

Theme: Social Justice
Sub-theme: Access to justice

Access to ODL programmes at NAMCOL through Recognition of Prior Learning

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The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) aims to broaden access to education by providing alternatives to conventional means of education and training and facilitate life-long learning opportunities for Namibians. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of identifying, matching, assessing and crediting the knowledge, skills and experience that candidates have gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning. Comparing relevant prior learning and experience against the set learning outcomes.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is seen as having the capacity to widen access to education and training and to enhance the qualification status of historically disadvantaged adults and youth. By enabling people to apply what they already know and can do, RPL can reduce barriers and create opportunities that will lead to greater social and economic prosperity

As of 2008 NAMCOL committed itself to implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a route to admit adult learners to its programmes. This paper is discussing the NAMCOL RPL case study, sharing the achievement, challenges and way forward in using the RPL for access to ODL programmes at NAMCOL

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of identifying, matching, assessing and crediting the knowledge, skills and experience that candidates have gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning. It means the comparison of relevant prior learning and experience against the learning outcomes of nationally accepted standards (NAMCOL RPL Policy Guideline, 2008).

One of the key objectives of NAMCOL is to facilitate pathways to formal qualifications that are based on, or include, prior learning that has occurred outside formal education and training. RPL includes formal recognition of competencies and skills gained on the job or as a result of other informal or unstructured learning experiences. RPL includes formal recognition of competencies and skills gained on-the-job or as a result of other informal or unstructured learning experiences. RPL involves assessment to determine whether the applicant meets the requirements of the relevant subjects.

The South African qualifications Authority provides that RPL is a process whereby people's prior learning can be formally recognized in terms of registered qualifications and unit standards, regardless of where and how the learning was attained. RPL acknowledges that people never stop learning, whether it takes place formally at an educational institution, or whether it happens informally. (SAQA, June 2004)

RPL will play an integral role within the Namibian Education and Training sector, since one of the key features of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is to provide opportunities for Namibians to gain qualifications by recognising competencies regardless of where they have learned.

An RPL strategy supports the Namibian College of Open Learning's (NAMCOL) mission statement of providing wider access to quality educational services for learners and other customers using a variety of open learning methods.

All learning has value, regardless of where and how it was acquired. It espouses the principle that formal, non-formal or informal learning should be recognised and accredited in relation to NQF registered qualifications. Recognition of prior learning within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is intended to provide access to higher education for Namibians, and to redress the injustices of the past by recognising and accrediting relevant prior learning.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) represents a holistic approach to learning and the acknowledgement of the value of past learning and experience in a variety of contexts.

RPL is seen as a means to widen access to education and training and to enhance the qualification status of historically disadvantaged adults and youth. By enabling people to apply what they already know and can do, RPL can reduce barriers and create opportunities that will lead to greater social and economic prosperity.

NAMCOL is committed to RPL being accessible to those wishing to gain access to the institution for purposes of further study.

The implementation and management of RPL at NAMCOL is within the framework of the following National legislations:

- Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution which aims to provide all Namibians with equitable access to quality education.
- Education Act, Act No 16 of 2001, which rests on the pillars of accessibility, equity, quality and democracy in the provision of education and training services.
- The National Qualifications Framework which aims to provide mechanisms for Namibians to gain relevant qualifications by recognising the learning of Namibians regardless of when, how and where the learning took place.
- The Namibian College of Open Learning Act, Act 1 of 1997, which aims to broaden access to education by providing alternatives to conventional means of education and training and facilitate life-long learning opportunities for Namibians.

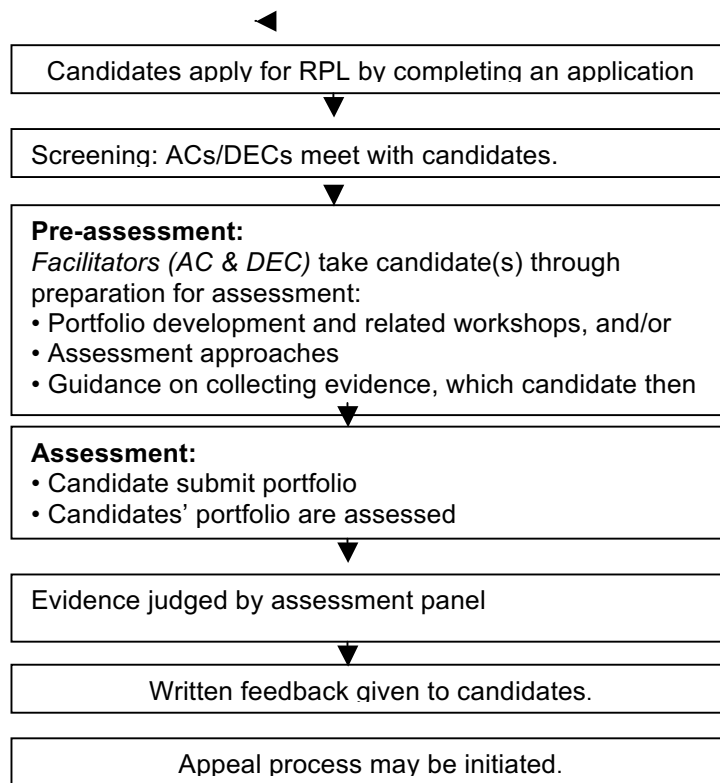
BENEFITS OF RPL

Following are some of the potential benefits of RPL:

- the main purpose of RPL at NAMCOL will be to provide access or/and alternative admission to formal studies;
- Increased self-confidence within the learner, reflecting on what they have learned, and realising that what they have learnt is now valued by others too, often leads to increased self confidence.
- recognises diversity of knowledge;
- Motivation to enter formal learning
- RPL validates learning gained through work and life experience. This process helps learners to:
 - ❖ think about what they have achieved so far through their experiences;
 - ❖ map their learning onto the NQF to identify level and credits;
- develop analytical and learning skills through the process of undertaking RPL itself;

The main focus of RPL is therefore the learning outcomes, in the form of skills and knowledge of experiences, and not how, when or where the learning occurred. Crediting the learner for skills, knowledge and experience already acquired;

The process of Assessing Recognition of Prior Learning at NAMCOL:



Portfolio refers to compilation of a folder of evidence according to portfolio guidelines. It is the process of collecting, substantiating and organising documented evidence to support an applicant's claim for prior learning assessment.

