfalls as they arise.

Departments should be encouraged to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among each other. Peer-learning initiatives would encourage the adoption of best practices in RPL implementation in the sector.

The SAQA (2019) RPL policy stipulates that prior to the award of certificates against accredited qualifications, the quality assures of the process must be convinced that the RPL process and assessments have taken place in accordance with their requirements. The researcher therefore recommends that the PSETA as a designated quality assurer of RPL in the sector, develops standardised assessor and moderator guides and tools to be used by SDPs who implement RPL against PSETA registered qualifications.

The study underscores the importance of well-defined policies, and the challenges organisations face in translating policies into effective practices. While the SAQA national RPL policy is in place, the sector's expectation is that at an institutional level, the DPSA policy must be approved to guide departments in developing their internal RPL policies emanating from the DPSA policy.

The researcher recommends the expedition of the approval of the RPL policy by Cabinet in this regard. In an attempt to get the RPL policy approved, the DPSA solicited public comments to the existing draft policy to be submitted to the department in May 2023, this demonstrates leadership will in providing clear direction and guidance to the sector by the DPSA.

The researcher finally recommends the re-evaluation of the DPSA recruitment and selection procedures in order to eliminate the implicit barrier to advancement stemming from the use of the phrase of an "appropriate bachelor's degree," which serves as an automatic barrier to professional advancement for those with qualifications not obtained through the formal academic route. The implication of the "bachelors' degree" phrase compels human resource practitioners to only consider applicants who possess the

prescribed academic qualifications and places applicants with qualifications obtained through other routes of study at a disadvantage which means the recruitment and selection processes do not afford such applicants an equal opportunity to fairly compete for career progression in the sector.

There researcher contends that the above offered recommendations would assist the public service sector in fully embracing RPL as a transformative training and development intervention.

6.10. CONCLUSION

The SAQA RPL policy makes it clear that the process of RPL is about: "identifying what the candidate knows and can do; matching the candidate's skills, knowledge and experience to specific standards and the associated assessment criteria of a qualification; assessing the Candidate against those standards; crediting the Candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past" (SAQA, 2002:7).

Although there is a good basis for the RPL policy's implementation in the South African public service sector, it should be highlighted that there are still many obstacles to overcome. To maximise the implementation process and remove obstacles to success, strategic interventions—such as policy formulation, capacity building, and focused advocacy—are essential. Implementing RPL policies in the public service sector more effectively and fairly require departmental cooperation, ongoing peer learning from successful cases and a dedication to resolving identified obstacles.

The qualitative analysis reflects a nuanced picture of RPL implementation, emphasising the need for targeted capacity building and funding interventions to address challenges for the improvement of the overall effectiveness of the RPL process. This study findings accentuated a complex landscape in the implementation of RPL in the South African Public Service Sector. Addressing the identified challenges can lead to a more effective and equitable RPL framework in the department, ultimately benefiting both candidates and the public service sector.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL RPL CANDIDATE SELF-EVALUATION AND PRE-ASSESSMENT GUIDE

INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) FOR CREDIT POLICY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA.

by: Siviwe Tywabi

RPL CANDIDATE SELF-EVALUATION PRE-ASSESSMENT GUIDE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM	MEANING
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
HET	Higher Education and Training
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRDSF	Human Resource Development Strategic Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NLRD	National Learner Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDA	Skills Development Act
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
Accreditation	Means the certification, usually for a particular period of time, of a person, a body or an institution as having the capacity to fulfil a particular function in the quality assurance system set up by the South African Qualifications Authority in terms of the Act;
Assessor	Means the person who is registered by the relevant Education and Training Quality Assurance Body in accordance with criteria established for this purpose by a SGB to measure the achievement of specified NQF standards or qualifications, and "constituent assessor" has a corresponding meaning;
Assessment	Is the process of gathering and weighing evidence in order to determine whether candidates have demonstrated outcomes specified in unit standards and/or qualifications registered on the NQF.
Assessment plan	Refers to the plan that outlines the assessment process and indicated the resources required per method or assessment. Candidates are to be informed of an assessment plan as part of candidate's preparation.
Competence	What someone knows, understands and can do. The ability to prove application of knowledge and skill in a particular context.
Education Training and Quality Assurance (ETQA)	Means a body accredited in terms of section 5(1)(a)(ii) of the Act, responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of national standards or qualifications, and to which specific functions relating to the monitoring and auditing of national standards or qualifications have been assigned in terms of section 5(1)(b)(i) of the Act;
Experiential learning"	Knowledge and/or skills learned through experience, rather than through a formal course or class.

TERM	DEFINITION
Exit Level Outcome (ELO)	The outcomes to be achieved by a qualifying candidate at the point at which he or she leaves the programme leading to a qualification and achievement of which entitles the learner to a qualification
Moderation	The process of ensuring that assessments have been conducted in line with agreed practices, and are fair, reliable and valid.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	The comparison of the previous learning and experience of a candidate, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)	South African Qualifications Authority - is a stakeholder body that registers qualifications and standards on the NQF and ensures that the education and training that is delivered enables learners to reach these qualifications and standards.
SAQA RPL Guidelines	These guidelines are available on the SAQA website or directly from SAQA upon request

Source: National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL (Amended in 2019)

FOREWORD

The quest for equitable access to education and career advancement in the South African Public Service sector has prompted the exploration of the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for credit to afford public sector officials the opportunity to obtain credits towards a full public administration qualification as registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa builds on the commitment of government to eliminate barriers to learning and develop a visible, usable and credible system as an effective vehicle for lifelong learning.

The apartheid legacy has significantly contributed to the prevailing disparities in education and skills development among the majority of South Africans. The apartheid legislation resulted in disparities, limited literacy rates, and insufficient job prospects for black individuals (Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017). Nonetheless, individuals accumulate knowledge throughout their lifetime in the diverse spheres of their existence. However, the acquisition of knowledge that takes place beyond the confines of formal education and training is often disregarded, unrecorded, underestimated, inadequately comprehended, and not widely acknowledged. Recognition of all types of learning can result in benefits in the labour market, formal education and training, financially and in terms of self-esteem.

This guide is produced as a result of a qualitative research that delved into the multifaceted landscape of RPL implementation within the South African public service sector, seeking to uncover enablers, challenges, and best practices that shape its application through a case study research design lens.

At the time of writing, the study was driven to develop an institutional RPL pre-assessment guide to assist RPL candidates to adequately assess their preparedness to undergo RPL for credit assessment against the Public Administration qualifications.

This RPL pre-assessment guide seeks to support RPL candidates in the first step of their RPL journey.

1. INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND

The enduring effects of apartheid have played a substantial role in the existing inequalities in education and the acquisition of skills among the majority of South Africans. The implementation of apartheid laws led to significant inequities, low levels of literacy, and inadequate employment opportunities for black citizens (Tibbitts & Weldon, 2017). However, people acquire knowledge during the course of their lives in many aspects of their existence. Nevertheless, the acquisition of information that occurs outside of formal education and training is often ignored, unreported, undervalued, incompletely understood, and not commonly recognised. The first democratic elections in South Africa symbolised the end of the apartheid period and ushered in a new age of inclusiveness and fair access to education and training.

