



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.11.21>

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL): ALIGNING INFORMALLY LEARNED SKILLS TO A FORMAL COMPETENCY & QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK FOR MOBILITY

¹Raj Nehru, ²Prof Sujata Shahi and ³Prof Jyoti Rana

^{1&2}Vice Chancellor and ³Dean Academics

^{1&3}Shri Vishwakarma Skill University and ²IILM University

Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

National Education Policy 2020 has been introduced with one of the main objectives to raise Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035, to make this vision a reality, Recognition of Prior Learning plays a very important role to make Informal Learning equivalent to Formal Education system and effective pathway toward integration. As per reports there are approx 37.4 million youths, in the age group of 18-23 years, enrolled in higher education and more than 54.8 million eligible youths are in the labor market without any formal qualifications. RPL practice in Higher Education has been adopted by many countries like Australia, Finland, Germany, USA, Switzerland etc. and they are doing well. To implement RPL practice in Higher Education in India, study best practices done by the above countries have become the need of the day. The International Webinar on recognition of prior learning (RPL) was organized by Shri Vishwakarma Skill University Haryana, jointly with IIHMR Rajasthan on 18th Jun 2021, with the objective to study the ways RPL practice is done by the different countries. Various eminent speakers from the US, Berlin, UK, Vietnam, and India are invited to showcase their knowledge experience and perception toward RPL practice for Higher Education. 11 eminent speakers came together on the common platform and shared their views on RPL in Higher Education. The main objective of this webinar was to explore opportunities of using RPL in Higher Education for Educational Mobility aligned with NSQF Framework.

Keyword: Lifelong Learning, Diversity, National Education Policy, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION TO RPL

People learn throughout their life; it is a continuous process. However, the society has developed a mechanism of recognizing and valuing the learning acquired through formal process. This has given importance to formal educational institutions as a center of learning. However, the learning that happens outside this formal process has not been recognized. In a country like India where millions of people enter labor market or start to work or learn through informal process are not valued for their learning gain and resultantly, they remain excluded from the formal recognition system depriving them of the opportunities. People learn through various ways other than the formal educational institutions. The learning occurs in all non-formal settings, e, g On the Job Training, working in the field, taking care of elderly and sick relatives, job shadowing etc. However, all these learning gained do not come with a formal process of recognition and certification of the proficiency and competency achieved with respect to their experience, knowledge, skill, attitude & habits acquired. Recognizing such experiences and learnings can benefit such individuals by getting connected to job market, formal education and also benefit them in growth and sustainability of their financial earnings. This will also enhance their self-worth and fuel their contribution more meaningfully. In the form of new ideas, innovation, entrepreneurship and productivity at work besides social inclusion. Many developed countries have recognized the importance of recognizing the value of non-formal and informal learning. Many of such countries have also developed systems and frameworks to recognize such experiences and acknowledge the competencies gained through a formal certification process that is mapped to their existing educational framework. This Recognition of Prior Experience that is mapped to formal education framework has encouraged millions of aspiring people and made them hopeful to enroll for higher education degrees based on their existing skills and experience. This system has also encouraged millions of dropouts to enroll back and reintegrate into formal system of education through a process of aligning their experience and skills with the new qualification frameworks aligned to formal education ones. The new credit-based qualification framework facilitates the vertical and horizontal mobility across general and vocational education. This system of recognition has provided aggregation of all training providers for their modular programs that are offered for mobility and transferability of learning as well has highlighted the need for a university-based system that can lend credibility to this system and framework.

As per NSQF Gazette notification Dec 2013, “Recognition of Prior Learning” or “RPL” is the process of recognizing previous learning, often experiential, towards gaining a qualification. RPL acknowledges that learning outcomes can be acquired in different ways, forms, and settings, with a distinction between formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts. RPL accords the focus on the outcome of an applicant’s learning and not on the way competencies were acquired. Due to lack of appropriate qualifications, a large proportion of people face severe disadvantages in getting appropriate jobs, migrating to other regions, and accessing further education, even though they might have the necessary knowledge and skills. RPL process can help such candidates acquire a formal qualification



that matches their knowledge base and skills, and thus contribute to improving employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion, and self-esteem.

