LEVERAGING ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL) FOR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT
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LEVERAGING ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL) FOR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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2011
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**CHAPTER 6**

**ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD FOR APEL IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA**

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This booklet provides useful information and knowledge on Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) from the theoretical perspective to the practices of APEL in the education and training sectors in Malaysia. The move by the Malaysian Government to recognize APEL is a strategic move to develop the seamless flow of training and learning, before we could have the type of workforce required as a developed country. Already demonstrated in the form of Malaysian Qualification Framework, the implementation of APEL in Malaysia has yet to reach the desired level. Much has to be coordinated across ministries and institutions before the seamless flow could be practiced.

This booklet also reveals the potential of application of APEL in Higher Education Institution (HEIs) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) in developing countries like Malaysia. The key features of an APEL practice, assessment process, tool and instrument, role of assessors, quality assurance of APEL are discussed and provide a systematic view particularly in the process of assessment. Against the background of the changes in higher education – particularly its inclusion in a different form of linkage to the needs of economic development – it is interesting to assess what is riding on the introduction of APEL to the new learning path in the MQF and to try to grasp its current and future implications. This booklet also looked into the nature of the Malaysian certification system – and how it fits in with the possibilities opened up by lifelong learning, to understand the role that the APEL could play in the transformation of higher education in Malaysia. In principle, APEL is desirable, but if implemented without careful consideration of appropriate approaches for different target groups of learners, it will not be beneficial either for the learners involved or for the system as a whole. The different APEL perspectives from various countries highlighted the fact that successful implementation of RPL is complex and difficult, and that 'upgrading' of learners should be understood as both access and human capital development issues.

The author would like readers to reflect on the practices of APEL with respect to the fundamental and importance of APEL in the development of our workforce and at the same time to assess the extent of APEL being practiced in your organizations. The next strategic move is expected out of readers and may this small contribution provide readers with sufficient tools for APEL implementation.
I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my colleagues in the Office, my three head of departments, my personal assistant Pn. Nor Syafida bt Mohd Narsardin; Cik Nur Hidayah Muslik; Cik Norhafizah bt. Ruslan, members of Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education; and other UTHM staff who have contributed directly or indirectly in the production of this Booklet and in organizing my lecture. I would also like to convey my appreciation to the top management of the University for providing this opportunity in sharing the knowledge and practice of Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) to the academics and non-academic alike. My special thanks also go to colleagues in the Office of Strategic Management and Quality who have been very supportive of my work. My special thanks is also due to the Vice Chancellor Dato’ Professor Dr. Mohd Noh Dalimin for his provocative recommendations of this topic and also for giving me the inspiration to deliver this topic. Finally, my heartiest love and gratitude to my husband and family for their never ending encouragement and inspiration.

Prof. Dr. Noraini Kaprawi
26 May 2011
CURRICULUM VITAE

Professor Dr. Noraini was born in Parit Raja in 1960 and went to tengku Mariam Primary School before furthering her secondary school at Temenggong Ibrahim Girls School, Batu Pahat and then to Sekolah Menengah Teknik, Bukit Piatu Melaka. Later she continued her A level at the Blackpool College, UK to do A level under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Education. She took Physics at the Aston University, Birmingham, United Kingdom.

She went on to pursue her Postgraduate Teacher Certificate, at the Temenggong Ibrahim Teachers College (MPTI), Johor Bahru, Malaysia, before being posted as Physics teacher at a number of Schools. Her search for self upgrading took her to UTM where she took M.Sc in Technology Management. Her interest in Higher Education grew further when she finally completed her Ph.D in Management of Higher Education (Organisational Effectiveness and Human Resource Development) at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

During her tenure at the Ministry of Education, as Assistant Director, Technical and Vocational Education Planning and Research Division, she was involved in managing the consultancy projects mainly conducted by international consultants for Polytechnics in Malaysia.

Her interest and expertise on the Management of Higher Education took her to KUiTTHO in 2001, where she taught Research Methods and Statistics for postgraduates courses. Due to her management skills, she was appointed as the Director for Continuing Education Centre (CEC) where she managed to secure a number of training projects such as the Industrial Skills Enhancement Programmes (INSEP) projects for unemployed graduates in technical skills and technologies. Upon bringing CEC to a good start, she took the responsibility as the Director of Strategic and Quality Management Office in 2009.

Actively involved in the postgraduate supervision, she has graduated 2 Doctorates and numerous Masters in TVET. Concurrently, she is actively involved in Research and Development through a number of FRGS projects that she led and participated as researcher. Apart from involving research at the National front, she also participated in the EU-AsiaLink project, The Development of Transnational Standards for Teacher Training for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TT-TVET) with a multidisciplinary and Industrial Orientation: EU-Asia-Link Project and UNESCO UNEVOC research.

Her previous job of handling consultants, has contributed towards her ability to secure and managing consultancy projects. She led the INSEP and the Development and Implementation of Certificate and Diploma Programmes for Casting Technology, Packaging Technology and Automotive Technology at the Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara, Temerloh. In another World Bank funded consultancy project in The Heshimite Kingdom of Jordan, she performs as a consultant for gender equalities and Quality Assurance System.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Role of Higher Education and Training in Human Capital Development

Malaysia, with a population of 28 million is a medium-sized country and at this stage of its development can be described as a middle-level economy. Under the Tenth Malaysian Plan (2011-2015), and human capital development lies at the foundation and at the core of innovation and a productive high income economy. It is the most important investment a country makes. No economy can succeed without a highly skilled talent base that is able to rapidly respond creatively to economic changes, and is centered on developing and utilizing knowledge. To achieve the Malaysia’s aspirations, it is imperative to develop, attract and retain a first-world talent base.

Towards nurturing top talent, the Government undertakes a comprehensive reform across the entire life-cycle of human capital development, from upgrading early childhood education right through to upskilling the existing adult workforce. One of the special emphasis given to enablers of productivity, was specifically focusing on skills development. Hence, skills training will be given special emphasis under the Tenth Plan to ensure that Malaysia develops the necessary human capital to meet industry’s requirements and drive productivity improvements. Technical education and vocational training will be mainstreamed, with a focus towards raising the quality of qualifications.

Human Capital Development is one of the key enabling factors in our pursuit for prosperity and sustainable economy and thus, it must be stressed in any transformation agenda. The 10th Malaysian Plan’s focuses reflects the importance of developing, and nurturing quality talent base human capital. For the next five years, the Tenth Plan will be the means to jumpstart the nation’s move towards a high-income economy. The Tenth Plan will focus on the following key areas:

a) Creating the environment for unleashing economic growth. This will be the anchor of the Plan, as it details strategies to create an environment that fosters economic growth with the private sector as the main driver;

b) Moving towards inclusive socioeconomic development. There will be measures to ensure income and wealth is distributed in an equitable manner thereby reducing inequalities. The objective will be to build a more inclusive society;

c) Developing and retaining a first-world talent base. This will be the key to promote productivity and innovation-led growth. Central to this will be strategies to develop, attract and retain quality talent base;
d) Building an environment that enhances quality of life. Economic growth will be supplemented by strategies to raise the quality of life of the rakyat that commensurate with the country’s higher income status; and
e) Transforming Government to transform Malaysia. The role of government will evolve to become an effective facilitator in the transformation of the economy and provide quality services to the rakyat. ¹

A knowledge and innovation-based economy inspired in the tenth Malaysian plan, requires a critical mass of knowledge workers such as scientists, engineers, patent agents and ‘technopreneurs’. As such, higher education institutions have an important role in producing highly skilled people and enablers of systemic social change, who are able to create, innovate, and exploit new ideas as well as apply and develop technologies needed to transform Malaysia into a more prosperous nation. Innovative and competitive mechanism and tools are needed to address the employability issues, skills shortages and mismatches which still remain major issues of human capital development. Effective systems will also motivate the development of intellectual capital of the highest quality which is critical in Malaysia and must be emphasized by HEIs, in order to accelerate the nation’s progress in its pursuit to a developed country through our New Economic Model (NEM).

Malaysia urgently requires a transformation in Higher Education (HE) and is very serious in its transformation plan. This is reflected through its National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007-2020 and beyond) which laid down the stepping stone towards promoting long-term objectives of human capital development. The ultimate aim of which is to empower Malaysian higher education, in order to meet the nation’s developmental needs and to build its stature both at home and internationally.² This transformation plan also aims on squarely holistic human capital development and to produce Malaysians who are intellectually active, adaptable, creative and innovative, ethically and morally upright, and capable of critical thinking in which without this characteristics the NEM is just a mere rhetoric. We can be proud that Malaysia has been successful in the democratisation and massification of higher education that ensures equitable development and broad access to higher education. In order to meet the demands of new global challenges, however, we must ensure that quality remains an integral focus of higher education. The future economic, social, and spiritual well-being of our nation depends critically on the success of this transformation. The economic repercussions of failure cannot be underestimated.

‘Malaysia cannot afford to lag behind. Developmentally, Malaysia has decided that it can no longer rely on foreign direct investments (FDI) in low-cost labour-intensive industries for its future economic growth. To remain competitive in these changing market conditions, we must generate high value-add capabilities to raise our position in the global value chain. This will enable us to not only attract higher value-add knowledge-intensive investments, but also to export our own product and service innovations to other markets.’

(PSPTN, pg 7)

Wealth will continue to be created in countries that can develop and attract human capital that is able to generate new knowledge and commercialize it to meet the world’s needs. The importance of tertiary and higher education in this process must not be overlooked—it is today considered by both developed and developing nations to be a critical agenda in the formulation of national policies. With respect to this, tertiary education in Malaysia includes skills training, vocational training, matriculation and university education that fall within the domains of various ministries and government agencies. In order to trigger this process, The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007-2015) has focus on five critical agendas which will act as catalysts of change, where Lifelong Learning is one of them;

- APEX Universities
- MyBrain15
- Academic Performance Audit
- **Lifelong Learning (LLL)**
- Graduate Training Scheme

We are, indeed, at a critical phase in the nation's economic transformation towards Vision 2020. The talent base and workforce of high-income nations include a number of key characteristics, specifically around higher education qualifications to promote knowledge generation and innovation, high skill-levels in both technical and professional fields, and strong levels of productivity. Regarding these characteristics, Malaysia has a long way to go and will need to concentrate efforts to catch up with a first-world skill and talent base by 2020.

1.1 Transformation of Lifelong Learning

Due to the rapid pace of globalization and technological change, the changing nature of work and the employment market, and the gaping disparities in access to learning opportunities between the knowledge-haves and knowledge have-nots, Lifelong Learning (LLL) has become one of the critical agenda under the Malaysian National Higher Education Action Plan (PSPTN) as a policy agenda continues to receive significant emphasis by developed nations. In relation to this, the Ministry of

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Higher Education has outlined its focus on seven strategic thrusts which is in line and fits the 4 Ministerial Key Result Areas (MKRA) as shown in Figure 1.1 below.

As in figure 1.1, Enculturation of LLL together with improving the Quality of teaching and learning and also strengthening HEIs are related to the increase of access to quality of HE as well as enhancing the HE quality. The Government needs to play an essential and important role in setting the direction and creating the instruments to govern the development of lifelong learning. However, Malaysia urgently needs a clear, coherent, and comprehensive policy on lifelong learning.

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Fig. 1.1: PSPTN Strategic Thrust and The Related MKRA

1.2 APEL-RPL: A Powerful Tool for a Friendly Learning and Training Pathway

Learning occurs in many contexts that include work, involvement in social, community or sporting activities, or learning through life experience generally. Much of this informal or non-formal learning is relevant to the learning or competency outcomes of formal qualifications within the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF). In principle, these learning’s can also provide learners with the required knowledge and individual development necessary to enter more advanced learning programmes, when they have not been able to acquire these prerequisites in the mainstream. A mechanism or tool that could assess (or credential) that learning is crucially needed so that it can be counted towards achievement of a qualification. The education and training system in Malaysia is now very much at the point where it must develop and implement the mechanism in concrete ways in a vast range of different education and training contexts. Accreditation of Prior
Experiential Learning (APEL) is envisaged as the mechanism whereby this recognition of diverse learning experiences will be carried out.

APEL could provide a powerful tool that enables the process of assessing and validating prior (experiential) learning to be carried out. In an Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) research paper (2000), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was identified as a powerful tool for bringing people into the learning system (2000, p.93). It was seen as a key strategy to increasing motivation and building confidence, which leads to participation in learning. The ANTA national marketing strategy widely supported a need for strategies to improve the implementation of RPL, and to develop quick and cost effective access to the process.

As in other Quality Agencies in other parts of the world, Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) has also about the same reasons why recognizing prior informal and non-formal learning has become to be very important objective;

- Offering alternative pathways - APEL-RPL opens opportunities for people as it recognized not only formal learning, but also informal and non-formal learning.
- Accrediting learning for disadvantaged groups- for many reasons, many individuals (particularly people from disadvantaged groups) have not had the opportunity either to succeed (perhaps due to unfavorable environments or experiences) or participate in formal post compulsory education and training. However, ‘learning’ does occur throughout their lives, and much of this learning is relevant and valuable to their competencies enhancement and thus could be counted towards a qualification which could help in their career development.
- Save on money and time - people should not have to pay for learning to be repeated, and pay for, learning they have already achieved, and so the government and thus the taxpayers. It will be also a waste of resources and time if there is no value added in their course or qualification they are undertaking;
- Mechanism for human resource management – staff selection and recruitment, appraisal, training needs analysis and staff career development.
- Mechanism for acknowledging knowledge and skills developed in industries or enterprises through informal and informal learning - Knowledge and skills generated in workplace are valuable as it is sometimes new and at the ‘cutting-edge’ to meet the needs of the rapid and ever changing customers. New courses to meet up with the rapid development of technology and needs of customers, takes time to be offered in universities/institutions. Thus APEL-RPL should be able to capture those ‘learning outcomes’ achieved in work places or everyday life and accredited equivalent to formal education and training qualifications.

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4 Australian National Training Authority (2000), *A national marketing strategy for VET: Meeting client needs*
Thus APEL-RPL pathway to a qualification is fundamental to developing a post-compulsory education and training system that has multiple pathways to qualifications. APEL pathways can contribute to a system that is accessible, transparent and equitable. It is premised on a philosophy that values and recognizes the learning of all Malaysians, and stakes a claim for the legitimacy of that learning within formal education and training. An open system that is able to embrace learning from diverse sources is more dynamic, more capable of creating new knowledge, and in involving people in extending and applying that knowledge. APEL is one strategy that can contribute to the transformation of institutional practices, courses and curriculum to ensure the outcomes meet the needs of all stakeholders. It cannot do this on its own, but this process of transformation will be much more hesitant, slower and less complete without the inclusion of APEL.

This chapter has signaled the importance of APEL-RPL as a key initiative in the effort of widening access and equity to education and training and also to realize the achievement of Lifelong Learning as stated in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) of Malaysia. This has also been reflected by the effort of MQA in developing the policy and guideline of APEL which is in the pipeline. APEL could be a ‘friendly’ learning pathway that students could use, where it combined with their life and work experience where they are becoming increasingly complex. However, a great deal of uncertainty often remains regarding how AP(E)L works in practice. This uncertainty often discourages institutions from offering APEL and discourages those who have a potential APEL claim from embarking on the APEL process.

Thus the following chapters will explore the various definitions, benefits and functions of APEL-RPL. Despite the differing terminology, definitions and policy frameworks of APEL-RPL, this booklet aims to illustrate the understandings of and terminology used around the world and also identify principles and the obstacles to the implementation of APEL as well as the mechanisms that facilitate the use of APEL. It is also aimed to gain an insight into actual practice and systems used by educational institutions and organizations particularly related to adult education to deal with prior learning. It also intends to explore the best practices of implementation processes that the Malaysian HEIs could share and adopt in their practices. It is imperative that if all learning is to be valued that there is greater consistency in the way that APEL is implemented. This will increase opportunities for students and employees in Malaysia to access education and training pathways, and to have their prior learning as well as performance counted towards a qualification or certification. Thus, it is hoped that through this discussion, it could give inputs to the practitioners of APEL in the following aspects;

- Enhanced the widening access of Higher Education (HE) through ‘friendly’ learning pathways, particularly for those from under-represented social background and late ‘bloomers’.
- Promote lifelong and life wide learning
• Enhancement of the strategies in facilitating and the implementation of APEL as a pathway towards the partial or complete achievement of recognition or qualification.
• Effective APEL in HEIs and Recognition of Prior Achievement (RPA) in Department of Skills Development (DSD) in the process of increasing the certification of skilled workers. Currently, there is about 60,000 employees in Malaysia that has yet to be certified to be able for their skills to be recognized.
CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS APEL?

2.0 Introduction
APEL stands for Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning - a method of assessment by which learners can gain recognition for knowledge, understanding, skills and competences that they already possess. They may use this formal accreditation or validation for entry to a programme of study in place of the usual entry qualifications or for part of the final qualification (e.g.; diploma or degree) so that they avoid repeating learning that they can already demonstrate. In countries like France it is possible to obtain a whole diploma on the basis of APEL. In general APEL;

- It provides an alternative entry route and opportunities for you to claim credit from programmes of study
- It encourages you to recognize your skills, reflect on your experiences from paid or voluntary work and life experience
- It can give value to your experience by helping you to recognize what you have learnt
- It can develop your progression in learning or help you change direction and breakthrough into a new career

APEL is similar to Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) in as much as it is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) but is broader as it allows, in theory, for learning from any prior experience. Often APEL, APL and RPL are used synonymously and the terms overlap. In the Malaysian scenario, both the terms APEL and RPL are often used interchangeably, but however the Malaysian Qualification Framework is using the term APEL. Some practitioners / providers may use them with a specific emphasis, however, the differences are only small.