The development of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) idea was to eliminate inequalities and promote fair access to educational and training opportunities. Its purpose was to dismantle the inequities and divides created by the Apartheid regime. South Africa's RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) adheres to the principles specified in section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. This legislation ensures that every individual has the right to engage in further education and training. This implies that education should be easily attainable without any hindrances.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an integral element of the national policy in South Africa. It pertains to the procedure of recognising, assessing, and verifying an individual's current knowledge and abilities in order to offer them entry to school, certification, or other growth prospects. This approach seeks to recognise and use the expertise that people have gained from their previous experiences. RPL, also known as Recognition of Prior Learning, is an evaluative approach that recognises the knowledge and competencies acquired by an adult learner via informal, non-formal, and formal channels.

The purpose of this guide is to aid RPL candidates in getting ready for their RPL procedure.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the process of assessing and acknowledging an individual's existing knowledge, skills, and competencies gained via formal or informal learning experiences.

RPL, or Recognition of Prior Learning, encompasses the ideas and techniques used in South Africa to acknowledge, facilitate, and evaluate an individual's existing knowledge and skills for the purpose of gaining entry, recognition, certification, or further advancement in education and training (SAQA, 2015). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the recognition and validation of skills and information acquired via non-formal education and training, as well as job and life experiences, both paid and voluntary. The RPL evaluation may be classified as either summative or formative. The process entails granting credentials or partial qualifications based on the attainment of learning exit level outcomes in relation to a specific qualification.

2.   MAIN REASONS FOR WHICH RPL IS APPLIED INCLUDE

While there are essentially two legislated forms of RPL in South Africa, the following four forms as outlined in table 1 below are widely implemented.

FORMS OF RPL	PURPOSE
RPL for Access	to provide an alternative access route into a programme of learning, professional designation, employment and career progression into learning,
RPL for Recruitment and Selection	RPL has also been used for recognition in workplaces: for employment purposes which occurs in the workplace and for workplace purposes.

FORMS OF RPL	PURPOSE
RPL for Credit	to provide for the awarding of credits for, or towards, a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF
RPL for Professional Bodies	The context of the NQF requires that **Professional Bodies provide RPL** routes to their professional designations. SAQA's policy requires that the recognition of professional body be in alignment with the National Constitution (RSA, 1994) and the NQF, therefore professional bodies need to include an RPL route to their professional designations

Table 1: Forms of RPL

Source: Directive on Policy Guidelines and Procedure for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the Public Service DPSA 2021.

3.   THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to make it possible for RPL candidates to obtain formal recognition for knowledge gained throughout life, such as in workplaces and own reading or experiences. The document provides guidelines to candidates regarding the process to be followed for attaining RPL against the National Certificate in Public Administration.

The RPL process also entails providing support to a candidate to ensure that knowledge is discovered and displayed in terms of a relevant qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

4. WHO SHOULD USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide has been developed to serve various RPL candidates. In particular, it will be useful to the following individuals and groups:

➢ Those currently employed and wish to enhance skills and grow their career in the public sector,

➢ Skills Development Facilitators (SDFs) who develop workplace skills audits, workplace skills plans (WSPs), or

➢ RPL coordinators who support RPL candidates in the RPL journey.

5. RPL ROLE PLAYERS

Table 2 below outlines the stakeholders involved in the RPL process along with their responsibilities to assist the RPL candidate understand what to expect in their RPL journey.

STAKEHOLDER	ROLES	RESPONSIBILITIES

RPL Candidate	The primary role is to participate in the RPL Process and collect/provide evidence to prove competence.	▪ Identify his/her prior learning and show that it matches the learning outcomes for the desired qualification.
		 ▪ Prove that he/she has learned what is claimed to have been learned
		 ▪ Collect the relevant evidence to prove the claim and collate a Portfolio of evidence which include:
		    o Reference letters from relevant employers
		    o Certificates of appropriate and relevant training in the field of public administration

STAKEHOLDER	ROLES	RESPONSIBILITIES
RPL Coordinator / RPL Champions	The RPL coordinator's role is of an advisory nature and does not assume that evidence will be collected on behalf of the candidate	▪ Counsel the candidate regarding the RPL process, e.g. guide the candidate on how to prepare for the assessment, etc.
RPL Accredited Skills Development Provider	Provides the environment in which assessment will be conducted and/or learning interventions will be facilitated.	▪ Adhere to the regulations regarding the implementation of RPL. ▪ Ensure that all RPL policies and procedures align with national legislative requirements. ▪ Establish rules and regulations in relation to RPL that are consistent with the relevant ETQA and SAQA principles.
RPL Accredited Assessor	Conducts RPL assessments in line with the principles of fair assessment as outlined by SAQA.	▪ Inform the candidate about the qualification requirements ▪ Communicate assessment methodologies and details to the candidate in writing as soon as possible after receipt of the application ▪ Support and guide the candidate in the collection of evidence, without compromising the fairness of the assessment ▪ Assist the candidate plan for the assessment ▪ Inform the candidate of the arrangements surrounding the assessment ▪ Manage, conduct and coordinate the assessment process according to the relevant ETQA/SETA principles and policies ▪ Provide assessment feedback to candidates

STAKEHOLDER	ROLES	RESPONSIBILITIES
		- Complete the documentation and recording requirements, and forward the results to the ETQA/SETA - Regularly review the assessment tools and process and implement changes as and when required - Comply with all moderation requirements - Keep abreast of current assessment practices, learning outcomes; standards for assessment, methods of assessment, time frames, technical details and understanding of the process - Counsel candidates regarding barriers and possible ways forward - Recommend gap/top-up training if necessary - Ensure that all original documents or materials are returned to the candidate or kept for a maximum period (to be determined by the organisation) - Ensure that candidates are informed of the results of the assessment within a specified time - Review the RPL policies for continuous improvement
RPL Moderator	Verifies and validates that the assessment process adhered to accepted standards and principles	- Report on assessment principles that are in contravention of the accepted standards - Advise and assist assessors in implementing policies and procedures pertaining to RPL and assessments - Ensure that effective management and quality systems are in place.

STAKEHOLDER	ROLES	RESPONSIBILITIES
Employer / Workplace/ Institution	▪ May fund the implementation of RPL ▪ Provides the workplace in which the candidate is assessed.	▪ Ensure that adequate resources are available to embark on the RPL process ▪ Compile and implement policies and procedures that regulate the RPL process ▪ Provide easy access to candidates into the RPL process
Organised Labour	Represent employees' interests within the workplace and during the RPL intervention.	▪ Inform employees/candidates of their rights ▪ Support the implementation of the RPL process ▪ Facilitate buy-in from employees into the RPL process.
SETA ETQA	Creates environment and framework within which RPL can be conducted.	▪ Approve the relevant RPL assessment instruments prior to the RPL processes being implemented ▪ Develop policies and guidelines for the implementation of RPL within the sector ▪ Design and develop relevant qualifications/skills programmes for the sector ▪ Quality assure and accredit skills development providers who may implement RPL

Table 2: RPL Role Players

Source: Directive on Policy Guidelines and Procedure for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the Public Service DPSA 2021.