International Labour Standards and International Labour Conferences (ILC) have emphasized the importance of RPL and recommended the establishment of systems for RPL. RPL promises to address the disconnect between education and life. Recognition of Prior Learning shall guarantee a win-win situation for everyone and shall change the face of India's Education system.

NEED OF RPL IN INDIA

Education has a vigorous role to play in "Samagra Vikas Overall Development" of the citizen of any country. In India, while the gross enrolment ratio (GER) was 97.2 % at the Primary Level (AISHE, 2015,16), it is less than 80 % at the secondary level and is yet to reach 60 % at the senior secondary. The GER in higher education for India is lower as compared to developed nations because a large population of students in the relevant age group drops out and does not enroll in higher educational institutions (Agarwal,2006). This is because either they have not completed their prior class successfully to become eligible for next-level admissions or in case they have done so, they prefer to enter into the labor market due to financial needs. As per various data and AISHE- reports available, total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 37.4 million that makes a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 26.3%. GER in Higher education in India is calculated for the 18-23 years of age group. At present, according to the AISHE-2019, the higher education sector in India consists of 37.4 million students across 993 universities, 39,931 colleges, and 10,725 Stand-alone institutions (Chanana,1993). The population, in 18-23 years is more than 140 million. It means, approximately, 102.6 million populations do not enroll themselves in higher education and drops out from education. As we look from the prism of eligibility enrolment ratio, (EER: The ratio of the eligible population, those who have at least cleared Class 12 in the 18-23 age group) as per a paper published by AIU. There are approx. 54.8 million populations would be eligible to enroll in Higher education (Chauhan,2010). By bringing them into the ambit of education, India's GER ratio can go up to 64.9% and be at par with the GER of developed nations (Ernst & Young,2011).

METHODOLOGY

Due to a lack of appropriate formal degree/qualifications, a large proportion of people face a severe disadvantage in getting appropriate jobs and need to migrate to other regions and accessing further education, even though they might have the necessary knowledge and skills. India's Labour Force Participation Rate (Economy's active workforce) dropped to 49.2 % in Dec 2020, compared to 49.3 % during the previous year. India Labor Force Participation Rate is updated yearly. It is available from Dec 1990 to Dec 2020, with an average rate of 57.5 %. The data reached an all-time high of 58.4 % in Dec 1990 and a record low of 49.2 % in Dec 2020. For the purpose of evaluating present dire needs, and a roadmap for going ahead with the enormous exercise, a webinar was organized in June 2021 to focus on activities pertaining to RPL infrastructure.

Objectives of the webinar

- To know about various innovative and scientific methods adopted by various countries on RPL and to know more about international practices best suited to the state/country's labor market needs and boost the economy of the state and India;
- How RPL can prove to be the game-changer in achieving the desired GER as per NEP 2020 and promote lifelong learning and life-wide learning among the youth of the state for a sustainable livelihood;
- How RPL can Align the competencies of unorganized workforce with standardized NSQF framework, in India to Enhance their skills for sustainability and opportunity for further formalized education.

Scope

This study is action base research descriptive in nature where the primary data is obtained from 11 eminent speakers of different countries and institutions, during the webinar, have shared their views and best practices done in their respective country. The data will help to implement RPL practices in higher education efficiently, which leads to achieving the objectives of National Education policy of 50% GER in India. Map the suggestion, thoughts and conclusion of the seminar with the research conducted on RPL in higher education and elaborate on the practices started by Shri Vishwakarma Skill University in this direction

Seminar Viewpoints and Conclusion

RPL can help in achieving the desired GER.

GER shall enhance up to nearly 65% by bringing in additional manpower into the ambit of formalization through RPL which will bring the GER indicator at par with the developed world. Global average GER is 36.7% in Upper Middle-Income Countries. In India, 92.4% of the workforce is in unorganized and informal sectors with no employment contracts. As per the skills report Employability of India's youth has remained stagnant for the past three years. As per a survey conducted by Shri Vishwakarma Skill University, more than 89% of dropouts are desirous of resuming their education and about 58% desire to hold a graduate degree for



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.11.21>

better career opportunities as well as social status. In a globalized world with the speed of automation and velocity change, the learner has many ways to find and gain knowledge with a blend of school, college, and other offline and online modes which makes RPL an important mode. Indian Higher Education system has a huge unutilized capacity that goes wasted every year and RPL can prove to be a game-changer for India. Universities can develop D.VoC, B.VoC & M.VoC Programs in such a way and aligned to existing job roles that encourage eligible labor force to apply, enroll and pursue higher vocational education in shortest and flexible timeframes.