In the global scenario, APEL is also referred to by a number of other terms and the differential usage of the term is not systematic. Different country used a slightly different terminology and the various international terminologies for APEL are shown in Figure 2.1 below. The international acronym for APEL also reflects a multi range of possible approaches which will be discussed in the later chapters. In Australia, the term RPL is used while other terminologies are used in other countries; e.g., Britain, Ireland- Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Canada- Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), France- Validation of Acquired Professional Learning (VAP), The Netherlands - Eerder Verworven Competenties (EVC), etc.
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<td>USA</td>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>Prior Learning Assessment</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>VAP</td>
<td>Validation des Acquis professionels (Validation of acquired professional learning/experience)</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1: Various international terminologies for APEL

2.1 Definition of APEL

APEL describes the process of giving formal recognition to learning derived from informal learning, personal and experiential. The process requires active reflection and analysis of experiences and a self-evaluation profile to extract the learning achieved for measurement against learning outcomes. APEL is associated with both credit and access, the institution seeks to formalize learning through monitoring while the individual undergoes a learning experience through an active process of reflection and evaluation (Cleary et al., 2002). APEL is also often closely associated and sometimes subsumed within Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Wheelahan et al., (2003) refers RPL to the assessment of an individual’s learning which can be used to gain access to a course or qualification, and/or partial or total completion of a qualification. Thus, it is a process that can be used to recognize and finally validate the acquired learning (RPL Centre Working Group, 2007) which can be acquired through:

- informal training/study
- work experience/employment and/or
- life experiences

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6 RPL Centre Working Group (2007), Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL), RPL Centres: Synthesis of Research, RPL Coordinating Group, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

7 Skillup Australia (undated), RPL, RCC, Policy and Procedure,
RPL focuses on the learning outcomes of these experiences, not how, when or where the learning occurred. In the case of Australia, previously acquired skills and knowledge can be identified and assessed against standards set by industry and the Department of Education, Science & Training (DEST).  

However, across the literature and in practice there are various definitions and terms in use pertaining to APEL and some providers even includes the usage of the terms like Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC), Skills Recognition (RC) and Recognition. RCC means recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. Similar to RPL, these competencies may be attained in a number of ways including through any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience or general life experience. Interpretation of APEL is further confused when clients are offered various opportunities for skills recognition through processes referred to as accelerated learning, early assessment and fast-tracking, all offered after tuition has begun.

The term ‘Accreditation of Prior Learning’ (APL) which are used by countries like United Kingdom and Ireland, incorporates both ‘Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning’ (APCL) and APEL as well as RPL. Basically, APL is used to encapsulate the range of activity and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of prior learning has taken place. Prior learning is part of and also shapes an individual’s biography. In reflecting upon their learning experiences learners are also reflecting upon their life experiences.

Thus it follows that APEL extends to encompass a wider range of learning experiences which includes informal and informal, planned and unplanned, certificated and uncertificated learning which characterizes ‘life-wide learning’. Thus APEL is a process by which appropriate experiential and uncertificated learning is given recognition and an academic value. The ‘volume’ and the ‘taxonomy’ of the academic value is reflected in terms of academic credit points at a particular level. Experiential learning encompasses knowledge, skills and behaviours acquired in a planned or unplanned way through life, especially work. In relation to that, APEL could be generally defined as a formal acknowledgement (based on professional assessment) of learning acquired from previous experience which encompasses experiences unrelated to an academic context. Nevertheless there have been various definitions of APEL and its associates, APL and RPL, from several countries and organisations.

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9 Skillup Australia (undated), RPL, RCC, Policy and Procedure.
10 Training Services and Development Unit, The University of Melbourne RTO, RPL Portfolio (2009), Diploma of Management RPL RCC booklet.
In Malaysia, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined by the MQA (1998) as follows:

‘Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirement’.

Later in 2009, APEL was conceptualized and the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) defined it as;

‘A systematic process that involves the identification, documentation and assessment of prior experiential learning (i.e., knowledge, skills and attitude) to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes, for access to a programme of study and/or award of credits.’

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) define RPL as:

‘All prior learning which has not previously been assessed or credit-rated'. The Handbook goes on to say that this includes, ‘prior learning achieved through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained in non-formal contexts through community-based learning; workplace learning and training; continuing professional development; and independent learning’. (SCQF Partnership 2007, p3)

The AQTF 2007 (Australian Qualifications Training Framework 2007) essential standards define RPL as:

“An assessment process that assesses an individual’s non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.” (2007, p 49)

While RCC in the AQTF Standards for RTOs is defines as the:

‘…recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. RCC assesses the individual’s prior learning to determine the extent to which that individual is currently competent against the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.’

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In South Africa, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined by the NSB Regulations (1998) as follows:

‘Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirement.’ (Ronel Hynes, 2009)

Swinburne University of Technology defined RPL as

‘Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) acknowledges skills and knowledge gained outside the university and TAFE system, through paid or volunteer work, informal or employer-based training and during certain degree programs that a student hasn’t graduated from.’

The AQF Advisory board research\(^{13}\) confirms the amount of jargon and definitional issues associated with RPL. Despite of that however, the literature undertaken has shown that to a certain extent, the definitions of APEL and RPL shows close similarity in purpose and functions. Thus the term APEL, APL and RPL will be used interchangeably in this book.

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2.2 Differences between APEL-RPL and Credit transfer

In many HEIs, APEL-RPL can be sought through various ways. As an example, RPL at Monash University in Australia\(^\text{14}\) may be sought by seeking;

- credit for prior academic work; or
- recognition of prior learning (RPL) for non-credentialed work (for example, relevant work experience). Various types of credit may be granted.

Most Malaysian HEIs also practice RPL by recognizing the student’s prior learning which includes their experiential learning, especially for the clients involved with continuing education. However, for most of the mainstream programme in most public universities, ‘RPL’ in the form of credit transfer is used to seek credit for a course or subject already completed. This involves assessing a previously completed course or subject to see if it provides equivalent learning or competency outcomes to those required within the student’s current course of study.

Nevertheless, Wheelahan et al., (2003) noted that there are differences between RPL and credit transfer;

- RPL assesses the individual’s learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification
- Credit transfer assesses the initial course or subject that the individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in, the destination course to determine the extent to which it is equivalent to the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards in a qualification. This need not confine credit transfer to credentialed courses within the AQF framework. The key distinguishing characteristic is that it is the course or subject that is assessed for equivalence, not the student.

In relation to that, the Australian Qualification Framework defined credit transfer as a process based on formal credit arrangements or protocols negotiated by institutions on the basis of articulated course content and independent of the individual applicant. By contrast, the RPL process involves a case-by-case assessment of the individual’s knowledge and skills, which may be derived from a whole range of learning experiences, including workplace learning and general life experience, to determine how much credit can be given towards the requirements of the desired qualification. It further explained that some of this learning may be formal, as in a short course but, unless a formal credit arrangement has been made, or protocols in place to negotiate credit, the only way to establish credit for this learning is through RPL assessment (AQF Advisory Board, 1997 cited in Wheelahan, L.(2003)).

Like many other countries, Malaysian HEIs also works by assigning each academic course/module a credit rating at a particular academic level. The credit rating reflects the length of the course/module or hours of study required, and the academic level is determined according to the standard required for assessment. This way, it enables students to utilize prior learning to count towards their current programme of study. In order to do this, they must have met the learning outcomes of a previously completed course(s)/module(s) and demonstrate how this can be mapped against the learning outcomes of a course(s)/module(s) on their current programme of study and how the prior learning could be potentially useful to them as a student or as a registered practitioner.

2.3 Who can use APEL?

APEL can be used by anyone with formal qualifications, irrespective of when, where or why they were taken. APEL is often used by a wide range of adult learners, particularly those who have little or no formal education. AP(E)L is often used by the following groups of learners to help them to regain entry to formal learning or as a contribution towards a programme of study:

- undergraduate and postgraduate students
- people wanting to improve upon existing qualifications
- people who left courses before achieving the formal qualifications
- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and who may lack formal qualifications
- those wanting to re-train or change careers
- women returning to education
- unemployed people seeking accreditation for past skills or informal learning
- people who have disabilities of some kind
- minority ethnic groups and asylum seekers

2.4 Summary

APEL is beginning to be researched, discussed and implemented in most developing countries. The variations in understanding of the meaning of APEL cannot be made as an excuse of not exploiting its potential in the human capital development for the country. It is therefore timely that a developing country like Malaysia is to quickly and rightly unleash this potential.
CHAPTER 3

PURPOSE, ROLE AND RELATED THEORY OF APEL

3.0 Introduction

APEL is undeniably an important potential tool and a key element for reforms and enhancement in the Malaysian qualification frameworks. It is also a viable mechanism to Higher Education and Training Institutions and other training providers for widening access and participation. It could also promote for social inclusion for those who have not had the opportunity for higher education and training, but nonetheless have much learning that is relevant to qualification outcomes. Thus APEL could provide the ‘disadvantage’ community an alternative learning and training pathways. However, despite the prominence of APEL, the take-up of APEL is relatively low in Malaysia, particularly the public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Except for the implementation of ‘Recognition of Prior Achievement’ (RPA) by DSD of the Ministry of Human Resource (MOHR), the APEL in HEIs has not acted well as a mechanism for social inclusion to education and training pathways for students and employees from the disadvantaged backgrounds. Perhaps, the understanding of APEL among the stakeholders in Malaysia are still vague and do not have a clear understanding of the purpose, role and benefits as well as the outcomes of APEL. It is hoped that this chapter would help to promote greater understanding of APEL among stakeholders, (particularly practitioners and students) in order to have confidence in APEL potentials and what it has to offer.

3.1 Purpose of APEL-RPL

Accreditation of Prior Learning originated in the United States of America (USA) shortly after the Second World War, with the passing of the GI Bill of 1946. There, the purpose was to enable returning soldiers, who have gained considerable knowledge and skills in active military duty, to receive credits for learning thus acquired.

Elsewhere, the purpose of RPL in South Africa is seen to be a key strategy to address the following issues:

- Redress of past unfair discrimination (due to APARTHEID) in education, training and employment opportunities;
- Equitable access to education and training; and
- Lifelong learning as a principle whereby participation of adults in education and training can be enhanced.

Likewise, in Malaysia, APEL is also seen to be a key strategy to achieve the following agenda of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2010- 2020 and beyond), namely:

- Supporting lifelong learning to realize the development of k-society and k-worker.
• Increase access and widening participation for tertiary and higher education and training
  o APEL provides an ‘alternative’ entry route to higher education and training.
  o Learners mobility

At the provider level, the purpose of APEL implementation within a particular sector (e.g., Tertiary and Higher Education Institutions, Training Institutions or Workplace-based education and Training centers or private providers) would be closely linked to the target market and target area. The qualification awarded (where all the requirements have been met) varies from academic to professional to vocationally oriented. Therefore, it goes without saying that obviously, there are varied purposes, that could include the following:

• Access – to provide ease of entry to appropriate level of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression.
• Placement – to determine the appropriate level for learners wanting to enter education and training through a diagnostic assessment.
• Advanced Status- to grant access to a level of a qualification higher than the logical next level following.
• Advanced Standing – to award credits towards a qualification for which a candidate has registered.
• Credit – to award formal, transferable credits to the learning that meets the requirements of the part or full qualification.
• Certification- to certify credits attained for the purpose of a qualification.

While at the individual level, the purposes of embarking on the APEL process are varied and this includes the following options\(^{15}\):

• Personal development and/or certification of current skills without progression into a learning programme, if the candidates so chooses;
• Progression into a learning programme, using APEL to fast track progression through the learning programme;
• Promotion; and
• Career or job change

The principle, upon which their learning was recognized, was based on the acknowledgement that people learn in formal and informal settings outside of education and training institutions, and that such learning could be equated to the learning acquired in formal institutional environments. Their learning could therefore be formalized through the award of credits or exemptions for parts of the

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qualifications (SAQA, 2002, Appendix C). In Malaysia, students can base their application on any combination of formal, non-formal or informal learning.

3.2 The Related Learning Theory of APEL

In today's volatile and unpredictable environment, finding better ways to learn will propel organizations forward. Strong minds fuel strong organizations. We must capitalize on our natural styles and then build systems to satisfy needs. Only through an individual learning process can we re-create our environments and ourselves.

3.2.1 What is Learning?

Learning could enhance our ability and change a person's life from novices to experts and enables us to gain new knowledge, skills and change our attitude. Learning can be defined formally as the process or experience of gaining knowledge or skills. Learning could enhance our level of capacity from knowledge to evaluation as noted in the taxonomy Bloom (Krathwohl, 2001) through experience or study. Learning also enhanced our brain by developing new pathways and increasing connections according to our needs.

Learning, therefore, stems from experience and involves a dynamic and continuing interactive process of knowing and doing. Learning involves, from the most fundamental to complex, to gain knowledge, memorizing information, acquiring knowledge for practical use, abstracting meaning from what we do, and a process that allows us to understand. Learning can and should be a lifelong process. Learning shouldn't be defined by what happened early in life, only at school. We constantly make sense of our experiences and consistently search for meaning. In essence, we continue to learn.

3.2.2 Sources of Recognition: Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning

There are three kinds of learning that could be among sources of recognition of wider or additional learning, relate to the validation of non-formal and informal learning by adults;

i. Formal learning: Learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective;

ii. Non-formal learning: Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning

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17 Malaysian Qualification Agency (2009), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in Malaysia- Policy Consideration, Draft for a presentation to the Director General Secretary of MOHE and Vice Chancellor of Public HEIs.
objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the
learner's perspective;

iii. Informal learning: Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or
leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning
support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional
but in most cases it is non-intentional (or 'incidental'/random).

European Commission (2001, pp32)

Most extra-curricular activities and involvement in youth organizations, for example will offer
non-formal learning and the distinction between formal/non-formal and informal learning
corresponds to the differences between planned and unplanned learning. This correspondence
should mean that principles and conclusions arising from research and development in this
aspect of lifelong learning should be broadly applicable in the educational and training sector.

APEL also bridges the divide between formal and informal learning. In doing so it also presents
a contradiction. By accrediting informal learning APEL is quantifying something which is
qualitative and non-formal. APEL also recognizes that adults bring with them to the learning
situation a wide range of skills and knowledge (Knowles, 1990)18.

3.2.3 Concept/theories on which APEL is founded

The mapping of learning theory would make APEL being understood within a psychological
constructivist understanding of learning, for example, learners constructing their own individual
meanings through reflection on their experiences, involve in experimentation and exploration,
assessment using portfolios, and so on. The pedagogic process that looks into issues like,
active learners and teachers as facilitators is also seen as a constructivist view. On the other
hand, some APEL practices however also draw on aspects of cognitive theory where mind
maps and learning taxonomies (e.g., taxonomy Bloom, krathwohl)19 are used.

Over the last few years, the development of the national vocational qualification system and the
national standards under the Malaysian qualification framework (MQF), have led to the
adoption of a different approach to APEL. An individual's learning from experience can still be
recognized but only to the extent that it matches pre-specified hierarchies of national standards
or learning/performance outcomes. Learners need to focus and match their prior learning to the
criteria with assessment as stated in the standards. The required competencies can thus be

18 Knowles, M (1990) The Adult Learner: the neglected Species, Chicago, Follett

mapped, evidenced, assessed, and get accredited and awarded qualifications. These approaches is a more of a behaviourist view of mind but again as APEL are a hybrid and complex system, this is not a clear cut situation and it is debatable. There are others who also push towards a situated view of mind with attention to social and cultural aspects of learning.

Nevertheless, there are three main concept/theories on which APEL is founded. They are;

i. Adult Learning Theory
ii. Kolb’s Learning Theory
iii. Johari Window Concept

a. Adult Learning Theory

Educators must remember that learning occurs within each individual as a continual process throughout life. The field of adult learning was pioneered by Malcom Knowles who identified the following characteristics of adult learners20:

- Adults are **autonomous** and **self-directed**. They need to be free to direct themselves. Their teachers must actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they must get participants’ perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. They have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Finally, they must show participants how the class will help them reach their goals (e.g., via a personal goals sheet).

- Adults have accumulated a foundation of **life experiences** and **knowledge** that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, they should draw out participants’ experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.

- Adults are **goal-oriented**. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. They, therefore, appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show participants how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.

- Adults are **relevancy-oriented**. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore,

20 Knowles, M (1990) The Adult Learner: the neglected Species, Chicago, Follett
instructors must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. This means, also, that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants. This need can be fulfilled by letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests.

- Adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Instructors must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.

