

Certifying Informally Developed Skills through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

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Abstract

Assessing the skill level of workers acquiring skills informally and recognising it formally through certification within the National Technical Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF) are a high priority in the National Skill Development Policy adopted in 2011. With over 80% of the workforce employed in the informal sector, an a large majority acquiring their skills informally through work experience, assessing and certifying the skill level of these workers are obviously a huge task. This article describes the concept and rationale of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the mechanism and process to be applied in this effort. The challenges and lessons are also noted briefly. The Annex includes a fact sheet on RPL as a ready reference for readers.

Key words: RPL, NTVQF, Informal employment, non-formal skill development.

Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL is a system of formal recognition of skills acquired informally or in a nonformal way through certifications by the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) regulatory authority, in case of Bangladesh it is Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB). In Bangladesh more than 80% of skilled work force providing services to formal and informal industry and service sectors acquire skills informally. The forms of informalities are informal apprentices under Master Crafts Person (MCP), helper, assistant or even ordinary worker. Recognition of their skills will create opportunities for them to have access to formal TVET qualifications, lead them to career building, make them more productive as a result of their increasing acceptability by the employers and empower them both socially and economically. Another benefit of RPL is the export of high-value certified skilled manpower to foreign countries which bring foreign currency for the country.

The newly developed “National Skills Development Policy – 2011” (NSDP) of Bangladesh created a provision for recognition i.e. a provision to grant formal accreditation to those skills informally gained without any formal schooling through its National Technical Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF). It is intended specifically to do so through its two steps of Pre-vocational level of qualification applying the process adopted in the Quality Assurance System.

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Bangladesh National Skills Development Policy attaches great importance to RPL

- Many citizens acquire skills and knowledge through work and other life experience without access to formal education or training. In order to recognise the skills and knowledge acquired and provide enhanced pathways into further education and training, a system for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) will be introduced. (Sub-section 13.1. of NSDP)
- Wherever possible, the recognition should be conducted against the competencies and qualifications embedded within the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). (Sub-section 13.2.c. of NSDP)
- The Government and its partners will also explore the potential for introducing assessment centres for RPL to be regulated by the same quality standards applicable to accredited training institutions. (Sub-section 13.4. of NSDP) (MOE, 2011)

RPL also contributes to promotion of equity and access to skill development as large number of Bangladesh workforce have acquired no formal skills. On the other hand, the proportion of girls' enrolment in formal TVET in Bangladesh is insufficient (around 20% of total). RPL process will help minimize the gap of gender inequality in TVET, if RPL assessment can be taken to their door step (ILO, 2012a)

ILO implemented the TVET Reform Project (EU-funded), worked with BTEB and developed Competency Standards for fifteen informal sector occupations at Pre-vocational Level 2 and National Competency (NC) Level 1 qualifications for the following occupations: Electrical Installation and Maintenance (construction), Plumbing, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning (RAC), TV Servicing, Mobile Phone Servicing, Motorcycle Servicing, Solar Electrical System Installation and Maintenance, RMG Sewing Machine Operation, Tailoring and Dress Making, Block Batique and Screen Printing, Beauty Care, Embroidery, Karchupi Works, Tiles Works and Jute Bag and Box Making.

Government is very eager to implement RPL and BTEB is expanding its provision all around the country. Currently, as of June 2016, BTEB has accredited 85 assessment centres around the country of which 35 centres are conducting RPL assessment and the figure of certified workers has increased to around nine thousand covering Pre-vocational Level 2, NC Level 1 and NC Level 2. World Bank-funded STEP Project has been promoting large scale implementation of RP (ILO, 2012b).

RPL implementation process

RPL implementation process includes the following steps:

- Development and approval of Competency Standards and Course Accreditation Documents for occupations
- Development of Assessment Tools
- Accreditation of Assessment Centres
- Certification of Industry Assessors

- Identification of potential assesses
- Organisation of assessment events

Challenges

- The main challenge in the RPL effort is to bring candidates to assessment centres. For example, one needs to communicate with those potential assesses; get them ready for assessment; get them released from their workplace to go to the assessment centre; pay their transport allowances and assessment fees; and organize the assessment events at different locations. Approximately BDT 4,000 (US\$50) is required for the assessment of one qualification for each participant.
- The second challenge is to get the certified assessors for each of the occupations around the assessment centres.
- The third challenge is to develop and approve competency standards for hundreds of informal sector occupations. Currently Pre-vocational level Competency Standards are available at BTEB for only 24 occupations.
- As per Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Labour Force Survey – 2010 (BBS LFS) the total employed labour force was 54 million with an annual growth rate of employment of 3.2% and, as such, with the same rate of growth, the employed workforce was estimated at 59 million in 2013. More than 80 % of this workforce are employed in the informal sector, obviously with some level of skills. So the challenge is to reach out to this huge population of workers and undertake assessment and certification of their skills.