- Raj Nehru

Dropouts can start their academic career through RPL model.

Prior learnings can now be recognized to give them formal certificates and social standing. Their knowledge needs to be assessed with a defined framework and should be converted into credits.

- Prof. Dr. Sujata Shahi- IILM

RPL can Align the competencies of an unorganized workforce with standardized NSQF

Shri Vishwakarma Skill University has prepared a detailed Policy document in accordance with NSQF and a pilot project has been started with JBM on B.Voc.- Prod. Tool & Die Mfg. with their experienced employees at various plants. This Pilot Project will benefit their employees, Organisation and promote Life Long Learning too. Experienced employees will be able to gain Higher Education for Vertical and Horizontal mobility. About 7000 employees are planned to undergo RPL for Vertical and Horizontal mobility. MNC's, Indian companies, and other local Industries can largely be benefitted from RPL.

- B.B. Gupta-President- Strategy & Planning- JBM

Clear Roles & Responsibilities of Regulators, Providers, and Students shall play an important role in the Higher Education Policy & Ecosystem in India.

-Quality and Excellence helps the Leadership model of Higher Education using an Innovative framework. Proper and scientific Assessment is the key to RPL. As per Dr. Rajesh- RPL shall bring in qualitative changes in the Skill Management and education formalization scenario. In his opinion - There is a need to Recognise Arts, Crafts and Handicraft making as Prior Learning at School (10th/12th) Level and recognize Skills of Army /Army/Air force Personnel on War or Peace, as Prior Learning for Bachelors, Masters, and Ph.D. Degree Awards.

- Prof. Dr. Rajesh- Professor Emeritus, FITP University, Vietnam

Credit Accumulation and Transfer system is very crucial in the success of RPL

As per Prof. Dr. Graham Hasting- Evans-CEO, NOCN in Europe informal education gained by candidates is recognized for the continuation of formal education. In Europe, Credit linkage and Occupational Standards facilitate the creation of a framework that supports RPL. The credits accumulated in informal learning are formalized in RPL. Community colleges & institutions also provide credit formalization, which is judged by Accreditation agencies for the award of qualifications. Occupational standards enhance possibilities for mapping of Credit framework and formalization of the same.

- Prof. Dr. Graham Hasting- Evans-CEO, NOCN

Different ways of learning support RPL Model

There are many ways of learning like conventional, face-to-face, part-time, blended, online, and distance education which can help the student community to gain formalized education. International Accreditation Credit (IAC) would be a Global Educational Currency with Global Curriculum & acceptance.

- Prof. Dr. Kyriakos Kouveliotis

Effects of RPL across the globe will be fruitful and productive

Initiatives in this direction can bring in the desired changes in the academic world, including in manpower development .RPL can become a prestigious education in India. NEP 2020 and MOOCs can give an edge to skill education. As per Ms. Pankaj Mittal, Secretary-General, AIU the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) will keep the aspirants motivated to continue their education by gaining credits at their ease.

- Prof. Dr. Ramu Damodaran, Chief, UN Academic Impact

If the proper quality structure is in place for the assessment of the RPL candidates with required skill sets and regulatory body for RPL ensures the best of assessment bodies RPL can meet the objectives of NEP 2020 and shall become the Game changer in India. According to Dr. Neetu, Bhagat RPL will boost the local economy and employability of skilled people if the quality of assessment is ensured.



Shri Vishwakarma Skill University Pilot on RPL in Higher Education Policy Formulation

Shri Vishwakarma Skill University formed a special Cell to design RPL policy Framework for Skill Credits. A proposal was prepared by the university that was approved by the government. RPL Policy was drafted by, specially formed Skill Credit Framework Cell. This policy draft was duly presented to the Steering Committee constituted by the university with members comprising various vocational institutions, regulators and experts. This Draft was prepared based on various inputs received from the committee members. Further, the draft was presented to the Executive and Skill Council of the university and was approved.