- As do all learners, adults need to be shown respect. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

Learning implies change. At their most general and simplistic, theories of learning can be seen as explanations of this change – of how people learn. The field of learning theory draws from the human sciences generally – most particularly from psychology (behavioural and cognitive) and more recently from social theory, anthropology and linguistics. Traditionally, APEL practices have been framed by adult learning theory and by experiential learning where Kolb's experiential learning cycle has been central to the system (Harris, 2000). Being able to locate and translate between different learning theories will provide a stronger frame for the development of APEL (Edwards 1998) and thus could re-vision APEL into the context of the Malaysian social, culture and environmental needs.

b. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Building upon earlier work by John Dewey and Kurt Levin, American educational theorist David A. Kolb believes “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984, p. 38). Kolb’s experiential learning theory is a holistic perspective that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior, have become the methodological hallmarks of RPL (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1995). Kolb's learning theory, typically expressed as four-stage cycle of learning (or training) cycle which is the central principle of experiential learning theory, in which 'immediate or concrete experiences' provide a basis for 'observations and reflections'. These 'observations and reflections' are assimilated and distilled into 'abstract concepts' producing new implications for action which can be 'actively tested' in turn creating new experiences. In short, experience + reflection = learning.

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Thus, Kolb’s model which works on the two levels, posits four-stage cycle of experiential learning as shown below (may begin at any one stage but must follow each other in the sequence):

- concrete experience, CE (or “DO”)
- reflective observation, RO (or “OBSERVE”)
- abstract conceptualization, AC (or “THINK”)
- active experimentation, AE (or “PLAN”)

![Kolb's Experiential Four Stage Learning Cycle](image)

- **Concrete Experience** (CE) (first stage), is where the learner actively experiences an activity (doing) such as in the laboratory or field work and this lead to the second stage, **reflective observation** (RO), where the learner consciously reflects back on that experience (observing). These reflections are then assimilated (absorbed and translated) and in turn lead to the third stage, **abstract conceptualization** (AC), where the learner attempts to conceptualize a theory or model of what is observed (thinking) with implications for action. This finally leads to the fourth stage,

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active experimentation (AE), where the learner plans how to test a model or theory or plan for a forthcoming experience\textsuperscript{24} (planning), which in turn leads to further critical reflection and further generate new experiences and competences. The following figure represents the learning cycles, which, according to Kolb (in Kelly, 2003), will support and deepen learning:

![Figure 3.2: Generating New Experiences Through Further Critical Reflections in Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle \textsuperscript{25}](image)

However, contemporary theorists argue that experience is not neutral raw material for knowledge creation but contextualized partial and already shaped by knowledge. These theorists also criticize learning processes which abstract experience from its context to the extent that it becomes neutralized and distanced from the experiencer/learner. The extent to which experience translates into learning and knowledge is largely debatable. It is claimed that each stage of the learning cycle fosters different and separated capacities – affective, symbolic, perceptual and behavioural\textsuperscript{26}. Perhaps, an understanding of the pedagogic orientation of the context and of the RPL practice will enhance knowledgeable practice.

The theory and practice of experiential learning are based on experiences as a foundation to generate learning (or training) and knowledge. Experiential learning pedagogies are largely concerned with transforming experience: An individual’s experience may comprise of earlier events in life, current life events or those that arise from participation in activities


\textsuperscript{25} Experiential Learning (Kolb) http://www.learning-theories.com/experiential-learning-kolb.html Retrieved 20.04.2011


implemented by facilitators.  

27 Beard and Wilson (2002) define experiential learning as ‘the insight gained through the conscious or unconscious internalization of our own or observed interactions, which build upon our past experiences and knowledge.’  

28 However, such definitions need to be taken cautiously and be kept in perspective to avoid from a narrow and restrictive understanding of what is a highly complex concept.

Kelly (2003) defined ‘experiential learning’ as follows: learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied… experiential learning typically involves not merely observing the phenomenon being studied but also doing something with it, such as testing the dynamics of the reality to learn more about it, or applying the theory learned about it to achieve some desired result.

On the face of it, experiential learning, as a part of a traditional classroom learning in cooperative education, internship, and other fields and laboratory programs (Whitaker, 1989), is not problematic. Presumably, such ‘practical’ applications would be subject to pre-defined assessment approaches, which are in line with the requirements for the curriculum. Kolb’s four elements in the experiential learning cycle, describes his view of how this could enhance learning, and much of these principles have been absorbed in education, particularly in terms of the need for learners to become more ‘reflective’. The following figure represents the learning cycles, which, according to Kolb, will support and deepen learning:

Experiential learning therefore, according to Whitaker (1989) is about:

i. acting and observing
ii. understanding the effects of the action in a specific instance;
iii. understanding the general principle
iv. applying the general principle in new circumstances

Experiential learning (or learning by experience) is considered a key principle whereby prior learning could be assessed and recognized. The argument is that learning by experience enhances understanding and transferability of knowledge and skills. Experiential learning should therefore be an important part of formal curricula. However, the assessment of prior experiential learning, not as part of a formal curriculum, i.e. “to identify the level of knowledge of skill that has been acquired” (Whitaker, 1989, p. 2) regardless of how and where it was acquired, has been a topic of intense debate since RPL has been conceptualized.


http://books.google.com.my/books?id=qBgHYkS23tI&printsec=frontcover&dq=beard+and+wilson+experiential+learning&hl=en&ei=ip6zTZWOKsPORQeqzrzfDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CDkQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Using Kolb’s model, Jarvis (1995) highlighted that there are a number of responses to the potential learning situation. He used the model with a number of different adult groups and asked them to explore it based on their own experience of learning. He was then able to develop a model of which allowed different routes. Some of these are non-learning, some non-reflective learning, and some reflective learning. The figure below shows the trajectories on the diagram he produces.

![Figure 3.4: Learning Situations (source: Jarvis 1994)](image)

While this represents a useful addition to our thinking about learning, a number of problems remain. There is still an issue around sequence - many things may be happening at once, thus Jarvis’ model posed many questions that has yet to be explored.

Nevertheless, all learning involves current and/or prior experience of some sort. Parallel to this, Boud et al (1993), highlighted that experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning with the assumptions that;
- Learners actively construct their own experience
- Learning is a holistic process
- Learning is socially and culturally constructed
- Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.  

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c. Johari Window Concept

Johari Window concept is about understanding the skills of the experienced worker. The skills and experience of workers presenting for recognition of competency are complex and not always self evident. The concept of Johari Window could be used to explore the candidates skill base for recognizing competency as shown in Figure 3.5 below.

![Johari Window Diagram](https://www.businessballs.com/johari/windowmodel.png)

Adapted from www.businessballs.com, © Copyright alan chapman 2003

**Figure 3.5 Competency Window Model: A modified Johari Window**

The above are a modified Johari Window Model, a cognitive psychological tool created by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955 in the United States, calling it 'Johari' after combining their first names, Joe and Harry. It is a simple and useful tool for understanding and training self-awareness, personal development, improving communications, interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, team development and intergroup relationships. It is especially relevant due to emphasis on, and influence of, 'soft' skills, behaviour, empathy, cooperation, inter-group development and interpersonal development.

Also referred to as a 'disclosure/feedback model of self awareness', and an 'information processing tool'. It represents information - feelings, experience, views, attitudes, skills, intentions, motivation, etc - within or about a person - in relation to their team, from four

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perspectives, called ‘quadrant’ or ‘area’. Each quadrant contains and represents the information - feelings, motivation, etc – in terms of whether the information is **known** or **unknown** by the **person**, and whether the information is known or unknown by **others** in the team as shown in Table 3.1 below;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrant</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Relations to APEL-RPL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quadrant 1</td>
<td>What is known by the person is known by the team- the part of ourselves that we see and others see.</td>
<td>The part of ourselves that we are conscious and confident that we know and others know. Most often these are skills and abilities that have been obtained by a formal process or have been identified that represent our self Confident. These are the competencies we will seek for recognition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrant 2</td>
<td>What is known about a person by others in the group, but is unknown by the person him/herself - the aspects that others see but we are not aware of.</td>
<td>These are the areas where we are ‘open to learn’ and willing to enroll in a course of study or seek training, if our work requires it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrant 3</td>
<td>What is known to ourselves but kept hidden from, and therefore unknown to others - our ‘private space’, which we know but keep from others and,</td>
<td>All experienced workers have a body of skills and abilities that they are not aware that they know or often underestimate the extent of their knowledge and skills. Often adult learners claim that they know that, but call it something else by another name and sometimes they bundle several competencies together. They also often talk about these skills as ‘common sense’. This is the area of Unknown Competency. Very important area for the assessor to explore. The candidate may not lay claim to it, but it can be substantial. It is also important to note that if a candidate is lacking confidence (having been made redundant, returning to the workforce) their area of confident competency will shrink. Importance of a supportive relationship between the assessor and the candidate to draw out this experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrant 4</td>
<td>What is unknown to the</td>
<td>This can be dangerous - dangerous to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(The things I don’t know that I don’t know) person is also unknown to others in the group - the most mysterious room in that the unconscious or subconscious part of us is seen by neither ourselves nor others.

ourselves and others won’t recognize the boundaries of our competence and may be unaware that we are venturing into areas beyond my abilities. The area also deals with those things we need to unlearn. Sometimes people learn bad practice; they may have worked in poor workplace; practices and philosophies may have changed. Significant engagement is needed between assessor and candidate to observe discrepancies between what a candidate says and what they do during workplace visit or assessment. RPL process that fails to address this area will lack industry credibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Johari Window Quadrant in Relation to Information of Recognizing Competency</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This model is much related to APEL-RPL, as the skills and experience of workers presenting for recognition of competency are complex and not always self evident. Thus, in relation to APEL, this modified Johari Window could be used to explore the candidate’s skill base in recognizing the competency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Principles of APEL

Despite the fact that APEL-RPL has been implemented for two decades or more in most developed countries, one common approach to the assessment of prior learning has not been agreed. It may possibly be partly due to the fact that the notion of ‘experiential learning’ as a theoretical perspective, only became prominent with the experiential learning the countries where RPL has been implemented33. Literature studies indicate that there are variations to the principle of APEL but generally, five common principles underpinned the introduction of RPL at the national level; competence, commitment, access, fairness and support (Bateman and Knight, 2001).

The aim of identifying the principles of APEL is to ensure effective, quality-assured practice that will enable client and stakeholders to have confidence in the outcome of APEL. Thus consistency in APEL provisions will be more feasibly achieved. In general, the system of APEL must be able to grasp these principles during the implementation of the processes of APEL.

• Competence: as the core value to APEL that reflect the skills, knowledge and experience of the subject.
• Commitment: as the responsibility of the participant as well as accrediting institution in the processes of APEL.
• Access: as the provision of articulation between sectors of education and training to be made available to all citizens.
• Fairness: as laid down in the principle of competence that everyone has to be assessed fairly and justly as per his competence. APEL relates to principles and rules of assessment; reliable, fair, flexible, current, authentic and sufficient.
• Support: as the mechanism to facilitate and enhance the processes of APEL system. The support may include acts, laws or regulations.

In the context of Malaysia, the principles discussed earlier are also demonstrated in the core principles that underpinned APEL provisions in Malaysia that is stated in the APEL framework of the MQA (MQA, 2009), which are34:

• Prior experiential learning should be recognized regardless of how and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is relevant to the learning is relevant to the learning or competency outcomes;
• Credit awarded as a result of APEL is of the same value as credit gained through formal learning;
• Assessment should be evidence based, equitable, unbiased, fair, flexible, valid flexible, valid and reliable;
• Assessment should be undertaken by experts/practitioners in the subject content or skills area, policies and procedures;
• Assessment methods should accommodate the literacy levels and experiences of students, hence providing ways for students to demonstrate the required outcome;
• Decision should be accountable, transparent and subject to appeal and review;
• Information and support services should be actively promoted, easy to understand and recognize the diversity of learners; and
• Quality assurance mechanisms should be clear and transparent to ensure confidence in the decision.

Similarly, those principles are also, to a certain extent, demonstrated in the principles of RPA implementation by the DSD of MOHR which are;

34 Malaysian Qualification Agency (2009), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in Malaysia- Policy Consideration, Draft for a presentation to the Director General Secretary of MOHE and Vice Chancellor of Public HEIs.
The method of assessing the current competencies is based on the current standards, i.e. National Occupational Skill Standards (NOSS);

- The candidate is not required to undergo training and sit for examination;
- Valid, reliable and adequate evidence of competencies is required for assessment before recognition is given.

There are numerous scenarios where inability to adhere to APEL principles may result in the failure of applicants to get through the whole processes of APEL accreditation.

**Scenario 1**
Mr. Ahmad has always wanted to develop himself from the current job of a technical assistance for 10 years in the construction industry. However, due to the lack of information on APEL procedures apart from statements by policy makers on APEL, he is not sure of what to do next.
- Information about how their skills and experience fit against units of competency is not available.
- and qualifications information about what is involved in the RPL process is not available

**Scenario 2**
Mr. Lingam was a much sought after luxury car mechanic in town and was known to be an expert in the engine overhaul and maintenance and uses latest technologies in his work. He was approached by the APEL accrediting institution to apply for National Skills Certificate equivalent to his competences. However, much to his surprise, his competence does not match with the Occupational Skill Standards that is not quite current with the technology. He is now still working in the same old garage.
- Supportive systems, tools and processes, without excessive paperwork is not provided for.
- the RPL assessor’s ability to link an individual's existing skills, knowledge and experience to nationally accredited units of competency needs some reviews and flexibility

For APEL, consideration should be given to user-friendly, supportive processes, minimising paperwork, workplace observations, empowering the applicant, helping applicants generate evidence, and providing developmental and validation pathways. At the same time APEL should provide an opportunity for employers and individuals to capitalise on what has been learned already – saves time and resources, to encourage ongoing learning and development, to develop workforce capability and addressing skill shortages.
3.4 APEL as an Outcome

There are three potential outcomes for the individual from an RPL process, i.e;

- Access pathway into formal learning – individual is granted entry or admission into a particular course or qualification without necessarily meeting some of the the standard prerequisites
- Credit towards formal learning
- Advancement of employment opportunities- especially for those workers intending to work overseas and those returning from overseas with enhanced skill sets.

3.5 Benefits of APEL

APEL could provide a full or part qualification, avoiding duplication of training. It could be used to identify what training is needed to complete a qualification, or provide a pathway to higher qualifications.

In some countries like UK, APEL can be used in two ways. Provided that an applicant’s learning claim is formally recognized by an educational institution or employer, it can be used:

i. To gain entry to a programme of study offered by the educational institution or to the employer’s training programme

ii. To gain credit towards the completion of a programme of study or training

In the Malaysian context, APEL can be requested by a learner to support transition between informal and formal learning and for gaining credit. Student can base their application on any combination of formal, non-formal or informal learning. The learning gain through prior experiential learning which is identified by the APEL processes can be related to:

- The entry requirements to a formal programme of study (for recognition for entry); and
- The outcomes of a formal learning programme (for recognition for credit within a programme).

The benefits by practicing APEL into the education and training system includes,

- avoids duplication of training, maximizing the value of vocational education and training expenditure
- provides pathways to higher qualifications for people who may not have access to further training.

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36 Malaysian Qualification Agency (2009), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in Malaysia- Policy Consideration, Draft for a presentation to the Director General Secretary of MOHE and Vice Chancellor of Public HEIs.
creates a learning culture by valuing and recognizing learning that has occurred in the workplace.

APEL contributes to:
- formal assessment of previously unrecognized skills and knowledge
- aligning the requirements of a learning outcomes stated or qualification
- up-skilling or up-dating qualifications for improved employment opportunities / industry outcomes.

The various benefits highlighted by MQA (2009) as well as Open University Malaysia (OUM)\(^{37}\) are;

a. **Benefits to the Learner/Individual:**
   - Eliminate or reduces the duplication of learning on what has already been learnt or training in skills you already possess.
   - Allow for the earlier completion of a qualification, or Accelerates the completion of formal education;
   - Save the money one would have spent on textbooks or learning resources - Potential reduction in the cost of studying;
   - Bridges the gap between formal education and work/life experience;
   - Gain academic credit or obtains academic recognition for informal and non-formal learning from work/life experiences.
   - Get access, recognition and gain credits to higher qualification if desired.
   - Attain occupational licensing or certification.
   - Plan for further learning and personal career development,
   - Serves as an alternative assessment method to evaluate learner’s competencies – document knowledge, skills and experience better through the preparation of portfolio of evidence.
   - Develop analytical and learning skills through the process of undertaking APEL itself
   - Increase mobility and employability
   - Identify personal strengths and goals.
   - Increase self-awareness and self confidence

b. **Benefits to the Employer:**
   - Recruit and retain a dynamic, diverse workforce
   - Develop a clear understanding of employee skills that could help in identifying training gaps and thus in the development of effective training plans.