6. CANDIDATE RPL PREPARATION PROCESS

The example presented in this section is intended to assist RPL candidates in the preparation of the RPL journey. This part of the guide provides the candidate with a checklist of the RPL requirements for Public Administration NQF Level 5, as detailed in tale 3 below.

SAQA QUAL ID	QUALIFICATION TITLE			
50060	National Certificate: Public Administration			
ORIGINATOR				
SGB Administration				
PRIMARY OR DELEGATED QUALITY ASSURANCE FUNCTIONARY			NQF SUB-FRAMEWORK	
PSETA - Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority			OQSF - Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework	
QUALIFICATION TYPE	FIELD		SUBFIELD	
National Certificate	Field 03 - Business, Commerce and Management Studies		Office Administration	
ABET BAND	MINIMUM CREDITS	PRE-2009 NQF LEVEL	NQF LEVEL	QUAL CLASS
Undefined	141	Level 5	Level TBA: Pre-2009 was L5	Regular-Unit Standards Based
REGISTRATION STATUS		SAQA DECISION NUMBER	REGISTRATION START DATE	REGISTRATION END DATE
Reregistered		SAQA 06120/18	2018-07-01	2023-06-30
LAST DATE FOR ENROLMENT		LAST DATE FOR ACHIEVEMENT		
2024-06-30		2027-06-30		

Table 3: Qualification Details (source: saqa.org.za)

It is to be noted that a candidate who has successfully demonstrated competence against this NQF aligned qualification and is declared competent in all the unit standards against this qualification will be awarded credits against the National Certificate: **Public Administration NQF Level 5**. The candidate must thus complete the full curriculum in order to obtain the credits as broken down into Core, Fundamentals and Electives.

7.   RPL PROCESS

Table 4 below outlines the four phases are presented to assist the candidate with a high-level RPL process that the candidate should anticipate.

RPL Process	What the Candidate Should Expect
Phase 1: **Self-Evaluation**	- Assess current competence for one or several units of competency. - Complete the candidate information and self-evaluation forms provided with information of previous work experience. - Provide evidence against the elements/performance criteria for the relevant unit/s of competency. - Supply the contact details of work referees who can confirm skills in the industry. - Submit suitable evidence to support claims for RPL to be shared with the Assessor and discuss candidate's options with the Assessor. - Once the self-evaluation is completed and the candidate would like to continue with the RPL process, schedule an appointment for an interview with the Assessor and enrol for RPL.
Phase 2: **Enrolment and interview with the Assessor**	- Undergo an interview with the Assessor and the Assessor will review the information and supporting documentation provided and match Candidates' skills with the units standards in the qualification. - Anticipate that during the RPL interview, the Assessor will discuss the self-evaluation information and any evidence provided by the candidate. - The Assessor will ask questions relating to the work experience. This questioning forms part of the assessment, as it will identify the candidate's current knowledge and skills against the qualification exit level outcomes. - Note: It is at this stage that a decision will be made whether the candidate can proceed to the next step or whether they need to undergo gap training.

RPL Process	What the Candidate Should Expect
Phase 3: **Workplace** **Observation**	▪ The Assessor may request the to conduct a practical skills test at the workplace (if appropriate) or other suitable location. ▪ The Assessor will identify the skills they want the candidate to demonstrate by asking the candidate to complete certain tasks.
Phase 4: **Review and** **Validation of** **supporting** **evidence**	▪ The Assessor will need to confirm the candidate's previous work experience with someone (such as a supervisor or employer) ▪ The Assessor will contact the references as part of the candidate information. ▪ The Assessor may ask the candidate to provide selected workplace contacts or previous employers the third-party reports to complete. validation process.

Table 4: RPL Assessment Phases

After the above phases have been concluded, the Assessor will advise the candidate of the exit level outcomes they have successfully met against the Public Administration qualification. The candidate will also be advised of the gaps (if any) identified during the validation process. Where skills gaps have been identified, these may be addressed through gap training/ gap fill/ top-up training.

8.   RPL CANDIDATE SELF-EVALUATION AND PRE-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The applicant is required to complete a self-evaluation form, which will serve as a reliable indicator of their preparedness to perform the pre-assessment. Candidates are advised to have a high level of proficiency in at least 80% of the learning objectives before proceeding to the Skills Development Provider (SDP) pre-assessment. This examination will identify any areas where further training may be needed.

If the pre-assessment identifies deficiencies in training, the applicant will be directed to either study alone or, alternatively, to participate in gap training with the SDP.

The RPL candidate pre-assessment process is conducted.

The pre-assessment will consist of questions designed to evaluate the candidate's theoretical and practical abilities, as well as their understanding of different methods and techniques. Its purpose is to determine the candidate's degree of applied competence.

11.10. RPL Application and Pre-Screening

The first stage of the RPL process involves the submission of an application and undergoing a pre-screening evaluation. This stage is to ascertain whether an applicant have sufficient relevant job experience.

Candidates will be allowed access to RPL if they have the minimum required work experience as specified by the SDP.

Applicants with insufficient job experience will be disqualified from advancing.

The applicant must provide standardised evidence that proves they have had work experience that aligns with the expected results of the certification. The required papers for submission are as follows:

i. SDP Application Form and Pre-screening form

ii. CV-Template that aligns work experience with the exit level objectives of the qualification as specified by the SDP.

iii. Two recommendation letters pertaining to the qualification's field of work.

 iv. Certified copy of the highest qualification.

v. Certified copies of the certificates.

vi. Officially attested duplicate of identification.

The procedure includes the following steps:

1. The RPL candidate will submit these papers to an RPL coordinator who will thereafter assess them and inform the applicant about the further actions to be taken.
2. The RPL coordinator will authenticate the papers and collaborate with the SDP to start the further procedures.
3. The SDP will address any deficiencies in the candidate's training and provide guidance on how to rectify these gaps. This might include supplementary instruction on the designated skills program(s).
4. A comprehensive procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has been developed, which advocates for a comprehensive, task-oriented evaluation approach, emphasising the alignment of assessment activities with real work duties.

The purpose of this model is to optimise and expedite the recognition procedures for potential applicants. The purpose of this RPL candidate pre-assessment guide is to aid with the task-based model.

The primary objective of the newly optimised comprehensive evaluation procedure is to emphasise the display of proven abilities and knowledge, rather than relying primarily on documentation evidence as the major form of proof.

The RPL method is an efficient procedure that does not only depend on written proof. It employs a blend of inquiry, hands-on evaluation, and corroborating proof to establish the candidate's proficiency.

Provided below, are examples intended to motivate the applicant to collect evidence pertaining to each unit level of the qualification. The examples listed in table 5 below are consistent with the SAQA Specific Outcomes and Assessment Criteria. It should be emphasised that the examples given are not exhaustive. The work experience should be directly linked to the work modules outlined in table 5 below, which are aligned to this certification.