Lessons learnt

1. Organisation of one to two-day orientation sessions for the potential assessment candidates is essential for ice-breaking. It has been learnt from experience that for a better success rate orientation is required for the candidates to understand what to do and how to do along with demonstration of skills competency. For each Unit of Competency in each qualification, appropriate reading, writing, OSH skills need to be demonstrated along with the technical skills.
2. Selection of the right type of candidates as prospective assessors is important. To perform as an assessor, only technical skill sare not enough; writing, reading and interviewing skills are also required to conduct the assessment. It has been observed that some people have high level of technical skills but not the required level of reading and writing skills, which causes difficulty in performing with the required level of professionalism with respect to all elements of the assessment.

References

- MOE (2011). National Skill Development Policy. Dhaka: Ministry of Education
- ILO (2012a). Technical and Vocational Education and Training Bangladesh, Skills vision 2016. Dhaka: International Labour Organisation.
- ILO (2012b). Fact Sheet 14: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Dhaka: International Labour Organisation

Annex

FACTSHEET ON

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Bangladesh

CONCEPT

Recognition of Prior Learning gives credit for competencies gained through previous learning, other training, work or life experience as part of skill assessment. It formally recognizes the skills and knowledge

that a person already possesses against competencies in the National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). There are three pathways to assessment in the National Competency Assessment and Certification System (CACs), as noted below; and RPL is involved in two of them:

- 1 Training and assessment pathway (participating in an accredited training course delivered by a Registered Training Organization)
- 2 Assessment only pathway (RPL)
- 3 Combination pathway (Training and assessment for some units of competency and RPL for other units of competency)

The result of an RPL process can be credit for all the competencies in a qualification or just some of them. Credit given can allow for entry into a qualification and/or provide credit towards achieving the qualification, thereby possibly reducing the training time required for a learner to achieve a qualification. Assessment can only be conducted by Registered Assessors who have completed training on RPL, familiarisation with common types of evidence and assessment plans.

For example, Amin is a skilled welder working in the informal sector that wants to get a job in the formal sector but needs a Level 2 National Certificate in Welding. He has no paperwork to prove his skills and has trouble reading. He comes into the BTEB, gets an application form and submits it with photos of him welding and a letter from his employer.

He is asked to do a skill test and is given credit for all units except for two specific literacy units, which he completes through a night class. He is given his Level 2 Certificate.

As many of the applicants for RPL assessment will be from non-formal pathways and may not have documented evidence, be illiterate or come from marginalized groups, it is important that there are fair alternatives to meet the needs of different groups. BTEB will consult with industry groups and other relevant ministries to agree on the most useful methods to provide evidence of skills in any given situation.

Collecting evidence

The primary means of evidence will be practice-based, that is assessed through hands-on skills testing. This can be supported by secondary means of evidence such as work simulation and/or verbal questioning.

Portfolios can also be submitted as secondary evidence, highlighting the applicant's prior learning, achievements and experience. Examples of portfolio items could include work samples, photographs or videos of work, records of practical 'on the job' assessment by previous supervisors, skills log books or letters from employers.

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More on Assessment Design

RPL assessment design processes must be consistent with the national assessment design process outlined in NQSAS Manual 4: Accreditation of Assessment Centres.

- Fifteen courses in high-demand occupations (ready-made garments, mobile phone servicing, jute and paper bag maker, tailoring, plumbing, beauty therapy, etc.) will be accredited by BTEB under the NTVQF.
- One instructor/teacher and one industry representative for each of the fifteen occupations in each of the six divisional headquarters (180 in total) will be trained as Registered Competency Assessors and accredited by BTBEB under the NTVQF.
- Accredited Assessment Centres across the six divisional areas will be identified; these will operate both as stand-alone centres and as attachments to institutions. All AACs will be registered with BTEB.
- Approximately 10,000 candidates will be assessed through the RPL process as described below.
 - 1 Applicant (or sponsor) pays necessary RPL fee.
 - 2 Applicant completes the RPL application form/self-assessment form available from an Accredited Assessment Centre (AAC).
 - 3 The AAC advises the applicant on the types of evidence that could be used to support their application.
 - 4 The applicant collects copies of evidence and a declaration of their authenticity from the document provider.
 - 5 Each piece of evidence should be clearly marked so that the Registered Competency Assessor can quickly understand which part of the self-assessment that it supports. One document can be referred to in as many occasions as it is relevant.
 - 6 Once all the evidence is collected, the application form and evidence is delivered to the assessor.
 - 7 Once the application form and the evidence have been reviewed by the assessor the applicant will be interviewed and/or asked to undertake skills testing by the assessor to verify the legitimacy of the applicant's claims.
 - 8 The assessor will then make a decision on whether the applicant is competent against the units of competency they have applied for, and inform the applicant of the outcome.
 - 9 If the applicant is deemed as not yet competent or wishes to gain competency in additional units, he/she can do so through the normal pathways of institutional or workplace training and assessment.