• Gains recognition for training and staff development activities as well as workplace learning;
• Develop effective Career development path for employees.
• Reduces the amount of time required by employees to complete a qualification, thus less time away from the workplace; and
• Promotes closer collaboration between institution and industry in the development of education/training programmes that integrate the goals of the learners, employers, and institutions.
• Acts as a catalyst for Learning Organization development.

c. Benefits to the HEIs
• Develop a more responsive, learner-centered institution.
• Promote LLL and increase access to programs for a wide range of adult learners or non-conventional learners.
• Support the development of curriculum.
• Increase student retention and recruitment.
• Provides innovative assessment tools for learners.
• Creates an improved learning environment- enriched the teaching and learning experience with the presence of non-conventional learners.
• Providing better access and a ‘friendly learning path’ to the industry and society at large.

d. Benefits to the Nation:
• Promoting lifelong learning culture as a means of upgrading its workforce in response to global k-economy (knowledge economy) trend.
• Enhancing productivity through the acquisition of skills and knowledge among its workforce and,
• Boosting the nation’s competitiveness at the regional and global levels.

3.6 APEL-RPL Models

The debates around the purposes, role, scope and outcomes of APEL-RPL have led to the development of different models for APEL-RPL which will be discussed in the following topic. These models represent different concepts about what knowledge is, and what kinds of knowledge should be recognized or promoted. Broadly, the models are as follows:

3.6.1 A credit-exchange approach

This model is based on a straightforward notion of matching the knowledge acquired informally or non-formally with the specified standards or requirements of a qualification, or the outcomes represented by registered credits in a qualification framework. It has been defined as ‘the ability
of the individual to perform certain job-tasks or roles a pre-defined standard’. This approach does not require applicant to reflect on their prior learning. They simply provide evidence of having achieved the knowledge and skills prescribed for the course for which credit is sought. This approach will enables applicant to obtain credit at offering institutions for formal courses completed at a previous institution.

The aim is clearly the achievement of certification or credits, and the focus of the process is on making sure that the skills and knowledge being measured matched with the content of the curriculum and the defined standards. It is a practical approach towards recognizing knowledge achieved for qualification processes, but is sometimes criticized on the grounds that it does not challenge power relations in knowledge production, or the social and psychological elements of learning.

3.6.2 A developmental Approach

This approach was developed with the emergence of Kolb’s (in Kelly, 2003) ‘experiential learning’ theories. More importantly, Kolb’s ‘learning cycles’ were increasingly used as the preferred approach to determining prior learning. This model links the ‘critical reflection’ stage (see Figure 3.2), during experiential learning with the ‘identification of the learning derived from that experience’.

In this model, APEL training programme is an integral part of the assessment and accreditation process of an institution. This approach of APEL offers mentored skill identification, skills documentation and the preparation of evidence (e.g. portfolio) which occurs under supervision38 (Butterworth & Mckelvey 1997 in Motaung, 2011). The APEL candidate needs to be guided and coached, to ways in which the candidate can formalize the knowledge or learning achieved through experience, and acquire the generally accepted academic or technical ways of showing this knowledge.

The aim of this model is to support and promote the personal and intellectual development of the APEL candidate, and recognizes that there may be valuable learning’s that have happened that are not reflected in the formal curriculum. It is based on the idea of experiential learning, that is, that learning acquired through experience needs to be thought about and applied to new situations. The emphasis in this model is more on the individual experience of the learner and what he or she has actually learned, rather than matching to pre-agreed standards.

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APEL can be used as part of a developmental process, whereby the student engages in a process of self-actualization, personal development and self-knowledge and an understanding of the world and their place in it. Many courses have these objectives as outcomes in their own right, for example, the Diploma of Psychology in VET. It is also important in many occupations for practitioners to be reflective, to question their own practice, to have high levels of understanding about themselves and how they work in particular contexts, and to engage in continual processes of self-evaluation and self-appraisal in order to improve their practice. Teachers/Instructors are an example of occupation that value reflective practitioners. APEL offers students an opportunity to learn the skills of reflection and self evaluation, and it is important that it do so, if the assessment outcomes are to be related to the course objectives.

Assessment processes in the developmental model involved interview, journals, reflective essays, developmental and reflective portfolios, as well as portfolio development courses. Students need considerable support and mentoring because the skills of self-reflection are not always easy to learn. Identifying and writing the learning autobiography could facilitate them to reflect on their experiences and be able to articulate their learning from it. This is where the instructor’s (or mentors) role are important to dive support and guidance. The structure of the presentation of this learning should align and be able to relate with the academic learning outcome in the course/programme for which recognition or credit is sought.

3.6.3 A Transformational Approach

There are various forms of this model, also known as ‘radical’ or ‘emancipatory’ APEL-RPL. The model is linked to social transformation, and questions ways in which knowledge is constructed, what is defined as valuable, and the power relations in curricula and institutions. One of its aims is to allow experiential or marginalized learning to influence the mainstream curriculum. In Malaysia, APEL-RPL has taken both forms of the credit-exchange model and the developmental model, as well as a combination of the two.

3.7 Summary

The accreditation or recognition of a student’s prior skills and knowledge whilst at all times maintaining the integrity and standards of the defined learning outcomes of the specific course of study is a reflective of what is envisaged in this chapter. The beneficiaries’ of this initiative is nonetheless the country as a whole, where the total sum of its workforce is developed to a higher level of competence.
CHAPTER 4

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF APEL

4.0 Brief History of APEL-RPL

APEL-RPL has long been on the agenda as a key tool for the transformation of education and training as envisaged by the National (in most developed countries) Qualification Framework (NQF), but only in the recent years in Malaysia. The policy and guideline of APEL-RPL for Malaysian Higher Education and Training is in the development at stage undertaken by the MQA. However for other well established countries, they have begun to move from development of APEL-RPL policy to implementation of APEL-RPL practices. The challenges faced during implementation have helped the practitioners adapt and refine policy and practice in the interests of developing workable and effective APEL-RPL strategies. From development of APEL-RPL policy, countries like United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada and South Africa are now serious into sustainable implementation of APEL-RPL.

APEL-RPL originated in the United States of America (USA) shortly after World War Two, in 1946, where Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), enabled war veterans to achieve recognition for their skills built up outside of formal institutional education (SAQA, 2002, Appendix C). A concept and set of practices closely connected to workplace education and training, its aim is to assist learners who have acquired knowledge and skills through life and work experiences to receive credits for this work. RPL first emerged in higher education in 1974, under the leadership of Morris Keeton.39 The first type of RPL was regarded as a tool of social justice that made higher education more available to individuals from non-traditional student populations. Currently, in the USA, the council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in Chicago is a leading advocate of RPL, with over 1700 affiliates (colleges and universities) that offered RPL by mid 90s (Taylor, 2000 cited in (Motaung, 2007 ). Since 1974, CAEL has worked with postsecondary institutions, state boards of regents, and individuals by establishing and disseminating high quality standards for the awarding of credit through assessment, by training faculty evaluators and administrators in PLA practices, and by conducting research and disseminating it widely throughout the postsecondary community. CAEL has emphasized the assessment and promotion of experiential learning for adults and is responsible research and publication related to Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, and Procedures.

Ireland was also early in establishing a process dealing with experience gained in practical work situations, in 1975 (National Council for Educational Awards report), however, there was little movement in the practice of RPL.

The neighbouring country of USA, Canada has been practicing Prior Learning and Assessment (PLAR) from the early 1980s. Quebec was the first province to implement PLAR province-wide, but now six of Canada’s ten provinces are implementing PLAR province-wide, particularly in their post-secondary college sector. The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) has been established for the advancement of PLA in Canada.40

At about the same time as in Canada, AP(E)L was introduced in United Kingdom (UK) in the 1980s (Evans, 2006), based mainly on the work done by CAEL in America. HEIs are increasingly recognizing the prior learning, found at work, individual activities and interests where significant knowledge, understanding and skills are developed. Thus, the purpose was mainly to promote lifelong learning, wider participation, social inclusion, partnership with business and community organizations and among Higher education providers.

AP(E)L was introduced in UK in the 1980s, also at about the same time as Canada, based mainly on the work done by CAEL in America (Evans, 2006). The main aim is to promote lifelong learning, social inclusion, wider participation, employability, partnership with business, community and HEIs. At the beginning, there was no central AP(E)L system and foundations were laid through research projects mainly.41

Running parallel to the changes in education and training in UK, Scotland was transforming their education and training into a criterion-referenced learning outcome format. Criterion-referenced learning makes it possible for learners to be assessed against learning outcomes as soon as they feel ready to do so – even without ever having to attend a single class. The use of quality criteria in Scotland has become very specific and furthermore, is closely linked with their quality assurance system. In addition, there seems to be a clearer understanding of what should be assessed, i.e. the clearly understood and agreed descriptions for the successful achievement of a qualification. The ‘how’ is also becoming more specific – assessment itself must meet quality requirements.

Although France has involved with validating prior ‘learning’ (early form of RPL), as early as 1934, the Validation des Acquis Professionals (VAP) in France was only established in 1997. In France, a law was passed in 1934 whereby engineers who were older than 35 years, held no formal qualifications and who have worked in the engineering field for at least five years, could gain the

40 Available: www.tyendinaga.net/nti/prior/capla.htm
official title of ‘engineer’ through the preparation and presentation of a dissertation based on their work experience. However, it was only in 1984, with the increased movement towards the development of a European Union, that VAP became a focus for the education and training sector. This was due to the need for worker mobility in the European Union. The principle for VAP was finally developed in 1997. Finally APEL system was introduced in France in 2002 but it has practically no equivalent in Europe or the world (1). Many accreditation systems outside France grant conditional access to courses leading to a qualification, especially for graduate training, but only the French system offers the possibility of acquiring a qualification, full or partial, without prior instruction.  

In France, great emphasis is based on the candidate’s professional experience. The approach is based on evidence submitted by candidate. It is not the formal knowledge of the candidate, which is assessed, but it is the ability to prove the achievement of a level of intellectual development corresponding to that required. There is also the more explicit acknowledgement that RPL may have different purposes depending on the context, i.e. RPL for access and/or RPL for credit.

It follows that, RPL was introduced in Australia in 1991, as one of ten principles of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training and subsequently as part of the charter establishing the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 1995. RPL was then formally instituted in 1992 with the signing of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) agreement between states and territories. This agreement was the result of work that has been done in terms of a competency-based approach to training (CBT).

A bit earlier than Malaysian development of APEL, the Netherlands, implement their APL (RPL) at around 1994, where it was implemented to accommodate the need for re-skilling and up-skilling of the workforce. The Dutch government has set up the Knowledge Center APL at the beginning of 2001 for a period of four years. The functions of the knowledge centre are; development of expertise; dissemination of information on APL. Research and development of best practice; networking and supporting the new vocational qualification framework.  

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4.1 Experiences of APEL-RPL

This literature review draws on the experience of a number of countries who has implement APEL-RPL for quite some time and the policy and guidelines are in place in their National Qualification Framework, namely United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Netherlands and South Africa. APEL-RPL is established in some of these countries, especially in some vocational areas such as nursing, hospitality, engineering, etc. Several projects in those countries are also in place, and focus on qualifications frameworks and how they may be used in developing lifelong learning frameworks. It is hoped that the literature will provide important implications and lessons for Malaysia who is currently in its infancy of implementing APEL-RPL. It will also contribute to improve our understanding in this under-researched area by examining current RPL policies and practices and critically examining their impact on employability and lifelong learning. It also contains a number of approaches and outlines the basis for good practice models. Thus the best practices in setting standards for quality management of the provisioning of APEL-RPL could be identify. Finally, the synthesis of this literature, a recommendation of a sustainable APEL framework for Malaysian HEIs will be made.

4.1.1 United States

The United States is probably one of the most experienced countries with regard to accreditation of prior learning (APL) and it started in the 1940s where an early example of RPL dealt with the evaluation of the skills of soldiers returning from war for recognition by universities. Research on APL within higher education started in the 1970s with studies that investigated the use of prior learning as a means of gaining access to higher education. At that time, colleges and universities were confronted with a) an increasing number of requests to assess the learning of adult students gained outside an academic setting; b) an indication that the number of 18-year-old students would decrease dramatically in the coming years; and c) ideas that adult students would form an interesting clientele to replace the traditional student population (CAEL, 1998). Two important organizations working in this field of APL are the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

In 1975, the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning Project, undertook a research project involving ten colleges and universities, which demonstrated that PLA was indeed a feasible mechanism to recognize the skills and knowledge of learners. Most of them are adult learners who wished to enter or return to higher education, bringing with them a host of rich and varied experiential learning. Today more than 1200 colleges and universities in the USA offer RPL (PLA) services. As a result of this and other projects in the USA, a set of quality criteria was developed for prior learning assessment which are used and adapted by some countries like Malaysia.
CAEL’s long experience in the field has resulted in principles and procedures for the assessment of experiential learning that emerged from their pilot project. Over time, the guidelines of good practice have evolved into the quality standards used by higher education institutions and accrediting bodies. CAEL has also developed a web-based training programme together with the Office of Distance Learning at DePaul University in Illinois that addresses most of the issues related to the evaluation of prior learning. It provides the basic tools by which individuals can develop the skills and procedures needed for assessing adults' prior learning.44

i. APL basic Model

Figure 4.1 shows a schematic overview of the APL models for the assessment of sponsored and non-sponsored prior learning that could help post-secondary educational institutions to assess experiential learning. Whitaker (1989) distinguishes between experiential learning that takes place under the guidance of an educational institution (sponsored experiential learning) and experiential learning that is an unplanned result of work or other life experiences (non-sponsored learning). The advantage for the first is that the learning activities that will take place outside the educational institution can be planned in advance, as well as the method for measuring and evaluating the learning. In these cases, an individual has enrolled in a study programme and is planning an internship or other experiential learning activity as part of that programme. The student and the educational institution agree beforehand on specific learning objectives and the most appropriate learning activities. However, the procedure for the assessment of non-sponsored learning is different, where individuals try to get credit for prior learning that has occurred before they enrolled in a study programme.

ii. APL in Higher Education and Professional associations

The aim of the APL programmes developed by higher education institutions is to make it possible for adult learners who wish to go back to school for various reasons; for example, those who have dropped out of school earlier and now wish to earn their degree, or because of a career change that requires a different qualifications to enroll as students. Thus with APL, it enables them to gain credits for learning that has taken place in other environments and this inculcates lifelong learning.

However, majority of HEIs in the US are skeptical on prior learning or life experience if it could be worthy of academic credit. As a result they are selective in their admission policies and prefer students who have had appropriate academic preparation for the degree programmes offered by them. Nevertheless, there are institutions who have developed an APL policy and award a certain amount of credit for previous learning as long as it is relevant to the chosen study programme. In 1991 CAEL has conducted a nationwide survey among all accredited colleges and universities in the US to gather information on the use of APL within higher education institutions. Results show that 49 percent of the institutions reported that they offer opportunities for the assessment of
prior learning. Of this group, almost all institutions (97%) said that the credits can be used at the undergraduate level, while a small proportion award credits at the graduate level (CAEL, in Scholten and Teuwsen (2001)).

An APL practice has also been adopted by the Professional organizations in US for registration purposes which started in the late 1990s. Among these are the organizations of architects, nurses and dieticians. An outcome-based, practice-related approach was adopted in measuring competences in professional settings on the premise that competence must be demonstrated and measured if an individual worker is to be competitive.

a) **Assessment**

In most cases, the assessment criteria are derived directly from specific course objectives, or from the objectives of the study programme. The three most widely accepted methods are standardized examinations, institutional course challenge examinations, and the military programme evaluations of ACE. These methods are not competency-based. Individual portfolio assessment is in fourth place on the list of methods used for APL. The specific requirements of a portfolio may vary from institution to institution, but generally it contains the following elements (CAEL, 2000):

i. clear identification and definition of the prior learning for which college credit is being requested. This takes the form of competency statements in specific areas of knowledge.

ii. a written explanation of how the prior learning relates to the study programme in which the student wishes to enrol, how the learning took place, and how it fits into the student’s overall education and career plan;

iii. documentation that the student has actually acquired the learning; and

iv. a credit request specifying an exact number of credits for each subject or area.

Three models were indicated by Whitaker (1989) to determine the number of credits that can be given:

i. college course model - the course objectives provide a set of indicators for assessing the learning and how many credits it is worth.

ii. Block credit model – judges a student’s general breadth and depth of knowledge and compares it with the knowledge of a person who has graduated and is working in particular field.

iii. Competency model- crosses boundaries by matching credit to a demonstration of knowledge and skills - multidisciplinary skills (e.g. writing or reasoning); disciplinary skills (e.g. performing an historical analysis or interpreting ethical problems from the point of view of various ethical frameworks); or capabilities that reflect contexts
relevant to adult experience and students’ goals, such as the ability to resolve conflicts, organize people, or organize work.

b) Quality Standards

Long experience with APL has resulted in the definition of quality standards. Five of these are academic and five are administrative. These standards apply to APL for both academic and professional purposes. The Quality standards for Prior earning Assessment (from Whitaker, 1989) are as below;

- **Academic standards:**
  1. Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience
  2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning
  3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
  4. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
  5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted

- **Administrative standards:**
  1. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
  2. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
  3. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
  4. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for continued professional development.
  5. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.

In conclusion, the United States has considerable experience with the accreditation of prior learning (APL), primarily for academic purposes. Although not all higher education institutions accept that prior learning or life experience is worthy of academic credit, a large number of institutions do have mechanisms that make it possible for learners to have their previous learning experiences evaluated. Over 1700 universities and colleges now offer RPL assessment facilities.
4.1.2 Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) commissioned a report into the policy and practice of RPL in Australia across the four sectors of post-compulsory education and training in 2002. Differing sectoral definitions arise due to historical development and application of RPL in each of the sectors.