Pilot Project

There was necessity to test the policy document at a smaller scale. Hence a Pilot project was planned to aim at finding areas of improvement and incorporating in the document for its large-scale implementation. After successful implementation of pilot project, it will be scaled up with various courses in the university. Pilot project is expected to create pathways for the successful implementation of RPL across the state and finally at state and national level covering various B. Voc. and M. Voc. Course. Various industry partners were approached and after a series of discussions, JBM Group agreed to partner with SVSU for RPL. Based on the interest shown by JBM, presentation to their Top Management, HR Department and various stake holders were made. It was decided to work jointly on this pilot project for their Employees at various locations. After survey and meetings with HR Department and Top Management of JBM and the data collected, it was found that there are a large number of tool and die workers who have been working in this area for a long time and are eligible for higher education enrollment by virtue of their past qualifications. SVSU has already developed a BVoc in Ptod Tool & Die Manufacturing program that is running successfully for last 4 years. It was decided to take the pilot project forward in B.Voc. in Prod. Tool & Die Manufacturing.

Eligibility for B.Voc. (Prod. Tool & Die Mfg.) was decided for the pilot project in consultation with Skill Faculty of Engineering and Technology. The eligibility was kept as per the regulator requirements and compliances e.g., UGC

1. Candidate should have achieved Level 4 certificate after 10th with 3 years of relevant work experience Or
2. 10th + ITI pass out in relevant trade with 3 years of Work experience; Or
3. 12th pass out with 3 years of Experience; Or
4. Diploma in Engg. (Mech./Prod.) From a recognized Institute with 3 years of Experience.

In Regular Course B.Voc. is covered in 6 semesters and each semester is sub-divided into two components: Skill Education component (SEC) and General education component (GEC), while SEC component covers 60% of the semester and GEC covers 40%. GEC and SEC component of each semester covers some National Occupational Standards designed with respect to a job role. GEC and SEC are aligned to achieve specific learning outcomes as well. defined in the program. Various learning outcomes cover the complete subject and credits are also allotted against each subject. The mechanism built by the pilot project team is to map the working experience of identified employees of JBM with the learning outcomes defined in the BVoc program. The candidates experience shall be assessed in such a way that each unit of experience is mapped with the Learning Outcomes of the BVoc program and Syllabus. The process of this entire mapping is designed in many phases. The first step is portfolio development, where candidate writes his /her complete work experience gained in formal or informal way. All that he has learnt and performed during his employment period including various trainings undergone either through employer sponsorship or self-efforts are to be documented while developing and writing portfolio.

The entire documentation of this step one has to be made in an application form that has been designed to capture the complete information about the candidate, like his eligibility, past experience, contact details, experience areas, trainings, skills etc and exemptions sought for. SVSU office to records all the observations, after which Registration No. is allotted. This form has been prepared in Hindi and English both, for ease of its use by the applicant.

The candidate is required to write his/her complete portfolio. The objective is to map his entire learnings and experience claimed and mentioned in portfolio with the learning outcomes of the program intended to apply for.

In this phase the candidate is provided counselling support of the experts. The applicants are counselled by personalized calls from SCFC- SVSU about the program. All applicants are briefed about the process involved. Candidates are explained about self-assessment for filling up the application form and claiming exemption of credits.

Portfolios of all the candidates are been created, based on their Industrial experience. Each candidate was helped in creation of their Portfolio, which is to be mapped with the LOs of the regular B.Voc. course run by the University as per the scheme of the Course.



This LO based Portfolio helps in quick Assessment in second step by the assessors & experts for awarding credits towards Recognition of Prior Learning.

The team of assessors and experts in the second step comprise of the following members:

- a. Lead Assessor (Not below the level of Asst Professor of the relevant field)
- b. Assessor
- c. Industry Expert (SME)
- d. Member from ASDC/CGSC

Team of assessors will be able to holistically assess the candidate’s portfolio and recommend the exemption of credits. LOs Summary table shall be the basic criteria to assess, where each LO shall be given a Unique ID. These shall be mapped with the experience & expertise of the candidates for credit exemption. The team of experts assess the mapping and based on their scrutiny of the documents provided in support of the claims and details mentioned in the portfolio, the experts assign the score.

In the third step, based on the assessment score given, an expert team will call the candidate for the interview and assessment. This step is to authenticate whether the scrutiny and scores really match with the Program outcomes. The candidate during this interview process may be asked to demonstrate as well to verify the claims. A table of LOs has been prepared referring to the course scheme of the regular B.Voc.(Prod. Tool & Die Mfg.) in consultation with SFET- SVSU and SME from Industry Partner. LOs of RPL and Regular course have been kept identical for Assessment and Examination Both.