National Certificate: Public Certificate Level 5 SAQA QUAL ID: 50060 RPL Candidate Evidence Collection Checklist			EVIDENCE COLLECTED
Service delivery management			
SAQA ID	**UNIT STANDARD TITLE**	**EXAMPLE OF COMPETENCY**	
120310	Apply client service techniques to improve service delivery	Demonstrate understanding of customer expectations	☐ Yes ☐ No
120306	Manage service delivery improvement	Responding to Customer Needs Providing Excellent Customer Service	☐ Yes ☐ No
Manage and lead human resources in the workplace			
15237	Build teams to meet set goals and objectives	Demonstrate understanding of styles of team leadership	☐ Yes ☐ No
114226	Interpret and manage conflicts within the workplace	Describe conflict resolution in terms of the Labour Relations Act	☐ Yes ☐ No
120300	Analyse leadership and related theories in a work context	Demonstrate understanding of leadership and leadership theories	☐ Yes ☐ No
116928	Manage diversity in the workplace	Demonstrate advantages and disadvantages of diversity	☐ Yes ☐ No
120305	Analyse the role that emotional intelligence plays in leadership	Demonstrate understanding of emotional intelligence	☐ Yes ☐ No
119336	Manage the development and performance of human capital in the public sector	Demonstrate understanding of legislation governing HRM and the importance of performance reviews	☐ Yes ☐ No
The principles of knowledge management to public sector administration			
115405	Apply principles of knowledge management to organisational transformation	Demonstrate construction and management of appropriate and effective	☐ Yes ☐ No

National Certificate: Public Certificate Level 5 SAQA QUAL ID: 50060 RPL Candidate Evidence Collection Checklist			EVIDENCE COLLECTED
Service delivery management			
SAQA ID	**UNIT STANDARD TITLE**	**EXAMPLE OF COMPETENCY**	
		Employment Equity programmes within the company	
119332	Manage and develop oneself in the public sector work environment	Managing work relationships within the Public Sector environment	☐ Yes ☐ No
15222	Promote a learning culture in an organization	Investigate and analyse the status of the learning culture within the department	☐ Yes ☐ No
Strategic planning			
114585	Plan strategically to improve business performance	Demonstrate your involvement in planning, managing and/or implementing training and development within the department	☐ Yes ☐ No
15216	Create opportunities for innovation and lead projects to meet innovative ideas	Leading projects to meet new, innovative ideas.	☐ Yes ☐ No
119350	Apply accounting principles and procedures in the preparation of reports and decision making	Demonstrating an understanding of accounting principles and reporting requirements and nature of functions in the public sector	☐ Yes ☐ No
120304	Analyse, interpret and communicate information	Demonstrate communication knowledge, skills and values which will contribute to the improvement in service delivery to communities.	☐ Yes ☐ No
South African legislation and policy affecting public administration			

National Certificate: Public Certificate Level 5 SAQA QUAL ID: 50060 RPL Candidate Evidence Collection Checklist			EVIDENCE COLLECTED
Service delivery management			
SAQA ID	**UNIT STANDARD TITLE**	**EXAMPLE OF COMPETENCY**	
120307	Apply South African legislation and policy affecting public administration	Demonstrate the application of financial management techniques in the implementation of sector specific policy programmes	☐ Yes ☐ No
119342	Apply knowledge of ethical principles, standards and professional conduct in public sector management and administration	Demonstrate ability to explain the importance of ethical values and standards in relation to the public sector workplace.	☐ Yes ☐ No
The principles of risk management to manage risk situations in the public sector			
120303	Apply principles of risk management	Demonstrate ability to explain risk management in the public sector	☐ Yes ☐ No
Design, formulate public sector policies and regulations			
120301	Formulate and evaluate public sector policies and regulations	Demonstrate the ability to identify and explain the role of government frameworks and institutions in formulating regulations and policies	☐ Yes ☐ No

Table 5: RPL Candidate Evidence Collection Checklist

To validate competence, the Assessor may require any of the following pieces of evidence to support experience acquired against an exit level outcomes of the qualification

➢ Checklists;

➢ Historical Evidence;

➢ Written Portfolio of Evidence;

➢ Workplace Evidence;

➢ Interview Question Bank and Recording Sheets;

➢ Candidate's Information and Self-Evaluation Forms;

➢ Signed-off workplace logbook

➢ Third-Party Report and Supporting Documentation

  ✓ brief CV

  ✓ certificates/results of assessment

  ✓ any licences

  ✓ photographs of work undertaken

  ✓ diaries/task sheets/job sheets/logbooks

  ✓ site training records

  ✓ site competencies held record

  ✓ membership of relevant professional associations

  ✓ hobbies/interests/special skills outside work

  ✓ references/letters from previous employers/supervisors

  ✓ sector awards

  ✓ any other documentation that may demonstrate or support sector experience.

The third-party verification report is provided for references, for example the supervisor, to confirm the candidate's skills and experience in the qualification/occupation. It is important to note that third party reports are not always available, and that Assessors may use their professional judgement to determine if this is a requirement. Below is an example of the details that may be required in the RPL application form.

EXAMPLE-RPL APPLICATION FORM									
Surname			Full Names						
Maiden Name (if Applicable)		ID #							Nationality
Highest Qualification	Gender	M	F	Demographics	White	Black	Colored	Indian	Other	Disability	Y	N
	Candidate Address								Provide details
Application for RPL in respect of	**Full Qualification SAQA QUAL ID: 50060**			Skills Programme: US ID:				**Unit Standard(s)**	
Current Workplace	Position		Duties						Immediate Manager
Tertiary Qualifications	Courses Attended			Work Experience – Current					
Candidate Signature Date					Employer Representative Signature Date				