RPL was formally instituted in 1992 with the signing of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) agreement between states and territories. NFROT ensures that recognition is given for accredited courses based on competency standards, credit transfer between providers, competencies and prior learning, where RPL is seen to be a key aspect in the implementation of their competency-based training (CBT) such that CBT encapsulates the essence of RPL.

The universities in Australia have considerable autonomy in developing institutional policy, including RPL related. They have the authority to develop, teach, accredit, and award higher education qualifications. Thus they are self-accrading bodies established by state and territory legislation. Those who are not, have to submit qualifications for accreditation to the respective state and territory higher education accrediting bodies. All authorized bodies are expected to develop their RPL policies as part of their responsibilities. In this aspect, the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) has in place RPL guidelines to assist universities in developing their own frameworks (AVVC, 2001 cited in Motaung, 2007).

In 1993, the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) accepted the guidelines on RPL for credit, making alternative routes possible for learners to access higher education. Among the guidelines included:

i. Universities should develop and publish policies (and, where possible, details of amounts of credit available) on the recognition for credit of prior ‘informal’ learning (RPL), that is knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or attributes which have been acquired through learning experiences other than in a course offered by an Australian university or technical and further education. RPL for credit may be of two broad kinds:

45 Cameron, R. and Miller, P., (2004). RPL: Why has it failed to Act as a Mechanism for Social Change?, ePublications@SCU, Southern Cross University, Graduate College of Management Papers.
a) Learning acquired in a ‘credentialed’ context, other than a university or college, such as in a course offered by a professional body, workplace, private educational institution, or by any other provider recognized by a university.

b) Learning acquired in an ‘un-credentialed’ context, such as through work experiences or through life experience.

ii. Applicants for RPL should be advised of the forms and sources of prior learning, which a university is prepared to take into account in assessing prior learning for credit in a university course. As a guide, universities should indicate their willingness or otherwise to take account of

a) Courses provided by professional bodies, workplaces, private educational institutions and/or other providers recognized by a university, and/or

b) Learning from work or other forms of practical experience, and/or

c) Learning from life experiences.

iv. The procedures adopted to assess a particular course or range of experiences as the basis for credit in a university course should ensure that the prior learning assessed is comparable in content and standard with the university course for which credit is sought. The standards applied in assessing RPL should not be greater than those required to ‘pass’ the relevant component of the university course, i.e. it should not be more ‘difficult’ for RPL applicants to ‘pass’.

v. Procedures developed by a university for the recognition of RPL should ensure that;

a) the academic staff carrying out the assessment have a detailed knowledge of the university course(s) for which credit is sought.

b) the academic staff carrying out the assessment (particularly for work/life experience) have, in addition to detailed knowledge of the relevant university course(s), personal expertise in or access to advice on RPL assessment methods.

Annual reports from states and territories in Australia indicate that:

a) Great diversity exists in the extent to which RPL services are made available from state to state

b) Slow development of RPL assessment in universities is associated with; --- ‘the extra demands placed on staff to develop ‘customized’ assessments,

- a lack of RPL assessment expertise and training in universities
- resistance by academic staff and professional bodies;
- delays caused by the need to develop special policies and procedures for RPL; and
- disincentives to grant credit inherent in the existing funding arrangements for universities’ (Flowers, et al, in Evans,2000)
Quality Assurance Model
For RPL provisioning, the quality assurance arrangements explicitly emphasized the following aspects;

- The National Principles and Guidelines for RPL implementation
- Approach and model of implementation
- Procedure and processes for implementation
- RPL assessment process
- Quality assurance arrangements
- Forms of credit
- Support services to RPL students
- Fees and Funding for RPL services
- Appeal mechanisms during assessment process

In Australia, RPL initiatives have been very much linked to the vocational education and training system as well as higher education, and to economic and employment imperatives. As an example, RPL is available as a study mode in all RMIT TAFE courses. RMIT is a Registered Training Organization (RTO) within the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. As an RTO RMIT offer a wide range of TAFE programs including apprenticeships, traineeships, certificates and diplomas. In this TAFE sector, students could gain formal recognition of their current skills or to receive further training to update or improve their qualifications. Students can apply for RPL for all of the courses in their program of study, from a minimum of one course to a maximum of all courses in the program. RMIT offers two services under this scheme50:

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process through which people can gain entry to, or credit in, recognized courses based on competencies gained. The competencies may have been gained through experience in the workplace, in voluntary work, in social or domestic activities or through informal or formal training or other life experiences.
- Recognition of Current Competency (RCC) applies if a student has previously successfully completed the requirements of a unit of competency or module and is now required to be reassessed to ensure that the competency has been maintained.

RPL and RCC do not include any additional training required to achieve a competency. If a student/applicant requires additional tuition before he/she can achieve recognition for his/her chosen program, he/she may enroll in a state government subsidized program or enroll in a fee for service program.

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50 TAFE – recognition of prior learning,
www.rmit.edu.au/.../Current%20students%2FAdministration%2FEnrolment%2FEnrolment
4.1.3 United Kingdom

In the UK, Accreditation of Prior learning (APL) is firmly embedded in the HEIs where it focus on widening access to post-secondary education, including an emphasis on developmental RPL to help people maximize their opportunities. The generic term APL is generally used for the award of credit based on demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time ago. However, it also covers;

a) Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)

b) Accreditation of Experiential Learning (APEL)

Apart from those terms, recognition is also for learning acquired through training/employment (paid or unpaid) and placements where it uses the term;

a) Accreditation of Work-based Learning – future experiential learning with learner-defined outcomes – (learning that already taken place - retrospective sense) and,

b) Placement – future experiential learning with pre-defined outcomes (learning that is yet to take place - prospective sense)

APL also occupies a central place in the numerous Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes (CATS) that have been set up over time. An important purpose of the CAT schemes is to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning by allowing people to accumulate credits earned in various settings.

Pre-determined outcomes

![Figure 4.2: Types of Accreditation of Prior Learning in UK (UCAS cited in Scholten and Teuwsen (2001))](image)

**i. APL Model**

There exist several APL model in the UK HEIs that provides a framework to implement the APL process. Nevertheless, in general, the main steps in the APL process is as shown in Figure 4.2 below.
The Process of Assessment in APEL involved the following steps:

- Initial Guidance
- Recognizing and identifying skills
- Relating skills to criteria
- Gathering evidence
- Assessment
- Accreditation
- Certification
- Progression

While the main steps that a candidate should take in submitting an APL claim are as follows:

- Identify a potential study programme or award
- Develop a portfolio
- Assessment of portfolio
- Final decision for approval of credit points – award of certificate indicating the number general credits earned.
ii. Model Of Quality Assurance

The quality Assurance of RPL comprised of 5 domains of practice where stringent measures need to be taken, with a total of 16 guiding principles, where each domain is associated to a set of guiding principles.

- Policies and procedures (3 principles)
- Information (7 principles)
- Roles and responsibilities (3 principles)
- Support (2 principles)
- Monitoring and review (1 principle)
iii. APL in Higher Education and Professional Organizations

Within the higher education sector, APL is used for:

a) admission to the institution;
b) direct entry into a second or subsequent year of a study programme;
c) advanced standing (award of credit for specified modules within a study programme that do not necessarily occupy a full year) / exemptions from certain parts of a study programme (UCAS, undated). The maximum amount of credit awarded for prior learning varies from institution to institution. Some award up to one-third of the credits required, others about half and still others grant exemption only for the first year.51

APEL has also been used in UK to support professional practice by offering a flexible and coherent system of continuing education which provides practitioners like teachers and nurses working in schools and hospitals respectively, with relevant learning opportunities that enables them to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Thus, it is a vital instrument for widening access to the labour market. In relation to this, the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) has established the Framework for Continuing Professional Education, which leads to the Higher Award. Example of the instruments used is the skills audit under the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programme (GRTP) and the professional portfolio for the CPE in relation to the Higher Award of the ENB. The Framework is based on effective partnership between educational institutions and practitioners and managers and can be used in two ways;

- Planning their own professional development- Portfolio could be very useful
- Gain formal recognition of their continuing education to pursue the Board's Higher Award.

The main thrust for APL developments emanated from the British government's call for “a more flexible, adaptable workforce; training programmes that were more responsive to the needs of employers and individuals; [and] greater access to education and training for greater numbers of people”52(Simosko & Cook, 1996, p.13 cited in ).

UK emphasised quality criteria to ensure the credibility of their APL processes. The guiding principle is important and need for comprehensive and continuous evaluation, review, quality assurance and clear guidelines for the assessment of prior learning.


4.1.4 Netherlands

The Dutch term used to refer to accreditation of prior learning is *Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Kwalificaties* (EVK), which roughly translated means ‘the recognition of qualifications gained somewhere else or in an informal setting’. Later, the term *kwalificaties* [qualifications] is being replaced by the term *competenties* [competencies] and thus the abbreviation EVC is used to refer to the assessment and accreditation of prior learning and/or competencies. EVC, regarded as Netherlands’ APL or RPL, is a more recent development, where it was implemented to accommodate the need for re-skilling and up-skilling of the workforce. Increasingly, the globalization of society, technological and scientific advances necessitate the development of mechanisms to deal with these dynamics. In 1994, the Committee for Accreditation of Prior Learning concluded that a system of APL is desirable and feasible.

The Netherlands places its approach within the larger European knowledge-economy in which lifelong learning is a necessity. According to Ruud Duvekot, 2001 (cited in Scholten and Teuwsen, 2001) “we need high-grade know-how and people who can develop, transfer, acquire and use that know-how” (p. 2). In many European countries there is strong support for the use of RPL as an important way to deal with the needs of the economy. Also, as mentioned above, competency standards are being developed that will help describe the skills, knowledge and values required for particular professions that will enable assessors to determine whether a candidate has met the requirements for a qualification. This approach, i.e. an approach where clear criteria for the assessment of prior learning are established against the requirements for a field of learning, is increasingly being used to clarify and define what it is that will tell an assessor that a candidate’s prior knowledge is on par. This outcomes-based approach to education and training also reflected Malaysian initiatives towards quality of HEIs.

Quality assurance in the Netherlands place a great concerned with the validity of the assessment process, as well as to the validity of qualification standards, the quality and accreditation of assessors and integrated quality management systems on a national level (Scholten and Teuwsen, 2001).

EVC is gaining ground in the higher education sector and it is one of the instruments for dealing to cope with existing and anticipated shortages of highly qualified people. Scholten and Teuwsen (2001) noted that this could make higher education more accessible and more attractive to certain groups of potential students by granting recognition for prior learning and by creating possibilities for individual learning pathways. They also highlighted that the basic EVC model used in numerous Dutch pilot projects resembles the English model as shown in Figure below.
The model has three basic steps (see Figure 4.4):

i. **Development and assessment of the portfolio:**
An inventory of work and learning experiences and a comparison of these experiences with the national qualification standards;

ii. **Assessment tasks**
A practical assignment which includes the candidate being interviewed to assess his/her planning skills and his/her ability to reflect on the task performed or to transfer the task to another context. At the same time the performance itself is observed and scored using a checklist, and - if applicable - the quality of the person’s products is judged.

iii. **Final Evaluation Decision.**
A decision as to whether or not a full or partial qualification can be awarded.

Thus far, the universities of professional education in Netherlands are ahead of their regular universities in developing EVC procedures and instruments. In their university sector there are still people who feel that academic competencies can only be developed between the walls of a university and nowhere else. Similarly it happens in Malaysia, and it will not be long before this changes, since the Malaysian Qualification Agency are working to realized the dual learning pathways in which students work and learn at the same time and this has been highlighted in the Malaysian Tenth Malaysia Plan.

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4.1.5 South Africa

In 1994 South Africa witnessed its first democratic elections after more than 40 years of apartheid in which the majority of its citizens suffered serious deprivations. The immediate challenge was; i) to remove divisions inherited from the effects of apartheid, ii) the creation of equal opportunities for all individuals and, iii) preparing South Africa for economic competitiveness in the face of globalization.

One of the policy initiatives adopted by the first democratic government was the passage of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act in 1995 and the establishment of the SAQA Board in 1996. These provided a framework for the development and implementation of the NQF, with SAQA as its overseeing authority. NQF became the mechanism through which RPL is to be implemented - one of the most challenging and contested cornerstones. The drive for the development of a system were further pushed from the trade union movement, and emanated from among the movement organizations, most notably COSATU and its affiliates. It was the most timely policy to those who has been denied access to learning opportunities through apartheid education and training policies, and who was often viewed, due to their lack of formal qualifications, as being incompetent in the workplace.

In South Africa, RPL is a statutory obligation, promulgated by several Acts; The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, The Employment Equity Act and The Skills Development Act. RPL is conceptualized by the South African government as a key strategy for achieving the objectives of the NQF, which are access and redress. It is also prominent in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) released in 2001. In the context of HEI, RPL is a key strategy for increasing the pool of student recruits, ensuring equitable opportunities to education and training, and promoting the notion of lifelong learning.54

The South African history and contexts have led to a need for RPL that may be slightly different from the way in which most other countries approach the processes. South Africans who did not have fair and open access to learning, credits and certificates in the past deserve to be given RPL and an opportunity to return to formal learning. It was argued that the resulting policy directions expressed in the post-1994 policy agenda, where RPL was seen as a mechanism of redress of past inequalities in education, training and recognition within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), were not new in South Africa. In fact, policy reforms and initiatives introduced in the 1980s provided the building blocks with which RPL was constructed.55 The development of RPL and the NQF in South Africa is considered to be incremental. Both the development of RPL and the NQF


can be understood as an evolutionary process rather than the product of a sharp break with the past.

The emerging South African system has adopted the approach to outcomes-based assessment, including the criteria for good assessment, (given above), as well as the notion of internal and external quality assurance structures as a means to ensure an accountable system. In the Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered qualifications and Unit Standards (SAQA, 2001), the principles of outcomes-based assessment and internal (i.e. provider/ institutional quality assurance) and external moderation (awarding body quality assurance) are highlighted. The South African RPL policy is also in favour of awarding credits in relation to qualifications, as well as opening up access in a variety of ways both in their career and to further education & training.

4.2 Summary
The literature shows that the selected countries in this Booklet have more experience with APEL projects that aim to facilitate the access to (higher) education, than with APL project that facilitate the access to the labour market. However, there have been many interesting projects with a professional purpose were implemented in the South Africa and the United Kingdom. Among the assessment instruments that are being used in their projects are: portfolios, skills audit, authentic assignments, observations, interviews, and simulations where most of them are with an academic purpose, i.e. for the purpose of admission to further study.

Educational institutions also used the same instruments for the assessment of regular students particularly for those involving a competence-oriented teaching philosophy. The significant characteristics of the assessment is an integration of assessment and instruction, a more active role of the students who have a direct responsibility in the assessment process, the use of a variety of assessment tools to assess both the process and the product. The assessment tasks are dynamic, challenging and authentic where a student profile will also be the outcome.

Similar to the study done by Noraini et. al. (2007), Portfolio assessment is perceived found to be the most dominant instrument in APEL projects. The portfolio development and assessment is generally the first step in the APEL assessment process. In addition, a variety of assessment tasks which includes assignments are being used before the final decision is taken. The candidate reflect their prior experiences that relates to either the study programme or to the profession that he/she wishes to enroll or take up respectively.

The literature also emphasized that assessors should be competent by attending trainings, to ensure the validity of the assessment process. The standardized assessment instruments must also be used, like a standard format for the portfolio, guidelines for the interviews, a standardized
observation checklist. Other important aspects that need to be considered like what have been adopted by EVC;

- definition of standards of competency for the assessors;
- development of an accreditation system for assessors
- development of a quality assurance system for assessment centers.

The Assessment process and quality standards developed by CAEL in the US could be emulated and adopted in our APEL programmes implementation in Malaysia. Overall, most of their APEL model is in line with the model that has been used in some of the Universities in Malaysia. Overall there seems to be agreement that APEL-RPL should not be an ‘ad hoc’ process. APEL should be carefully planned, formalized in terms of policies, and operationalised through standardized, but flexible procedures\(^\text{56}\). Otherwise, there could be issue in transferability of credits and in the quality of the process. This requires skilled and confident practitioners. It is also clear that APEL is not meant to be practiced only in one particular field. APEL-RPL is mostly practiced in non-university sector but it is becoming popular to be practiced in university and HEIs in general. Implementations of APEL are not strictly vocational orientation although many have closely relates and map out with professional/career development.

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5.0 Introduction

Undoubtedly, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL) is of particular value to people like those, without formal qualifications who are in, preparing to enter, or returning to, employment. Through the process of APEL, a learner could achieve a qualification either in part or wholly. Thus, in the context of Malaysia, it enables them to obtain all or part of a wide range of National Vocational Qualifications, for e.g. the Malaysian Skill Certificate (SKM) and other qualifications issued by different awarding bodies.