Based on this interview and assessment outcomes, the relevant portions that map with the learning outcomes of the program are recommended for exemption. The syllabus portion and modules that get exempted are based on this 3-step mapping exercise. In case of 33%-75%, similarity partial credits can be transferred. In the case of less than 33% similarity match no credits shall be awarded. The credits as earned/accumulated by the candidates shall be vetted by respective credit award committee for the exemption of some modules. The balance of the modules is recommended to be completed by this committee. The final recommendations are then sent to the examination team and skill council of the University and once approved the admission to the student for completing balance module shall be granted. A candidate can get up to 60% of syllabus exemption consequently a candidate can complete the rest of the program in 6-12 months. The University has proposed to run the balance curriculum through a community college model. The final outcomes of this Pilot are also proposed to be sent to the University Grants Commission as well.

FINDINGS

The objective of achieving improvement in the Gross Enrolment Ratio to 50 % from the present level of 26 % in India can be made possible through formal recognition of RPL in higher education.

CONCLUSION

- RPL can be a game-changer for increasing General Enrolment Ratio in India for higher education and also meeting and exceeding the GER targets of 50% by 2035 which is currently 26% only. RPL in higher education can lead India’s GER indicators at par with the developed world.
- RPL linked to Occupational Standards and mapped to Credits and also its subsequent transfer through a structured framework can encourage eligible youths to enroll and pursue higher vocational education
- Credit formalization is a need of the hour, which can be assessed, judged and awarded by universities for the award of relevant Qualifications. e.g. D.VoC, B.VoC & M.VoC, aligned to job roles
- RPL in higher education will promote industry academia partnerships as it requires a significant assessment, evaluation, training and curriculum design support. Industry will find this highly relevant as it promotes upskilling, reskilling and cross skilling of their existing and potential resources. It will also improve the existing skill levels that will benefit a candidate for higher earning, ideation or self-employment and entrepreneurial opportunities
- There exists a need for proper accreditation for assuring the quality in RPL through Assessment, as RPL shall bring in qualitative changes in the Skill Management. and education formalization scenario;
- To accord help to student community to gain formalized education, IAC (International Accreditation Credit), would be a Global Educational Currency with Global Curriculum & acceptance.
- RPL across the globe will promote social inclusion, focus on lifelong learning and bring in the desirable change in the academic world by promoting diversity and inclusive campuses.
- NEP 2020 and MOOCs give an edge to skill education as the need for vocational education shall increase GER.
- Recognizing the informal learning via community colleges and other mediums are vital for the expansion of RPL model in India.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.11.21>

SUGGESTIONS

Reckoning the dire need for facilitation of RPL in India shall need:

- Establishment of a Ministerial Unified National body for Assessment of Learning and Award of Credits by attracting: Subject Matter Experts, Skill Councils, Universities aspiring to grant RPL Credits.
- Establishment of a National Body for coordination with UNESCO & ILO for global standards procedures for the award of RPL Credits to go for a global RPL footprint.
- Developing a National Policy on RPL in Higher Vocational Education

LIMITATIONS

- Speakers are invited based on the convenience of SVSU, as they all were in touch with the Institution.
- The Invitation had been sent to more speakers of other countries as well but due to some technical issues they could not participate in the webinar.
- The existing mind set in academic and policy world that requires a huge paradigm shift to recognize RPL as a need.
- Implement RPL in Higher Education in India is a game changer practice so it very difficult to gather all the information in single such initiative.
- The Pilot is based on the experience of only one Industry and only one Vocational UG Program

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, P. (2006). Higher Education in India: The Need for Change. New Delhi: Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations.
- AISHE (2014-15) Provisional Report, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2015.
- AISHE (2015-16) Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi, 2016.
- Chanana, K. (1993), 'Accessing Higher Education - The Dilemma of Schooling: Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Contemporary India,' Experience and Perspectives, New Delhi: Sage, pp. 115-54.
- Chauhan, S. (2010). Are we heading towards World Class Universities? University News, 48(28) July 12-18, 2010.
- Ernst & Young (2011), 40 million by 2020: Preparing for a New Paradigm in Indian Higher Education, EDGE report.