9.   RPL PROCESS FLOW

In line with the DPSA's RPL process for the public sector, figure 1 below outlines the prescribed RPL process to be followed by RPL role players in the sector.
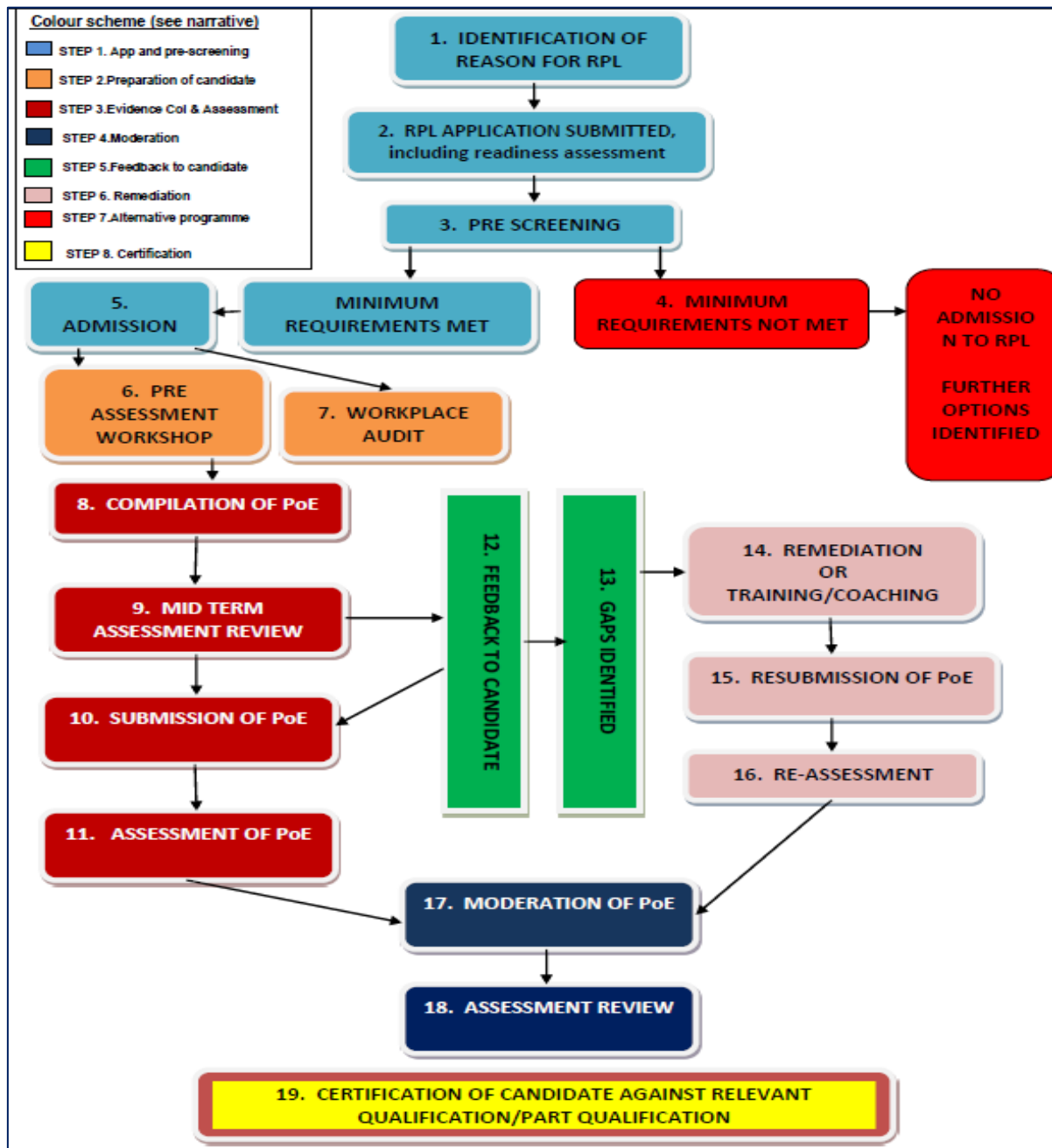
Figure 1: RPL in the public service (Source: DPSA 2021:29)

It is assumed that the candidate will undergo preparation workshop prior to the RPL Assessment. The RPL Assessment plan is agreed to and signed by the candidate and

RPL coordinator and Assessor. The RPL assessment agreements is signed by the candidate, employer representative, the SDP and the RPL coordinator.

10. THE ROLE OF THE ASSESSOR

The Assessor will execute their duties which includes, but is not limited to:

➢ Informing the candidate of the qualification or unit standard requirements

➢ Supporting and guide the candidate in the collection of evidence.

➢ Assisting the candidate plan for the assessment

➢ Informing the candidate about the arrangements surrounding the assessment

➢ Keeping abreast of current assessment practices, learning outcomes, standards for assessment, methods of assessment, time frames, technical details and understanding of the process

➢ Communicating assessment methodologies to the candidate

➢ Providing assessment feedback

11. MID-TERM RPL ASSESSMENT/REVIEW

Candidate is required to select an assessment methodology in respect of the evidence to be submitted for RPL. A mid-term assessment/review will be conducted with the candidate to ascertain whether the candidate understands the process and/or identify any areas of remediation. The mid-term assessment/review date is pre-determined and indicated per individual candidate's assessment schedule/plan. The role of the RPL coordinator is to support the candidate accordingly.

12. RPL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The candidate will be advised of assessment date and in line with the agreed assessment methodology. The assessment date is indicated per individual candidate assessment schedule. The assessment is conducted by a registered Assessor (registered with the SDP against a qualification / unit standard and or an Assessor registered to assess against the relevant qualification/unit standard). The Assessor

will issue an assessment report with every assessment decision at the conclusion of assessment process.

The role of the Assessor includes, but is not limited to:

➢ Conduct the assessments according to the relevant ETQA/SETA principles and policies

➢ Complete the documentation and recording requirements, and forward the results to the ETQA/SETA

➢ Conduct assessment of RPL in line with related curriculum

➢ Maintain records of assessment

The assessment principles of the SDP must conform to the principles of fair assessments.

13. RPL MODERATION PROCESS

The moderation of assessments conducted, and assessment decisions must be concluded in line with the SDP principles and policy on moderation. Internal moderation must be conducted by registered moderators against the relevant qualification/unit standards and the appropriate sampling must be adhered to. A moderation plan must be agreed to with the assessor and moderator must provide a moderation report on conclusion of the moderation.

14. RPL FEEDBACK PROCESS

Candidates must receive feedback after moderation on the assessment by the Assessor. Candidates must be advised of their right to appeal should they feel that the fair assessment principles were not upheld.

Should any remediation be required, the candidate must commit to such remediation within specified timeframes and an amended assessment schedule must be completed and gap training may be implemented. Should all the qualification

requirements be met, and the candidate has been successfully "RPL'd" against qualification or unit standards, the SDP certification processes must be adhered to.

15. REMEDIATION AND RE-ASSESSMENT

Should the candidate be required to remediate after feedback received from the RPL Assessor, then the candidate may re-submit further evidence to prove competence against the respective exit level outcomes and be afforded a further opportunity for assessment.

16. CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Candidates who have been successfully assessed/RPL'd against the relevant qualification or unit standards will be certificated as per the SDP certification policy.

Table 6 below outlines the assessment tools that are incorporated in the National Certificate in Public Administration. The below table provides examples of the evidence required towards the exit level outcomes of this qualification.

GUIDANCE FOR GATHERING EVIDENCE	
ORAL EVIDENCE	**WRITTEN EVIDENCE**
✓ Oral answers to questions ✓ Oral feedback ✓ Interview ✓ Presentations	✓ Workplace documentation for example: memos, logs, letters ✓ Checklists ✓ Portfolio ✓ Worksheets ✓ Forms
VERIFICATION	✓ Tests
Feedback (usually documented and signed) from: ✓ Mentor ✓ Assessor ✓ Supervisors/managers ✓ Peers	✓ Reports ✓ Charts and posters ✓ Tables ✓ Assignments ✓ Multi-choice ✓ Written questions
OTHER	✓ User manuals

	✓ Work plans
✓ Integrated assessment	✓ Research
	✓ Self-evaluation
	✓ Personal profiles
	PRACTICAL EVIDENCE
	✓ Observation – one off occasions, or over a period of time
	✓ Real life situations
	✓ Practical Demonstrations
	✓ Video/audio tapes
	✓ Posters
	✓ Graphics
	✓ Projects

Table 6: Evidence Guidelines

17. Conclusion,

By using the guidelines provided in this handbook, the RPL candidate should possess the necessary ability to effectively showcase the following abilities throughout their assessment:

i. **Practical proficiency** refers to the practical ability to apply the necessary knowledge, skill, and experience

ii. **Practical competence** refers to the proven capability to successfully carry out a certain set of duties inside a genuine and realistic situation. Various options are evaluated, and decisions are made about which courses of action to pursue.

iii. **Basic proficiency** refers to partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work

iv. **Foundational competence** refers to the proven comprehension of the candidate's actions and the underlying rationale behind them. This supports the practical proficiency and hence the activities implemented.

v. **Self-reflective proficiency** involves examining thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to gain insight and promote personal growth

vi. **Reflexive competence** refers to the proven capability of effectively combining practical skills with comprehension. It showcases the candidate's capacity to adjust to new situations in a suitable and responsible manner, while also being able to articulate the rationale behind their actions.