Although APEL is designed to offer learners flexibility, it is also essential that the process of awarding credit or part of a diploma/degree for prior learning is regulated and managed effectively to ensure quality. This is especially important as the credit which learners gain through APEL has exactly the same weight and value as credit gained by completing an assessed learning programme\(^\text{57}\). A clear policy and guidelines of APEL implementation need to be developed by the institution or providers to ensure quality assurance. Therefore the issue of quality of APEL implementation and assessment process will be dealt in this chapter.

5.1 Responsibility and Key Personnel in APEL Implementation

5.1.1 National Level
In Malaysia, the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) will act as the key assessment centre of APEL along with other authorized and accredited centres. A successful APEL application may then allow a student to apply for enrolment in any authorized conventional institution. The MQA will advise the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) on the selection and appointment of authorized conventional institutions for admission of APEL learners. A credit bank will be established within the MQA to keep a systematic record on credits earned by learners.

As for skills, Department of Skills Development (DSD) of Ministry of Human Resource (MOHR) is the coordinating body that is responsible for Recognition of Prior Achievement (RPA) provisions that is implemented in centres that is accredited and authorized by DSD. The role of DSD is not only to strategically plan to expand the RPA certification programme but also to enhance its credibility as a certification body. It is to safeguard the integrity of the RPA of the

Malaysian Skills Certification and ensure that the assessment process is done with transparency and effectiveness.

5.1.2 University/Institutional Level
At the institution/university-wide level, the Director/Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee has responsibility for the development and oversight of the overarching policy and procedures. At the Department/Faculty level, the department/faculty board is responsible for credit administration, processes, assessment and decisions, and block credit transfer arrangements. Departments/Faculties will publish information on the type and extent of credit granted for each award.

5.1.3 Roles of Key personnel
The institution/university must designate an administrative unit responsible for planning and implementing APEL assessment. The institution must ensure that personnel responsible are aware of APEL policies and regulations. The personnel should be suitably trained to carry out the APEL assessment process in order to make fair and sound judgements. APEL assessment must be carried out by individuals with expertise in the subject, content or skills area.

There must be a separation of functions between personnel who carry out the processes as in Figure 5.4. In general, a number of personnel will be involved and their roles are as follows:

a. **Coordinator** - should be a member of the institution and he/she will receive and ascertains the viability of applications, selects APEL adviser and assessor. The coordinator explains to applicants the assessment processes.

b. **Advisor** – an expert in the subject or courses where the applicant wishes to submit an application. The advisor will help the applicant prepare his/her application for assessment of prior experiential learning and if necessary, the advisor may assume the roles of the coordinator.

c. **Assessor** - an internal or external content/subject specialist who assesses the application for the purpose of making judgment. He/she should also have the contextual expertise needed for an understanding of the occupational context within which the candidate may have gained the learning. Ideally, advising and assessment should be performed by two different people to avoid potential conflict of interest or bias.

d. **Moderator** – internal moderator of the institution has to establish and maintain an APEL: system for the institution. The moderator will assist in the establishment of appropriate assessment methodologies and tools help define the assessor and evidence

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58 MQA (2009), Draft for Guideline to Good Practices; Accreditation of Prior Learning, Unpublished Document, Proposal Paper Presented to Secretary Director General and Vice Chancellor (Public HE), Pg 23-24
guides, and moderate a sample of the assessment and the assessor practice. He/she will assist the institution to review APEL models and practices.

5.2 Differing Context of APEL-RPL Implementation

The context within which APEL is practiced is as varied as the applicants seeking credits for learning achieved. In the case of The University of Monash in Australia, credit is granted through the recognition of prior learning for:

i. learning acquired in a 'credentialed context', other than a university or TAFE, such as a course offered by a professional body, enterprise, private educational institution, or by any other provider recognized by the university

ii. learning acquired in an 'uncredentialed context', such as through work or life experience.

Likewise, in Malaysia (and also in other countries like South Africa), APEL is not only practiced in the Tertiary and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), but also in Training Institutions, as well as at the 'workplace-based education', Training centres and also by small private providers. In addition, APEL is also done either against:

i. unit standard-based qualifications – recognition of prior achievement (RPA) implementation by the DSD of MOHR, are based on the National Occupational Skill Standards (NOSS). In other words, the skills and knowledge will be assessed according to the competencies stipulated in the NOSS.

ii. learning outcomes – practiced by the tertiary and Higher Education Institutions

Those qualifications by both methods are equally valid expressions of outcome-based education. As in Malaysia, this approach is seen as a method to establish ways in which articulation of qualification between various sectors of education and training providers can take place and this could facilitate the development of the multiple learning pathways. Apart from this, the context is also linked to the varied purposes for embarking on a process of APEL from personal development to career change as discussed in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, on top of this varied approach, all APEL-RPL practices are measured against the agreed criteria and this are considered as the basis upon which all APEL system are developed. Practically, APEL practice cannot take a 'one size fits all' approach, therefore different providers will have different strategies in APEL implementation which must be aligned to the client for which the system is developed.
5.3 Forms of Credit Awarded

Through the prior experiential learning assessment, candidates may then get access to a programme and/or receive credit within a programme. To be eligible for credit, prior experiential learning must have been acquired within a reasonable timeframe; as an example only skills and experiences within 5 years to the year of application may be considered. Time limit may vary from one discipline to another, depending on the rapidity of the change in the state of knowledge in that particular discipline.

Credits may be awarded to a programme on the basis of credit transfer and/or APEL credit. While both forms of credit are related, their boundaries are still vague. Nevertheless, MQA (2009) has outlined the differences of both forms of credit, as described in the following section.

5.3.1 Credit Transfer: Formal Learning

Credit transfer involves assessing a previously completed programme of study or subject to see if it provides equivalent learning or competency outcomes to those required within the current programme of study. Students may apply for credit transfer where they have successfully completed subjects, i.e., achieved a pass grade, at a similar level and standard in previous studies. Credit transfer is categorized as follows:

i. Specific Credit Transfer – granted where a student’s prior learning is assessed as satisfying the learning outcomes of a specific subject(s) within a programme (subject of previous study must be equivalent to at least 70 per cent of the curriculum and credit value of the destination subject). However it does not contribute to any grade point average calculation (GPA) calculation. The credit transfer may result in the student being required to complete fewer subjects.

ii. General Credit Transfer – granted where a student’s prior learning is assessed as being equivalent to one or more electives within a programme. It may be granted for partially or fully completed programme.

iii. Block Credit Transfer-granted for a block of credits and intends to advance students beyond the entry level requirements of a programme. It may be granted for a completed programme of study only.

5.3.2 Credit Exemption: Formal Learning

Exemption is the waiving of a prerequisite or required subject for students who have proven they have comparable prior learning. Such students will be required to replace the exempted subject(s) with alternative subject(s). Exemption does not reduce the number of credits required for completion of a programme.
5.3.3 APEL Credit: Non Formal/Informal Learning

Credit within the programme may be granted to a learner on the basis of prior experiential learning at the point of entry or at any time within the first year of his/her study.

i. APEL for Access – Applicants may undertake APEL to seek entry to a programme of study if they do not possess the required formal qualifications but can demonstrate that they have achieved the necessary prerequisite knowledge and skills through learning from prior experience (e.g. from workplace), to succeed and benefit from the programme.

ii. APEL for Credit – Credit for prior experiential learning can be gained for subject(s) within a programme, provided that the learning
   • can be assessed;
   • is relevant to the programme and;
   • is at an appropriate academic level.

5.4 Standards for Quality Assurance in Assessing Learning Credit

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (C.A.E.L.) has developed ten standards that govern the assessment of prior learning. These ten standards are divided into two categories - Academic and Administrative. The first five are divided into two categories - Academic and Administrative. The first five are Academic Standards relevant to the processes governing the assessment of prior learning. The second five are Administrative Standards that describe the administrative context within which the assessment and recognition of equivalent academic occur.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

i. Credit should be awarded only for learning, not for experience.

ii. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.

iii. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance between theory and practical application.

iv. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.

v. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS59

i. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.

ii. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.

iii. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.

iv. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provisions for their continued professional development.

v. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.

5.5 Approaches to Accreditation of Prior Learning

Higher Education providers typically describe their approach to the accreditation of prior learning under one or more of the following headings:

- Accreditation Of Prior Learning (APL) - a process for accessing and, as appropriate, recognizing prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This recognition may give the learning a credit-value in a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with it.

- Accreditation Of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) - a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognized for academic purposes;

- Accreditation Of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) - a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and recognized for academic purposes.

- Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL&A).

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is a process for accessing and recognizing prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This concept of recognizing and accrediting prior learning comprises two constituent parts: APCL and APEL. What is common between prior certificated learning, prior experiential learning and other mentioned activities above, which must be properly considered for accreditation, is learning which is considered or assessed and recognized for academic purposes. It is the achievement of learning, or the outcomes of that

60 Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), (2004), Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning, 
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/guidance.asp
learning, and not just the experience of the activities alone, that is being accredited. The difference between APCL and APEL is that the former is a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered/recognized while the latter is a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and recognized (if appropriate). It is important to understand the difference between APCL and APEL, because APEL can only be implemented successfully if both its fundamental elements are understood.

These approaches typically include policies and practices designed to accredit learning and achievement that occurred:

- and has been previously assessed and certificated;
- in a work/community-based or related setting, but is not a formal part of that experience;
- prior to the formal higher education programme on which an applicant is about to embark;
- concurrent with participation in a higher education programme, but is not a formal part of that experience;
- through experience and critical reflection, but was not part of a formal learning programme.

5.6 APEL Process

At universities/institutions, assessed courses, part-qualifications and full qualifications obtained elsewhere could be formally recognised and acknowledged as being acceptable to it as a part of its own educational provision through APEL, by counting that prior learning as an element of one of its own awards. This process involves identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement, or certification of an individual’s vocational relevance or past experiences to enable them to be awarded.

Thus, in this process, student actively recalls and formally communicates his real world experiences and achievements in a manner that is intended to facilitate entry to or credit toward a chosen program of study at the university level. APEL is mostly used in academic sectors that target adult learners. It is used significantly in some countries, particularly Malaysia, to give adult students who may lack traditional qualifications the opportunity to obtain a tertiary/university education. This tool is intended to give adults who lack education but have significant life / work experience educational credit for their achievements.

Providers of APEL must have a process that is structured to minimize time and cost to applicants and organization. For most managers and assessors, the APEL-RPL processes that they were using were often seen to be the major barrier to its effective implementation. Among them is the
bureaucratic processes developed by the providers, along with unimpressive funding models and the quality of assessment and resistance from HEIs and training providers.

APEL process is about identifying your learning at work, through reflection on what you have learned and a dialogue with your coach/line manager. This process encompasses the range of activity and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place. In this aspect, one of the key findings from a research conducted by Bloom et al., (2004) was that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to RPL is inappropriate in developing recognition processes.

In general, the APEL process involves three (3) main activities, as shown in the schematic Figure 161. It involves first, recording of achievements in learning and progress by individuals. The achievement should cover previously unrecognized skills and knowledge achieved outside the formal education and training system compared against the requirement and outcomes to be achieved. What follows is the assessment of prior learning using tools that help learners to reflect, identify, articulate and demonstrate past learning to be evaluated and validated. Finally, certification is awarded if all the requirements are fulfilled.

![Figure 5.1 General APEL Process](image)

### 5.6.1 Key Features in Developing and Operating Processes of APEL

There is no one best way in dealing with APEL, therefore learning providers may need to consider the following key features when developing and operating processes of APEL-RPL

i. initial guidance on the APEL-RPL process

ii. supporting learners in a reflective process, identifying learning through experience (skills, knowledge and understanding), selecting and presenting evidence of that learning, identifying areas for further learning

iii. mechanisms for gathering and presenting evidence of learning

iv. recognition process for RPL claims

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a. notional leveling /mapping – individual learning plan - bridging (RPL for Personal/Career Development)
b. assessment, credit limits, fee process (APEL-RPL for Credit)
v. monitoring process for APEL-RPL procedures
vi. support for staff engaged in support and assessment of APEL-RPL
vii. integration of provision within quality assurance systems

5.6.2 Important Elements of APEL Processes

For effective practices of APEL-RPL, institutions should adapt the processes and customize to suit according to the situation, cultural, environment and needs of their stakeholders, through discussions with professional and VET practitioners (Bowman et al, 2004). Nevertheless, the following are guidelines of the important elements of APEL-RPL processes
   i. Learner-centred
   ii. Consistency
   iii. Timely information
   iv. Clear guidance and support must be given to applicants about APEL and particularly, in presenting their evidences of learning.
   v. Evidences of learning must be provided by applicants seeking APEL
   vi. Valid currency- the credit achieved by applicants through APEL must has exactly the same value as credit achieved from completing an assessed learning programme.
   vii. Regular meetings for assessors for feedbacks and sharing of assessment tools and other resources
   viii. Continuous improvement- reviewing their assessment process for value add.
   ix. Both the assessor and applicant need support- the assessor needs continuous training and professional development and the applicant having access to clear guidelines and guidance in the evidence preparation

5.6.3 Case Study: APEL Process in The University of Northampton

Again, APEL process may differ to a certain extent from one institution to another. In the case of University of Northampton, it involves 5 distinct stages to making an APEL-RPL claim where the key features mentioned earlier are consolidated, as shown in Figure 1 below. To ensure consistency, and to enable ongoing tracking of claims, it is important that claims progress through the five stages. However, the procedure has been organized so that straightforward
cases will be able to progress fairly rapidly between stages. The five stages of the University of Northampton are:

- Stage 1 - Dealing with initial enquiries
- Stage 2 - Giving detailed advice
- Stage 3 - Making a formal application
- Stage 4 - Assessing the claim
- Stage 5 - Processing outcomes

**Stage 1 - Dealing with Initial Enquiries for APCL and APEL**

Applicants will be informed of the University’s AP(E)L scheme. Initial enquiries from individuals about direct entry or exemption on the basis of APCL will normally be dealt with by the Admissions Office, while enquiries about APEL will be referred to the APEL Coordinator who will provide advice.

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62 Freestone, N.P. Flow diagram APEL Procedures, A Guide to APEL Scheme, University of Northampton, northampton.ac.uk/apl/apel_intro.htm
Figure 5.2: APEL Procedure Adapted from University of Northampton University.

University of Northampton’s APL PROCEDURE

STAGE 1
Pre-entry publicity materials
Applicant Enquiry

STAGE 2
STAGE 3
STAGE 4
STAGE 5

Detailed advice/guidance given to the student by the APEL Co-ordinator

Enrolment on to a UCN Programme
Initial guidance and advice from APL specialist
Student obtains APL Information Pack

Aplicant obtains the appropriate application form and guidance notes

Enrolment onto the APEL Level 1 CAF Module. Tutorial guidance to prepare and compile evidence

Submission of application form APCL-1 and supporting evidence to the relevant Course Leader

Submission of application form APCL-1 and supporting Portfolio of Evidence to the relevant Course Leader

Assessment undertaken by the Course Leader or nominated academic assessor and moderated by another member of academic staff. Forms signed by the assessor and moderator and forwarded to the APEL Co-ordinator

APEL Co-ordinator processes documentation and presents assessment outcomes to the APEL Panel for approval

Student notified in writing

Assessment outcomes presented to the appropriate examination board(s)

Students complete an APL Feedback Form and send it to the APEL Co-ordinator

Student Feedback summarised for the Annual Review process.
Stage 2 - Giving Detailed Advice

Although applications for APCL are straightforward in most cases, however there are some cases that may need for more detailed advice about the relationship of certificated learning to the programme applied for. In such cases the university’s Admissions Office will arrange for the applicant to receive advice from the relevant Admissions Tutor or academic contact.

In the case of APEL, the coordinator sends the applicant an APEL Information Pack, containing details of how credit can be claimed, and an outline of the procedure.

The degree of advice and guidance required by APEL applicants will vary from case to case. As a general guide, it is anticipated that the support needs of applicants for direct entry through established progression routes will generally not needed. The support needs of applicants for APCL only could be met in a single discussion either by telephone/E-mail or face-to-face with an admissions tutor or appropriate academic member of staff, though in more complex cases a second session may be necessary. For claims involving APEL, a maximum of three discussions between the student and advisor would be a reasonable expectation.

The APEL advisor:

- outlines the Module content, teaching and learning strategy, assessment etc.
- discusses the PALP system
- identifies what learning achievements the student is seeking credit for, and within which named programme.
- discusses with the student how experiential learning might most appropriately be evidenced and where applicable the types of evidence needed.
- in consultation with colleagues determines the appropriate method(s) to be utilized to assess the applicant's experiential learning.
- offers guidance on completing and submitting the formal application for APEL, or where applicable a combination of APEL and APCL.

Applicants for APEL will need to complete an APEL module registration form.

Stage 3 - Making a Formal Application for APCL and/or APEL

Most claims for APCL in UK will be received in association with a UCAS or standard University’s application form with supporting documentation. The Admissions Office will monitor applications, using the form to record and process the application.

Those who wish to make a claim which includes APEL will be required to enrol on the Level 1 (10 credit) APEL module, and will be sent the following information:

- APEL Module Guide;
- APEL Module Enrolment Form
- Personal Academic Learning Profile;
• Module Learning Material;
  • Application Form;
  • Guidance on completing form.