Fees: Candidates applying for RPL are required to pay a fee *based* on 10% of the average course fees for Professional Programmes for assessment services rendered, and not for credits awarded, as determined by the NAMCOL Board of Governors. These fees are based on the principle of full cost recovery.

Marketing: Information on NAMCOL's RPL policy and procedures are made available to prospective learners through the College Prospectus, marketing tools, website and by meeting individuals and corporate clients.

RPL practices subscribe to a learner-centred approach and meet the requirements and needs of the mature learners.

CRITERIA FOR RPL ASSESSMENT

These criteria are made available to the RPL candidates for self-assessment.

During the RPL process, prior learning is assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Relevance: Are the learning experiences applicable?
2. Validity: Is there a sound relationship between prior learning and the requirements of the course/ workplace?
3. Quality: Is the prior learning at an acceptable level?
4. Transferability: Can the learner interpret what he/she has learned, and transfer it to other situations?
5. Authenticity: Can the learner support claims of prior learning, and can it be verified by documentation/evidence?
6. Currency: Is the prior learning still valid and applicable?

Achievements of RPL at NAMCOL

Summary of the Learners who are admitted into the Certificate Programme in Education for Development (CED) programme through during 2009

Certificate in Education for Development (CED) is a two year distance education programme designed to meet the professional needs of adult educators and community workers. During February 2009, the first group of fifteen candidates went through the process of RPL. After the assessment of the candidates' portfolio, only eight qualified to be admitted into the Certificate in Education for Development.

The table below summarises the academic performance of the learners during the 2009 academic year

Candidate	Gender	Age In years	Occupation	Years of working experience	% subjects Passed at end of academic year	2010 Status
Candidate 1	female	47	Principal Community Activator	16 years	100%	Final year
Candidate 2	female	49	Community Activator	17 years	66%	Final year
Candidate 3	female	45	Principal Community Activator	17 years	66%	Final year
Candidate 4	female	42	Principal Community Activator	13 years	100%	Final year
Candidate 5	Male	51	Sign Language Officer	10 years	66%	Final year
Candidate 6	female	49	Community Liaison Officer	17 years	100%	Final year
Candidate 7	female	39	Community Mobiliser	11 years	66%	Final year
Candidate 8	female	48	Literacy Promoter	16 years	Dropped out	Dropped out

Summary of the Learners admitted into the Certificate in Early Childhood Development (CECD) programme through RPL during 2010

The Certificate in Early Childhood is a one year distance education programme aimed at providing appropriate training to people working in the Early Childhood Centres.

Nineteen learners have been admitted into the Certificate in Early Childhood Development during February 2010 through Recognition of Prior Learning process.

The table below summarises the performance of the learners in the assignments up to June 2010

Candidate	Gender	Age In years	Occupation	Years of working experience	% Assignments Passed (Jan-June)	2010 Status
Candidate 1	female	26	Caregiver	7 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 2	female	22	Caregiver	4 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 3	female	25	Caregiver	5 years	66%	Semester 2
Candidate 4	female	25	Caregiver	4 years	Dropped out	Dropped out
Candidate 5	female	36	Pre-Primary Teacher	10 years	Dropped out	Dropped out
Candidate 6	female	40	Pre-Primary Teacher	18 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 7	female	27	Pre-Primary Teacher	6 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 8	female	30	Pre-Primary Teacher	8 years	Dropped out	Dropped out
Candidate 9	female	30	Pre-Primary Teacher	7 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 10	female	22	Caregiver	4 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 11	female	30	Caregiver	6 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 12	female	35	Caregiver	8 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 13	female	26	Caregiver	6 years	Dropped out	Dropped out
Candidate 14	female	35	Pre-Primary Teacher	13 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 15	male	26	Pre-Primary Teacher	4 years	Dropped out	Dropped out
Candidate 16	male	26	Pre-Primary Teacher	3 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 17	female	33	Caregiver	4 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate 18	male	25	Pre-Primary Teacher	5 years	100%	Semester 2
Candidate	female	26	Caregiver	4 years	100%	Semester 2

It is note worthy to mention that learners who have been admitted into the programmes through RPL are performing at same level or at times even better, than those who got into the programmes meeting the academic requirements.

These learners would not have been able to enroll for further studies, if it was not for RPL. RPL has widened access to education especially to the marginalized groups in the society.

Challenges

Language is a limitation to most of the learners admitted through RPL, because all the causes are offered in English. Learners are having a very good understanding of issues, they can relate the subject contents to the work experiences.

The learners need more contact sessions, in which the tutors can explain the concepts at a slower pace and in a more simplified language. Mentoring sessions have to be implemented to assist those learners who need guidance.

The administration of the RPL process is a lot of work and will need an officer dedicated to that only in order to ensure its smooth running. Otherwise, RPL is worth implementing to ensure that more people gain access to further learning or get certification for the skills and competencies obtained through life.

References

Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning – SAQA, June 2004
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Namibian College of Open Learning RPL Policy- NAMCOL, April 2008.

National Policy Guideline on RPL- NQA, February 2010