Good Luck!

APPEDNIX B: PROOF OF REGISTRATION

UNISA
university
of south africa

The Head of Department

Department of Human Settlements

31-33 Phillip-Frame Road

Chiselhurst

East London

5201   18 October 2023

Attention Mr Siswana

Re: Permission to Conduct Interviews in your Department

My name is Siviwe Tywabi, I am a student at the University of South Africa in the Faculty of Education, specialising in Education Management and Leadership. My approved Ethics Clearance reference number is 2023/08/10/38936607/37/AM which permits me to conduct research for academic purposes.

The research aims to Investigate the implementation practices of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit policy in the Public Service sector in South Africa.

RPL is part of a larger debate as a mechanism for up-skilling and multi-skilling a workforce and is linked to improved access to further education and training and the overall socio-economic development agenda of South Africa. This research seeks to contribute to education research in South Africa, with particular focus on the implementation of RPL as a transformation tool in the Public Service sector.

The Officials who have undergone RPL assessments against the Public Administration qualification(s) will be required partake in one interview of approximately 60 minutes on 30 October 2023, which will be audio-taped and transcribed.

The data collected will be analysed and documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings will be used for academic purposes including publication in a journal, presentation at an academic conference and policy advocacy.

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please contact me at 38936607@mylife.unisa.ac.za, phone number: 083 570 8738 or my Supervisor, Prof VJ Pitsoe, pitsovj@unisa.ac.za, phone number: 0124294436.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Siviwe Tywabi (Ms)

APPENDIX C: PROPOSAL ACCEPTANCE

1157 D1RST

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TYWABI S MS                          STUDENT NUMBER : 3893-660-7
33 SADOR STREET
4802 MIDSTREAM RIDGE ESTATE          ENQUIRIES NAME : MR P FOLKARD
MIDSTREAM                            ENQUIRIES TEL : 0861670411
1692


                                     DATE : 2023-02-16
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Dear Student

I have pleasure in informing you that your research proposal has been accepted. Please see details below:

DEGREE :   PHD (EDUCATION)   (90019)

TITLE :   Investigating the implementation practices of the recognition of prior learning
                    (rpl) for credit in the public service sector in the South African context

SUPERVISOR :   Prof VJ PITSOE (pitsovj@unisa.ac.za)

ACADEMIC YEAR :   2022

TYPE: THESIS

Registration is open. Please register online and pay for the research component of the degree before the
closing date of registration.

Yours faithfully,

Prof M S Mothata
Registrar

APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/08/10

Ref: **2023/08/10/38936607/37/AM**
Name: Ms S Tywabi
Student No.:38936607

Dear Ms S Tywabi

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2023/08/10 to 2028/08/10

Researcher(s): Name: Ms S Tywabi
E-mail address: 38936607@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0835708738

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof. V J Pitsoe
E-mail address: pitsovj@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124294436

Title of research:

Investigating the implementation of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for credit policy within the public service sector in South Africa.

Qualification: PhD Education Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2023/08/10 to 2028/08/10.

The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/08/10 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.

2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX E: NOTICE OF INTENTION TO SUBMIT

UNISA | university of south africa

CGS20: Notice of intention to submit dissertation / thesis for examination

(E-mail: resexcoord@unisa.ac.za)

Surname and initials	TYWABI S							
Student number	3	8	9	3	6	6	0	7
E-mail	38936607@mylife.unisa.ac.za							
Degree	Doctor of Philosophy (PHD) Education							
Qualification code	90019							

Final title of dissertation / thesis under which it will be submitted
(please print and ensure that the correct wording is used)

"INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) FOR CREDIT POLICY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA".

I hereby give notice that I intend to submit my dissertation / thesis for examination with a view to a graduation ceremony to be held during (please indicate which):
* Please note: Graduation cannot be guaranteed for the particular graduation period due to external factors influencing approval of the final result (eg corrections to be made before the final copies can be submitted), but submission prior to the closing date will enhance the possibility thereof).

Spring 20___	Autumn 2024

I declare that my supervisor has been consulted and supports submission and endorses the final title quoted above.
The candidate must, with the examination copies, submit a declaration by the supervisor to the effect that the originality software checking report obtained by the candidate has been considered by the supervisor and that he/she confirms that the thesis or dissertation meets an acceptable standard of originality.

Student consent in terms of the Protection of the Personal Information Act No 4 of 2013

1. I declare that all the personal information furnished by me on this form are true and correct, and I undertake to inform Unisa of any changes in my personal information.
2. I undertake to comply with all the rules, regulations and decisions of the university and any amendments thereto and I have taken note of advice which may be applicable to students in general.
3. I, as a student registered at Unisa or an applicant intending to study with Unisa, hereby consent that Unisa may collect, use, distribute, process my personal information for all required academic processes pertaining to my application or registration to study with Unisa, which may include, but is not limited to:
   3.1   internal administrative processing;
   3.2   institutional and scholarly research; and
   3.3   funding submissions.
4. I also consent that Unisa may share my personal information with the Matriculation Board and Admissions Committees, Higher Education South Africa, the Department of Higher Education and Training, the Council on Higher Education, the South African Qualifications Authority, other public higher education institutions, Qualification Verification Agencies, professional bodies, third parties rendering various services to the university and legal entities which may lawfully require such information for legal obligations and/or investigations.
5. I understand that in terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and other laws of the country, there are instances where my express consent is not necessary in order to permit the processing of personal information, which may be related to investigations, litigation or when personal information is publicly available.
6. I will not hold the university responsible for any improper or unauthorised use of personal information that is beyond its reasonable control.
7. I confirm that I have read the notice and understand the contents.
   Note: The nature of personal information collected can be viewed in the Personal Information Inventory Lists published on the Unisa webpage at www.unisa.ac.za

Signature	*[signature]*	3	0	1	1	2	0	2	3

APPENDIX F: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

UNISA
university
of south africa

The Head of Department

Department of Human Settlements

31-33 Phillip-Frame Road

Chiselhurst

East London

5201   18 October 2023

Attention Mr Siswana

Re: Permission to Conduct Interviews in your Department

My name is Siviwe Tywabi, I am a student at the University of South Africa in the Faculty of Education, specialising in Education Management and Leadership. My approved Ethics Clearance reference number is 2023/08/10/38936607/37/AM which permits me to conduct research for academic purposes.

The research aims to Investigate the implementation practices of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit policy in the Public Service sector in South Africa.

RPL is part of a larger debate as a mechanism for up-skilling and multi-skilling a workforce and is linked to improved access to further education and training and the overall socio-economic development agenda of South Africa. This research seeks to contribute to education research in South Africa, with particular focus on the implementation of RPL as a transformation tool in the Public Service sector.