The applicant is responsible for completing and submitting the Enrolment Form in order to register for the module. On completion of the module, the applicant will be responsible for completing and submitting the provided form together with evidence to the APEL Coordinator The relevant Admissions Tutor or Course Leader and APEL Coordinator, and other appropriate members of the Course Teams will provide the necessary help and advice to students.

Stage 4 - Assessing the Claim
Assessing APEL claims is the sole prerogative of academic members of staff.

The process of assessing prior learning is subject to the same principles of academic judgement and assessments. Evidence presented in support of an APEL claim must satisfy the criteria of:

• validity - it must be appropriate in terms of level, volume (i.e. match that for which the claim is made, although higher level credit may substitute for lower level credit) and relevance for the purpose of the particular claim
• sufficiency - it must be enough to satisfy the learning outcomes of the unit(s)/module(s) claimed;
• currency - it must represent the applicant's present knowledge and abilities;
• authenticity - it must be indicative of the applicant's own learning achievements.

Prior learning should relate directly to the learning outcomes of those modules for which credit exemption or advanced standing is sought.

The relevant Admissions Tutor or Course Leader normally acts as the assessor, or if it is considered more appropriate, nominates an academic colleague to undertake the assessment.

The assessor:
• determines the specific academic credit to be approved in respect of a named award
• records this decision on a form, signing and dating it
• refers the form to the Senior Admissions Tutor for authorization and submission to the Admissions Office
The relevant Course Leader together with a nominated academic assessor not previously involved in the application, and in consultation with the APEL Coordinator will:

- annotate the portfolio, particularly where the evidence is rather weak or perhaps missing, being careful to clearly show any shortfall and suggest ways in which it might be remedied;
- determine the specific academic credit to be awarded in respect of a named programme;
- record this decision on a form.
- completes the assessment section of the form, stating both the decision reached and the basis of that decision.
- signs the application form and forwards to the APEL Coordinator

**Stage 5 - Processing Outcomes**

The Admissions Officer:

- presents the completed application documents to the Chair of the Admissions Committee for approval
- maintains a record of the whole of the APCL process for each student;
- ensures copies of all completed application forms and submitted support evidence are filed;
- arranges for the relevant Admissions team to send an offer letter to the applicant detailing the outcome of the APCL claim, any conditions of entry and any specific requirements of programme registration (e.g. modules which can or cannot be taken)
- ensures confirmation of any certificated learning is obtained prior to enrolment on the programme

In the case of an application for concurrent APCL, the above tasks will be completed by the Programme Support Team Administrator, but approval will still be obtained from the Chair of the Admissions Committee. The Chair of the Admissions Committee should refer complex or difficult cases of APCL, particularly those which might establish a precedent, to the Admissions Committee. All recommendations for APCL are subject to the formal confirmation of the relevant Board of Examiners.

The AP(E)L Coordinator:

- presents the assessment outcomes to the AP(E)L Panel for approval
- maintains a record of the whole of the APEL process for each student;
- ensures copies of all completed application forms and submitted support evidence are filed;
- processes completed AP(E)L Student Evaluation Forms for The University’s Annual Review procedures.
The Admissions Officer:
- sends an offer letter to the applicant detailing the outcome of the APEL claim, any conditions of entry and any specific requirements of programme registration (e.g. modules which can or cannot be taken)
- ensures that the decision is recorded appropriately;
- ensures copies of all completed application forms and submitted support evidence are filed on the student's record;

All recommendations for APEL made by the APEL Panel are subject to the confirmation of the relevant Board of Examiners.

5.6.4 Criteria to be Fulfilled in APEL Implementation

Most University has a set of criteria to be fulfilled in APEL implementation and as an example, University of Dundee\textsuperscript{63} has imposed basic criteria to be satisfied for APEL and this could be adapted for use at UTHM;

i. it should be relevant to the award towards which it will count;

ii. it should be at an appropriate level (e.g. equivalent to 1st year or 2nd year etc of a UTHM Diploma/Degree);

iii. that its learning outcomes (i.e. what the student has achieved) are broadly equivalent to those elements of UTHM award for which credit is claimed;

iv. that its curricular content is broadly equivalent to those elements of UTHM award for which credit is claimed;

v. that it is recent - i.e. acquired normally within the last five years, a figure which may be adjusted according to the nature of UTHM award for which credit is claimed (e.g. an eight-year old qualification from the Temenggong Sultan Ibrahim Teacher Institute may be regarded as acceptable for general exemption from first year of Bachelor in the Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education while a four-year old Diploma in Biological Science may be out-dated in terms of its content);

vi. that it is the applicant's responsibility to provide the detailed information required from a previous institution or organisation for the purposes of accreditation by the University.

5.6.5 Limits of Credits from Experiential Learning

Institution or providers should define the proportion of learning that can be recognized through the accreditation process. Limits may be applied to the smallest amount of learning that can be accredited, for example, a module or cluster of learning outcomes, and/or the maximum amount of learning that any individual applicant may apply. The SCOTCAT Quality Assurance Handbook guidelines clearly state that academic credit can confidently be awarded for appropriate experiential and work-based learning. The two guideline principles for awarding such credit are: "Credit is allocated for work-based learning on the basis of the achievement of appropriate and assessed learning." and "The learning achieved through work-based learning should include appropriate underpinning knowledge and understanding in order to attract the award of credit." The guidelines strongly support the CNAA guidance principle given above saying that "Credit is awarded on the basis of achieved learning from an experience and not for the experience itself."

Although in some other institutions, it is possible to complete an entire undergraduate or postgraduate degree through experiential or work-based learning, however, in most institutions there are limits to the percentage of the total course which can come from such learning. Normally they will limit to around 50% but rising in some institutions to approximately 65%. However, in some University, they do not permit the award of an entire degree through experiential or work-based learning mode but only assessed experiential and work-based learning as components of degree courses. In most cases, universities impose limit to the use of credit from experiential learning to not more than 50%. In Kings College for example, a student can claim APEL credits for up to one third of the credits for a programme. The claims are per module, i.e. students can only claim credits for the whole modules and an APEL application has to be made separately for each module. As in Malaysia, it was proposed that the total credit may be given up to 30% of the destination programme.

5.7 Assessment Process

APEL assessment must build on the experiences and individual learning needs of an individual. A learner centred approach to APEL assessment and professional judgement of the assessor will generate authentic, consistent, sufficient, valid and reliable evidence and ensure that APEL: is a collaborative decision making process.

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5.7.1 Principles and Guidelines of Assessment

APEL-RPL assessment recognizes skills and knowledge, no matter how, when or where the learning occurred. Skills to be considered for recognition may have been gained through:
- formal or informal training and education
- work skills or knowledge
- general life experience
- any combination of the above.

On how to assess an APEL claim depends on the requirements of the individual institution. Obviously, an institution wishing to implement an APEL system needs to develop a clear and detailed assessment framework. In general, the following criteria should be considered and adopted by institutions as principles of assessment;
- Consistency of interpretation of evidence requirements – that the evidence is reliable
- Validity of the evidence being collected- that the evidence presented should be appropriately match with the learning outcomes being demonstrated.
- Sufficiency/Adequacy of the evidence – that the evidence should be sufficient breadth and depth, including evidence of reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes claimed. The essential reference point for ‘marking’ APEL is the lowest mark which enables a classroom taught candidate to ‘pass’. This rarely means a complete coverage of the syllabus.
- Authenticity- that the student really did what is claimed in the proposal
- Directness - that the focus of learning was sharp rather than diffused
- Quality - that the learning had reached an acceptable academic level
- Breadth - that the learning was not isolated from wider consideration
- Currency- that the student had kept up to date with recent developments i.e. reflects current learning.

However, it is not possible to give such detailed examples in this chapter, but the criteria mentioned above could also represent a useful set of generic criteria to guide assessors. As in the case of the University of Melbourne, four criteria of evidence of prior learning has been outlined for the assessor to be used as guidelines in judging evidence through a portfolio;

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• Authentic- it is the candidates own work;
• Valid - it is directly related to the current version of the relevant endorsed unit of competency;
• Reliable - shows that the candidate consistently meets the endorsed unit of competency and;
• Current- reflects the candidate’s current capacity to perform the aspect of the work covered by the endorsed unit of competency.

Assessment processes of APEL-RPL must adequately comply with the principles of assessment. Similar to all assessment, the evidence given by the applicants must indicates that he/she is currently competent against the endorsed unit of competency. This evidence may take a variety of forms and might include certification, references from past employers, testimonials from clients and work samples. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide sufficient evidence to satisfy and give confidence to the assessor(s) that they currently hold the relevant competencies.

5.7.2 Model for Validation and Recognition

The flowchart below gives a general outline of the APEL-RPL assessment process for adult, and what's involved. This is only an example of an APEL- RPL assessment process, and it may not be exactly the same as the process you go through with your assessor. However, this example highlights the main steps in the process and what's involved with each one. In most universities, APEL-RPL is assessed on the basis of equivalent learning outcomes or competencies. Assessments are done through evidence-based and the faculty concerned will determine a variety of methods and instruments to establish equivalence.
5.7.3 A Generic APEL Assessment Process for HEIs.

MQA (2009) has proposed a generic APEL assessment process as shown in Figure 5.4 below. This process may be adapted according to the specific needs of each institution.

a. Stages of Assessment Process

i. Pre-assessment- APEL advisor guides and advice candidates for assessment preparation in aspect like assessment approaches, portfolio development, tools and mechanisms, evidence collection.

ii. Assessment – a process where evidence is judge by the assessor.

iii. Notification of Assessment Outcome – Upon endorsement of the assessment outcome, a written notification of the result should be issued to candidates.

iv. Post-assessment Support/Appeal Process – post- assessment support for both applicants who succeed and those who don't should be available. Bridging or headstart programme could be propose for the former and for the latter, further guidance and counseling could be given and they should be allowed to submit an appeal.

v. Moderation – this is a key aspect of the overall approach to quality assurance of APEL process. The three main stages for internal moderation include design, implementation and necessary changes through lesson learnt. The moderation function may be carried out periodically to verify the effectiveness, validity, reliability, fairness and practicability of the procedures and assessment process itself and also the performance of the assessors. From the feedbacks, improvement and enhancement of the procedures, assessment
process, appointment or deregistration of assessors could be carried out. The appeal procedure for dissatisfied learners may also be review and revise.

This generic framework is implemented in many universities like the Monash University (MU). Prior to assessments, prospective students of MU will first determined from the relevant faculty what forms and sources of prior learning the faculty is prepared to consider when assessing entitlement to credit in a university course. Following this, the applicant would:

- obtain from the relevant faculty information regarding the types of learning that may be recognized and the ways in which this learning will be assessed, including any associated costs.
- an application form should be completed detailing the applicant's prior experiences and how these relate to the units for which credit is sought. All relevant details, for example references, course details should be included at this stage.
- the application for credit should then be discussed with a designated RPL adviser (usually the faculty registrar in the first instance) who will provide counseling as to the probability of success of the application.

The university will endeavour to complete the RPL assessment prior to the commencement of the semester for which the credit is sought.

b. Appeal Mechanism

An effective means of appeal mechanism should be established in each institution in relation to APEL decisions. It is important an appeal Committee be set up to review the decisions made by the assessor. An appeal should be dealt with, within a reasonable timeframe. Institutions must ensure that their policy on appeal against an APEL decision and the procedures to be followed, are clear and readily accessible. This Information should be provided at the commencement of APEL procedures.

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5.7.4 Recognition of Prior Achievement Assessment Process For The Malaysian Skills Certification

a. The Skills Recognition Good Practice Model

The Skills Recognition Good Practice Model as in Figure 5.5 starts with a facilitated self-assessment competency conversation whereby a discussion between the candidate and the assessor based on the candidate’s background, current job role (where applicable), current skills, knowledge and abilities, skills gained outside of their job role (volunteer work, community activities), potential types of evidence, and the identification of the RPA candidate’s interest areas, takes place. This self-assessment and competency conversation draws out potential
matches of the RPL candidate’s skills to units of competency and qualifications, which maybe from multiple training packages.

Mapping evidence to relevant competencies is primarily the task of the assessor and requires sound knowledge of the units of competency and the training package as well as confidence in the specific evidence requirements. Evidence validation involves considering a mix of direct and indirect evidence, while meeting the principles of assessment, including sufficiency and authenticity, and utilizing third party/peer or supervisor verification, where relevant.

Outcomes of RPA assessments can include demonstration of competence in individual units of competency or ‘skills sets’ from a single qualification, right up to a whole qualification or multiple qualifications, and/or units of competency across a multiple of training packages. The following diagram illustrates a good practice approach to skills recognition.

![Skills Recognition Good Practice Model](image)


Figure 5.5: Skills Recognition Good Practice Model


Quite similar to the MQA (2009) generic APEL assessment process, the stages of RPA assessment process of DSD of the MOHR is as shown in Figure 5.6 below.

![Flowchart for a RPA Assessment process](image)

Figure 5.6: Flowchart for a RPA Assessment process (DSD, MOHR, 2009)

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70 Department of Skill Development (DSD), Ministry of Human Resource (2009), Pembentangan Kursus Induksi, Pegawai Penilai, Pengiktirafan Pencapaian Terdahulu (PP-PPT), Persijilan Kemahiran Malaysia.
5.7.5 Support to Applicants

APEL-RPL providers must provide adequate information and support to enable applicants to gather reliable evidence to support claim for accreditation/recognition of current and/or prior learning or competencies. Among the support that should be given:

- Promotional documentation – brochures or inserts in students handbook are presented in simple language easily understood by the students
- ‘user-friendly’ forms that applicants are required to complete
- Clear and ‘easy to understand’ checklist and guidelines to support reliable and valid evidence collection
- Provision of formal assistance from instructors/lecturers together with information session, interviews and counseling.
- APEL-RPL experts assisting subject matter experts to make assessment decisions against standard checklists.
- Develop sample materials, evidence sheets, assessment plans and checklists to generate consistent outcomes.
- Implementation of Quality assurance of RPL at all phases- front, during and after assessment.
- Monitoring from Quality Assurance Managers- do spot checks of evidence and judgements.

5.8 Types of Assessment

There are many types of assessment but importantly they should be fair and flexible taking into account background, culture, choices and learning needs of the assessed. It could be argued that a methodology that relies on hard copy evidence would not be appropriate to all learners, since many have experience in areas which do not or cannot generate such evidence. This approach could be a burden for both applicant and providers, and many simply do not bother, opting instead to enrol and attend classes rather than taking the APEL pathway.

Thus, portfolio for obtaining evidence to support APEL is not suitable to all applicants. A practical alternative could deliver valid and reliable APEL assessments. Applicants can also be assessed through a combination of formative and summative activities which form part of an overall APEL assessment or the equivalent ‘assessment of learning’ which are carried out by ‘teachers/lecturers’. The list below is among the various types of assessment;

i. Portfolio
ii. Challenging test
iii. Attestation
iv. Examinations
5.8.1 Portfolio

The normal vehicle for the assessment of experiential or work-based learning is by presentation of a portfolio of learning incorporating reflective analysis on the learning achieved. This is often supported by an interview.

A portfolio is a compilation of evidence that relates to the learning outcomes of a subject or course that the individual applies credit for (direct evidence based on what the applicant can demonstrate for himself or herself). The portfolio could consist of reports, job description, referee reports, essays, artifacts and products made, designs, drawings, plans, test results and so forth.

In the portfolio, candidates are expected to be able to demonstrate evidence that they are:

i. Able to develop their own professional practice e.g. extending the scope of professional practice

ii. Experienced in field practice initiatives, such as involvement in commissioning of oil drilling equipment or in teaching at schools or any other field/clinical practice

iii. able to adopt and integrate contemporary subject matter knowledge (in their respective field) with practice e.g. changing an aspect of industrial practice or teaching practice.

iv. Able to utilize research to be applied in their work practice.

Candidate should also provide evidence of prior certificated learning that informs his/her professional practice e.g. certificate in teaching.

5.8.2 Challenging test

A challenge test can be used when evidence from the other sources needs confirmation. This could be a simulation, presentation, role play, practical demonstration, a written/oral test, or an assignment.

5.8.3 Attestation

Attestation is when the knowledge and skills of an applicant is confirmed in writing by another person, i.e., indirect evidence based on what others says or observe about the applicant. The person could be the applicant’s employer (e.g., manager and supervisor) or clients (e.g., students and customers).
5.8.4 Examinations

Examinations may be conducted in two forms: written and oral. Written examinations test concepts, basic skills and applications. Examples of written examinations are multiple choice, true-false, matching, fill in the blank, essay, short answer, situation-based problem solving and standardized exam.