The Officials who have undergone RPL assessments against the Public Administration qualification(s) will be required partake in one interview of approximately 60 minutes on 30 October 2023, which will be audio-taped and transcribed.

The data collected will be analysed and documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings will be used for academic purposes including publication in a journal, presentation at an academic conference and policy advocacy.

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please contact me at 38936607@mylife.unisa.ac.za, phone number: 083 570 8738 or my Supervisor, Prof VJ Pitsoe, pitsovj@unisa.ac.za, phone number: 0124294436.

Your permission to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Siviwe Tywabi (Ms)

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT

UNISA
university of south africa

Institution consent form

Investigating the implementation practices of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit policy in the Public Service sector in South Africa.

It would be greatly appreciated if the institution could please acknowledge receipt of the letter requesting permission for Siwiwe Tywabi to conduct research at your institution.

The institution will be acknowledging that:

I.   Involvement is completely voluntary, and participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw their consent at any given time without any negative consequences.

II. Interviews with RPL Candidates will be audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Consent will be obtained specifically for audio-recording and all data as well as transcripts will be securely kept and destroyed 5 years after completion of the research.

III. The Participants' inputs will not be completely anonymous as their positions in the department may be mentioned. Pseudonyms will be used instead of the participants' names.

IV. The data collection process will not interfere with the day to day running of the department.

V.   It is envisaged that the research findings will be used for academic purposes such as contributions to journal articles and presentation at conferences. The research findings could also be used for policy debate and/or advocacy.

I, *SIBUSISO. L. SISWANA* , (representative of the department, full name) acknowledge the information stated above and grant permission for Ms. Siwiwe Tywabi to interview RPL beneficiaries within the Department of Human Settlements in October 2023.

Please provide details should you wish to receive and electronic summary of the research findings.

Email address: *Sbusiso.@ecdhs.gov.za*

Signature: _____   Date: 30/10/2023

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE REGISTER

Attendance Register: Evaluation Session

DATE: 30 October 2023

14H30

Name and Surname	... Lugwali	Race	A ✓	I	C	W	Signature	Slusu
Designation								
Component	GRANT MANAGEMENT	Disability	Y	N				
Tel/Cell	071891 2...	Gender	M	F ✓				
Email	...@ ecdhs.gov.za							

Name and Surname	...nen supmzem	Race	A ✓	I	C	W	Signature	
Designation	Registry							
Component	IeTM E GcTM	Disability	Y	N ✗				
Tel/Cell	0823293...1	Gender	M ✗	F				
Email	...@...gov...ZA.							

Name and Surname	...Direct ...vuvi	Race	A ✗	I	C	W	Signature	
Designation								
Component	SCM	Disability	Y	N				
Tel/Cell	043 71146.-7	Gender	M ✗	F				
Email	...@ ecdhs.gov.za							

Name and Surname	...B	Race	A	I	C ✗	W	Signature	
Designation	SAO							
Component	Corporate Secretariat	Disability	Y	N ✗				
Tel/Cell	043 71197. 0796835...	Gender	M	F ✗				
Email	...H@ecdhs.gov.za							

Name and Surname	...Mrewe	Race	A	I	C	W	Signature	
Designation	SPA							
Component	ASSET MANAGEMENT	Disability	Y	N ✗				
Tel/Cell	063 082 329 1...	Gender	M ✗	F				
Email	...@ecdhs.gov.za							

Attendance Register: **Evaluation Session**

DATE: 30 October 2023

14H30

Name and Surname	Zingisani Sigonyela	Race	A	I	C	W	Signature
			X				
Designation	Admin Officer						
Component	OHRDS	Disability		Y	N		
Tel/Cell	0727032215			X			
		Gender		M	F		
					X		
Email	ZingisaniZ@ecdhs.gov.za						

Name and Surname	NOLUBABALO SOKOYI	Race	A	I	C	W	Signature
			X				
Designation	AD: HRD						
Component	OHRDS	Disability	Y	N			
Tel/Cell	076 823 1499						
		Gender	M	F			
Email	nolubabalos@ecdhs.gov.za						

Name and Surname	Sibusiso L. Sikwana	Race	A	I	C	W	Signature
			X				
Designation	D.D : HRD						
Component	OHRDS	Disability	Y	N			
Tel/Cell	082 060 9721						
		Gender	M	F			
Email	Sibusiso@ecdhs.gov.za						

Name and Surname	Siviwe Tywabi	Race	A	I	C	W	Signature
			X				
Designation	Researcher						
Component	NIA	Disability	Y	N			
Tel/Cell	0835708?						
		Gender	M	F			
Email							

Name and Surname		Race	A	I	C	W	Signature
Designation							
Component		Disability	Y	N			
Tel/Cell							
		Gender	M	F			
Email							

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

QUESTIONNAIRE

"Investigating the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit Policy within the Public Service Sector in South Africa"

Section 1: Demographics

1. Gender:

Male	1	
Female	2	X
Other	3	
I'd rather not say	4	

2. Age:

Under 18		
18-24	1	
25-34	2	
35-44	3	X
45-54	4	
55 and above	5	

3. Educational Background:

High School	1	
Diploma	2	
Bachelor's Degree	3	X
Master's Degree	4	
Ph.D.	5	

4. Years of Service in the Public Service Sector:

Less than 1 year	1	
1-5 years	2	
6-10 years	3	X
11-15 years	4	
More than 15 years	5	

5. Involvement if RPL process

DHET RPL Office	1
DPSA RPL Office	2
OTP Provincial RPL Coordinator	3

Investigating the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit Policy within the Public Service Sector in South Africa 1

Provincial Department RPL Coordinator	4	
RPL Beneficiary	5	X

6. Occupation Category/ Job Title in the public service

......Admin Officer......

......

Section A: RPL Implementation (12 Questions)

7. Qualification against which RPL for credit

50060 National Certificate: Public Administration NQF Level 5	1 X
57897 National Diploma: Public Administration NQF Level 6	2

8. Status of RPL progress

Registered	1
Completed	2 X
Terminated	3
Not Applicable	4

9. Reasons for termination of RPL programme

......

......

......

10. Mode of RPL delivery

Online	1 X
Classroom	2

11. RPL for credit is effectively implemented in the South African public service sector.

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3 X
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

12. The public service sector in South Africa has clear policies in place for RPL implementation.

Very Unclear	1
Unclear	2 X
Neutral	3

Clear	4
Very Clear	5

13. Adequate resources are allocated to support RPL implementation in the public service sector.

Strongly Disagree	1	
Disagree	2	X
Neutral	3	
Agree	4	
Strongly Agree	5	

14. RPL implementation is consistent across different departments within the public service sector.

Not Consistent at All	1	
Slightly Consistent	2	X
Moderately Consistent	3	
Very Consistent	4	
Extremely Consistent	5	

15. RPL processes are well-documented and communicated to all stakeholders.

Not Documented at All	1	
Not Communicated	2	
Not Documented and Not Communicated	3	X
Well Documented	4	
Well Documented and Communicated	5	

16. The monitoring and evaluation of RPL implementation is important in the department.

Not Important at All	1	
Slightly Important	2	
Moderately Important	3	
Very Important	4	X
Extremely Important	5	

17. Training and development opportunities are provided to support RPL coordinators.

Never	1	
Rarely	2	X
Occasionally	3	
Frequently	4	
Always	5	

18. RPL Candidates are satisfied with the feedback mechanisms are in place for candidates to provide input on the improvement of RPL processes.

Very Dissatisfied	1	
Dissatisfied	2	
Neutral	3	X
Satisfied	4	
Very Satisfied	5	

Section B: Models and Practices (4 Questions)

19. Peer mentoring programs have facilitated RPL implementation.

Very Unlikely	1	
Unlikely	2	
Neutral	3	X
Likely	4	
Very Likely	5	

20. RPL digital platforms would benefit RPL implementation processes.

Very Unlikely	1	
Unlikely	2	
Neutral	3	
Likely	4	X
Very Likely	5	

21. Regular reviews and updates of RPL models would be beneficial.

Strongly Disagree	1	
Disagree	2	
Neutral	3	
Agree	4	X
Strongly Agree	5	

22. Public service departments are willing and collaborate to share successful RPL practices.

Not Willing at All	1	
Slightly Willing	2	X
Moderately Willing	3	
Very Willing	4	
Extremely Willing	5	

Investigating the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit Policy within the Public Service Sector in South Africa   4

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Section C: Candidate Perception (9 Questions)

23. Candidates have a clear understanding of RPL assessment processes.

Very Unclear	1	
Unclear	2	X
Neutral	3	
Clear	4	
Very Clear	5	

24. Candidates feel that RPL assessments are effective fair and unbiased.

Not Effective at All	1	
Slightly Effective	2	
Moderately Effective	3	X
Very Effective	4	
Extremely Effective	5	

25. The communication of RPL expectations to candidates is clear and effective.

Very Unclear	1	
Unclear	2	
Neutral	3	
Clear	4	X
Very Clear	5	

26. Candidates are satisfied with the feedback provided during RPL assessments.

Very Dissatisfied	1	
Dissatisfied	2	
Neutral	3	
Satisfied	4	X
Very Satisfied	5	

27. Candidates believe that RPL assessors are knowledgeable and competent.

Poor	1	
Below Average	2	
Average	3	
Above Average	4	X
Excellent	5	

28. Candidates feel that the department is willing supports them throughout the RPL process.

Not Willing at All	1	
Slightly Willing	2	X
Moderately Willing	3	
Very Willing	4	
Extremely Willing	5	

29. Candidates are confident in their ability to navigate RPL requirements.

Not Confident at All	1	
Slightly Confident	2	
Moderately Confident	3	X
Very Confident	4	
Extremely Confident	5	

30. Candidates believe that RPL assessments are aligned with their job roles.

Not Aligned at All	1	
Slightly Aligned	2	
Moderately Aligned	3	X
Mostly Aligned	4	
Accurately Aligned	5	

31. Candidates feel confident to apply for higher positions after the qualification has been awarded through the RPL route.

Not Confident at All	1	X
Slightly Confident	2	
Moderately Confident	3	
Very Confident	4	
Extremely Confident	5	

Section D: Guidelines and Assessment Tools (10 Questions)

32. RPL Coordinators are satisfied with the guidelines available to assist them in their roles.

Very Dissatisfied	1	
Dissatisfied	2	
Neutral	3	X
Satisfied	4	
Very Satisfied	5	

33. Pre-assessment tools used in RPL are standardized and reliable.

Do not Exist	1	
Poor	2	
Average	3	X
Above Average	4	
Excellent	5	

34. RPL Guidelines and resources are readily accessible for RPL coordinators.

Very Inaccessible	1	
Inaccessible	2	

Neutral	3	X
Accessible	4	
Very Accessible	5	

35. Continuous improvement of assessment tools is a priority for RPL implementation.

Not Important at All	1	
Slightly Important	2	
Moderately Important	3	
Very Important	4	X
Extremely Important	5	

36. The public service sector provides adequate training for RPL coordinators on using pre-assessment tools.

Never	1	
Rarely	2	X
Occasionally	3	
Frequently	4	
Always	5	

37. Assessment tools are regularly updated to reflect the relevant exit-level outcomes of a qualification.

Never	1	
Rarely	2	X
Occasionally	3	
Frequently	4	
Always	5	

38. RPL guidelines and tools promote consistency and fairness in assessments.

Strongly Disagree	1	
Disagree	2	
Neutral	3	X
Agree	4	
Strongly Agree	5	

39. Candidates are provided with clear guidance on compiling RPL portfolios of evidence.

Very Unclear	1	
Unclear	2	
Neutral	3	
Clear	4	X
Very Clear	5	

40. RPL Guidelines and tools are user-friendly and easy to understand.

Not user-friendly at All	1
Slightly user-friendly	2
Moderately user-friendly	3 X
Very user-friendly	4 '
Extremely user-friendly	5

41. The public service sector is committed and actively seeks feedback on the usability of pre-assessment tools.

Not Committed at All	1
Slightly Committed	2 X
Moderately Committed	3
Very Committed	4
Extremely Committed	5

Section E: Constraints to Implementation (10 Questions)

42. Resistance to change among public service officials is a barrier to RPL implementation.

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4 X
Strongly Agree	5

43. Bureaucratic processes influence the slow-paced RPL implementation efforts.

No Influence at All	1
Low Influence	2
Moderate Influence	3
High Influence	4 X
Very High Influence	5

44. Limited awareness among candidates about RPL processes is a challenge.

No Awareness at All	1
Low Awareness	2
Moderate Awareness	3
High Awareness	4 X
Very High Awareness	5

45. Unreasonable timeframes for the compilation RPL portfolio of evidence is a constraint.

Very Unreasonable	1
Unreasonable	2
Neutral	3 X
Reasonable	4

Very Reasonable	5

46. Inadequate infrastructure and technology hinder RPL implementation.

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4 X
Strongly Agree	5

47. Resistance from management affects RPL adoption.

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4 X
Strongly Agree	5

48. Inconsistent policies across departments create challenges in RPL implementation.

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4 X
Strongly Agree	5

49. Limited collaboration and knowledge sharing between departments impede RPL continuous improvement.

Very Unlikely	1
Unlikely	2
Neutral	3
Likely	4 X
Very Likely	5

50. The lack of a centralised support system for RPL implementation is a barrier.

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4 X
Strongly Agree	5

Thank you for your participation.

Investigating the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit Policy within the Public Service Sector in South Africa   9

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APPENDIX J: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

22 Oshe Street

The Reeds

Centurion

0157

14 December 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate serves to confirm that I have edited S Tywabi's thesis entitled, **INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) FOR CREDIT POLICY WITHIN THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

I found the work easy and intriguing to read. Much of my editing basically dealt with obstructionist technical aspects of language, which could have otherwise compromised smooth reading as well as the sense of the information being conveyed. I hope that the work will be found to be of an acceptable standard. I am a member of Professional Editors' Guild.

Hereunder are my contact details:

Jack Chokwe (PhD)

Contact numbers: 072 214 5489

jackchokwe@gmail.com