5.9 Summary

The process of APEL which enables the identification, assessment and certification of an individual's learning and/or vocationally relevant past experience is of particular value to people without formal qualifications to enable them to obtain all or part of a wide range of qualifications. The process involves a number of stages; dealing with initial enquiries, giving detailed advice, making a formal application, assessing the claim and processing outcomes. However, there is no 'one size fits all', thus, Institutions need to adapt not adopt model and best practices to accommodate a number of processes customized to the clients. Although APEL has been exercised by many developed countries like the USA, since the 1970’s, there is no generic template for its implementation at the institutional level yet. The implementation of APEL demands that systematic attention be made to all internal processes in an institution. Consistency, validity, sufficiency, authenticity, directness, quality, breadth and currency underpinned the principle of assessment which involves the stages of screening, pre-assessment, assessment, notification of assessment outcomes, post-assessment support and moderation. Lastly, APEL focuses on the learning outcomes of these experiences, not how, when or where the learning occurred. Previously acquired skills and knowledge are identified and assessed against standards set by the awarding body (like MQA, DSD, industry, etc.). Thus, Institution must standardized curriculum content to ensure the portability of courses.
CHAPTER 6

ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD FOR APEL IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA

6.0 Introduction

Undeniably, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) seems to be a powerful tool and mechanism to enable current skills and knowledge assessed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or registered training organization to see if they meet current institution or industry standards. Everyone deserves an opportunity to have their skills and knowledge recognized to gain the relevant formal qualifications. These could be made possible through APEL where assessment doesn’t restrict to when, where and how the learning has occurred.

In the context of business and industry, the increased demands require new approaches and paradigms to improve confidence, morale and business results. Streamlined, integrated processes of APEL could help business firms and industry develop capability and capacity for future business growth. APEL could also be a viable tool in Human Resource Management such as in the development of workforce planning, succession planning and developmental pathways.

6.1 Brief History of APEL-RPL in Malaysia

Based on the reports of policy decisions by the Cabinet Committee of Training (pg 59, Statement 6.3(2), the Department of Skills Development (DSD), Ministry of Human Resource Malaysia (MOHR) has embarked with the Recognition of Prior Achievement (RPA) and was launched in September 1996. The concept of RPA is derived from the philosophy of recognition of prior learning (RPL). It was conceptualized as a key strategy for achieving the strategic thrust laid by the Malaysian Work Skills Training and Development Plan (2008-2020) which are;

i. Fulfill the industrial needs of skills workforce
ii. Recognize more skilled workforce or industrial experts

Similar to the concept of RPL, RPA is a method of assessment for an individual to acquire recognition for their current competencies based on prior achievement. The purpose of RPA\(^7\), is to recognize the current competencies based on the prior achievement of an individual by giving an opportunity to them to acquire the;

- Malaysian Skill Certificate (SKM) or
- Malaysian Skill Diploma (DKM) or

- Malaysian Skill Advanced Diploma (DLKM) or
- Statement of Achievement (PC)

The use of RPA system is very timely and instrumental to enable the government in increasing the number of skilled workforce and lessened the reliance on foreign workers. RPA is also imperative as enablers to generate productivity in the industrial sector with the increase of skilled workforce. Currently, there are 60,000 uncertified workers\textsuperscript{72} in Malaysia where their competencies from their prior achievement are yet to be assessed and recognized. Thus RPA is a powerful tool that could fasten the recognition and certification and could deliver the required skill workers. At the same time, this recognition will motivate the workforce to enhanced their education and qualification for their career development. In addition, they could achieve this in a shorter time without having to attend classes, training or examination. On the hand, the employers get better competent and motivated workers who would enhanced their quality of work and thus increase the productivity of the organization. In terms of cost, the employers also save as they do not need to send for training.

Against the same agenda of human capital development and based on the same concept of RPL, Open University Malaysia (OUM), Malaysia’s pioneer open and distance learning university, was the first institution of higher learning in Malaysia to be granted approval by MOHE to implement the Open Entry. The philosophy of Open Entry, that is to democratize and make education accessible to all, enables admission opportunities for adult learners who possess vast working experience but yet lack the minimal qualifications to enter into a university programme. Thus, it acknowledges learning gained through formal, non formal and informal means and allows an alternative access to higher education with less restrictive entry requirements compared to conventional universities. The system based on the underpinning lifelong policy, is a fundamental principle in the Malaysian Qualification Framework.

The launching of Open Entry in May 1996 by the then Minister of Higher Education, has become one of the most significant milestones in the Malaysian’s higher education development when in the following year of 2007, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) launched the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN). The strategic plan articulates its vision for the transformation of Malaysian higher education from 2010 to 2020 and beyond where Lifelong learning (LLL) was one of the seven strategic thrusts outlined. The Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), is one of the key agencies that has been entrusted to execute the ‘thrust’, and one of the key elements required for the realization of the ‘thrust’, is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Based on the philosophy of RPL, RPA and Open Entry in Malaysia, considered to be under the umbrella of APEL, is conceptualized by the Malaysian Government as a key strategy for achieving the objectives of the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) which are:

i. Increase access to higher education and widen participation of adult learners

ii. Alternative pathways and learners mobility

Nevertheless, in the Malaysian context, the term APEL is mainly used by the Higher Education System, while RPA by the Vocational Education and Training (VET) System. RPA policy regards its system as an intrinsic function of a sustainable and equitable vocational and training system. Despite RPA started earlier than open entry and seems to be more ‘active’ and more ‘mature’ in the implementation, both the system of RPA and open entry has developed and paved the way to the transformation of a more dynamic and sustainable Malaysian Qualification Framework. Open Entry has undergone a tremendous journey where substantial improvements have been ongoing, particularly on the assessment method where RPL has been integrated into the scheme.

6.2 Open Entry, RPA and APEL in Malaysia

The need for developing competencies of the workforce and for investment in human capital has generated the provision for RPA by accredited training centres under the purview of DSD, MOHE and also Open Entry and RPL in selected HEIs. This type of entrance is normally for adult students who may not meet the entrance requirements but possessing relevant experience, to enroll in a programme of study.

In the HEIs scenario of open learning, steps taken by OUM was followed by University Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) and Wawasan Open University (WOU). They were the pioneer practitioners in open learning in Malaysia which was approved by MOHE.

Later in 2008, three more universities was further approved by the MOHE to exercise open admission; Asia e University (AeU), International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF) and Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU). The growth of open learning paves the way for APEL practice in Malaysia to a certain extent it has enlightened the potential of APEL practice in the much needed talent development for a sustainable human capital development.

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Recognition of Prior Achievement (RPA) has been an integral part of the national Vocational Education and Training system in Malaysia for nearly 15 years. During this time the uptake of RPA has fallen well short of anticipated levels and the potential of RPA to achieve access and social inclusion goals has not been fully realized.

For Vocational Education and Training Providers (VET) in Malaysia, RPA is all about:

- Realizing social & economic goals
- Engaging employees and enterprises
- Leveraging opportunities to enhance productivity through human capital development

Recognition of prior learning is becoming an integral component of the VET system in Malaysia. Apart from the various purposes that have been discussed earlier, RPL can also enable an organization:

- to audit the skills of its employees and assess where further development should be focussed.
- help an organization to articulate the competences and qualities which it requires of its workforce in line with its business aspirations.

The method used for this recognition practice varies between the different needs of the courses offered. This method has given opportunity to skilled workers to get recognition of the skills that they have. Without any certification, these experienced skilled workers can apply to get the Malaysian Skills Certificate/ Diploma/Advanced Diploma without going for training or sitting for special exams. The candidate only need to provide proofs of skills that they have acquired to be evaluated and certified, besides meeting the requirements that have been identified. As an example, in order to apply for the Vocational Trainer Officer Programme, one needs to have experience in the fields shown in Table 6.1.
Table 6.1: Duration of working experience for those applying for the Vocational Trainer Officer Programme in order to gain accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification Level</th>
<th>Duration of working experience *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian Skills Certification Level 2</td>
<td>7 years and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian Skills Certification Level 3</td>
<td>5 years and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian Skills Diploma, Malaysian Skills Advanced Diploma (DKM/ DLKM)</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not inclusive of training period, if programme/course was undertaken at the training centre

6.2.2 RPL and Open Entry Experience in OUM and Other Private Universities

In OUM, candidates who wish to pursue an undergraduate programme must be at least 21 years of age on the year of application and possess a minimum PMR/SRP/LCE qualification or its equivalent. For programmes at the Masters level, candidates must be at least 35 years of age and possess a minimum qualification of STPM/HSC/A-levels or its equivalent\(^74\). Candidates must also possess prior learning experience in the programme of interest as well as pass the Open Entry Assessment conducted by the university. These measures undertaken is to ensure adherence to the national guidelines as well as quality in the assessment mechanism. All learners in Open Entry will receive the same learning services and assessments until they graduate, just like the normal entry students. There will not be any bias in terms of quality or services for one admission path over the other.

The Open Entry scheme at OUM is illustrated as in Figure 6.1 below.

The School of Lifelong Learning (SOLL) was established to manage the implementation of Flexible Entry and Recognition of Prior Learning policies at OUM. In September 2007, SOLL was restructured and renamed as the “Centre for Assessment of Prior Learning” (CAPL) to better reflect its role in the university. CAPL is responsible to further enhance the quality in assessment, processes and services relating to Flexible Entry and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) at OUM. Today, CAPL aspires to uphold the university’s motto “University for All” by providing an avenue to lifelong learning opportunities through Flexible Entry admission and APEL in the country.

OUM APEL applicants have to undergo screening at the first stage to ensure that candidates have the necessary knowledge, skills and aptitude for the specific course or programme. At the pre-assessment stage, learners submit their Knowledge Resume that contains detailed information of their prior learning and experience relevant to the course they wish to apply for through APEL. Thereafter, the learner will be required to take a Challenge Test or submit a portfolio to assess their prior learning. The Challenge Test will assess knowledge on the course while a portfolio will demonstrate prior learning through a collection of evidence that support the prior learning claims (i.e. documents, reports, photos, etc). For the portfolio, details and documents must be provided as evidence to proof that they have the knowledge and skills that they must have prior learning knowledge gained through their life experiences including at the workplace. Three steps that the applicant will take to produce the portfolio; (i) enrolling a portfolio course for 8 hours, supervised by facilitators (ii) portfolio development in two to three weeks and (iii) submit the portfolio to OUM before the deadline of the application. The panel will evaluate the applicant’s portfolio and help them change prior experience to apply for prior learning Credits. If competent, APEL credits will be awarded for the course.
Figure 6.2: Route to APEL

Step 1: Pre-Assessment
Applicant need to submit the details of all applicant prior learning and experiences relevant to the course that he/she wish to apply through APEL using the Knowledge Resume template found in the eServices menu at the myLMS learner management system.

Step 2: APEL Assessment
Upon successful review of the Knowledge Resume by the Reviewing Committee, he/she will be required to undergo an APEL Assessment which may take the form of a Challenge Test or a Portfolio.

Step 3: Credit Awarded
If he/she is competent in the APEL assessment, he/she will be awarded with APEL credits for the course. Hence this would accelerate his/her completion of a programme and smoothen the road to his/her graduation day.

The normal study cycle that all OUM learners go through begins with registration. Prior to the first tutorial, all new learners will have to attend a compulsory Learning Skill Workshop. In this half day workshop session, learners will be introduce to the important aspect of learning in an open and distance environment. This includes hands-on session on how to access the OUM Learning Management system, myLMS and the Digital Library. The main objectives of the learning skill workshop is to provide the initial confidence, motivation and to make them feel at ease before coming to their face to face tutorial session. Thereafter, tutors and academic staff will take them through the five tutorial sessions. This stage is clearly important in influencing learner’s perceptions of their experience with the institutions, but it is by no means the only critical stage in learner’s journey from registration to graduation. Administration staff is also key players during all stages of the learner study cycle. It is crucial to provide the relevant support services to help them move seamlessly through their journey in an ODL environment.
Though OUM provides assistance by conducting examination clinics to learners taking difficult or “high risks” courses, some still find it difficult to cope. Thus, along the learner study cycle, there are several attrition points, such as after tutorial 1; at mid-semester examination; at tutorial 4 and at final examination. However, learners who have gone through the whole spectrum of the study cycle, and have passed or failed their examinations, will come to an even more critical point, that is the re-registration for the next semester.

As in OUM the entry requirements is also the same as in other private open universities like WOU and UNITAR. At the first stage, candidates have to undergo screening, just like OUM but the assessment in WOU is based on certificate of attestation, work experience and diagnostic tests and also includes certification based on the programmes offered in WOU. Candidate is also expected to furnish a portfolio outlining their work experiences, knowledge skills, etc. The diagnostic test is used to gauge literacy and scholastic aptitude of the candidate. At the same time, WOU takes into account all documentary evidence of certificates obtained by the candidate. The level of attestation is divided into three broad categories of Band A, B, C according to the relevancy of the certificate(s) in relation to the learning outcomes of the degree programmes and courses applied for by the candidate. The decision to place candidates into various bands is done in consultation by a panel of trained counselors in RPL assessment together with the academic faculty members and technical advisors of respective courses.

Similarly, the same first stage of screening process is involved in UNITAR. However, candidates will be provided a four hour training session in assembling of the portfolio. The applicant’s completed portfolio will be sent to the faculty for assessment and verification. An interview session will be conducted to gauge the applicant’s ability to enroll direct into a programme of study. The preparatory programme is designed for the student who as a result of the interview sessions is deemed to be required to undergo a preparatory programme to prepare him for the course of study.

6.2.3 RPL in Enterprises/Associations

RPL is also implemented by some enterprises through collaborations with training institutions, particularly for licensing purposes. As an example, the Malaysian Equine Council (MEM - Majlis Equine Malaysia) conducted RPL program aims to certify farriers who have had no prior formal education in farriery. This program was important to fulfilled the requirements that all farriers shoeing race horses have to obtain their RPL III certificates by the end of 2005, as announced by Malaysian Racing Association.

This RPL programme was first developed and introduced in Australia in 1994 and was brought to Malaysia by MEM which then set up the Malaysian Farriery Training Program and later, an
MoU was signed between MEM and Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, whereby the Institute will provide full ongoing support for the delivery of the training and accreditation of farriers. This programme also provides farriers with skills and competencies to enhance their ability to provide training and assessments services within our farriery industry, through provision of training in 7 Units of Competency from the Nationally Accredited Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Apart from this, there are also other enterprises and professional bodies that implement RPL to provide licensing for practice and other development purposes.

Figure 6.3: Farriery Training Program
6.3 APEL-RPL in Malaysian Public Universities

Although APEL is now a national education and training policy imperative, it is new and remains an untested policy in Malaysia. Where there has been research, the findings suggest that there is still a lack of awareness, clarity about the nature, value and purpose of RPL (Noraini et al. (2010), Latifah et al (2009), Kuldip and Nirwan (2006), Harvinder and Yusof (2004)) and that institutional bureaucracy and inexperience, and the absence of expertise in assessment of experiential learning remain constraining factors for implementing APEL-RPL in Malaysia.

Therefore, although APEL-RPL has also been implemented in the Public Universities to a certain extent but the implementation is according to faculty.

Despite the potential, the policies and procedures have yet to be developed.

University Vocational Awards Council in UK (Jonathan Garnett, Derek Portwood and Carol Costley, 2004) recommended a proposed model for Learning, Recognition and Development (LRD). This model could be adapted by the universities in Malaysia, particularly UTHM to further develop an action plan on APEL. UTHM need to work together to forge partnerships and put the systems in place that will enable the benefits of APEL to learners, employees, institutions, employers and the nation to be realized.

6.4 MQA and APEL: Towards Quality Assurance and Mobility

Malaysia established the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) and at about the same time, the establishment of the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) in 2007. The function of the agency is to manage the framework and its associated mechanisms across all higher education, technical and vocational tertiary education and skills training, thus establishing an overall national qualification framework embracing qualifications across all three sectors and the relations between them (Figure 6.4).

Post-school education and training involves four types of providers: universities and colleges; polytechnics; community colleges; and skills centres. Funding and administration for these providers entails three systems – for universities and colleges; polytechnics and community colleges; and skills centres, respectively. Responsibility for the funding and administration of the skills centres (consists of public and a large number of private training centres) is located in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MOHR). The universities, colleges, polytechnics and community colleges are under the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) but under separate divisions of the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE). The higher education sector consists of public universities and a large number of private universities and colleges, including branch campuses of overseas universities. In
addition to these institutions, there also a range of professional associations that award their own credentials and overseas qualifications are issued by some providers.

Figure 6.475: The Function of MQA Across all Sectors of Education and Training Providers.

In 2009, MQA developed a draft for the consideration of the national policy document on APEL, entitled: Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL) in Malaysia – Policy Consideration, to provide direction and support for a sustainable evolving system of APEL that should be able to set the required standards to meet the challenges of a sustainable economy through human capital development, as stated in the tenth Malaysian plan. Highly skilled talent base are imperative to rapidly respond creatively to economic changes and therefore APEL is seen as a vehicle in terms upskilling the existing workforce to facilitate industries to move up the value chain.

The other emphasize of this policy consideration is to give guidance to providers in Malaysia, particularly the Malaysian tertiary and higher education and training institutions, regarding the establishment of proper mechanisms and resources as well as quality assurance measures in APEL provisioning. The core principle of APEL was presented as well as key criteria for effective and valid assessment. This document although not comprehensive, nevertheless it is open-ended and non-prescriptive. It is meant to support the development of APEL systems and processes that would ultimately putting quality assurance of APEL in place. Guidelines for institutions on how to develop a systematic approach in their implementation plans are also mentioned. Additional, the documents outline six steps needed by institutions for implementing the APEL Assessment processes. Finally, the document highlights nine areas of standards for the quality assurance requirements that must

75 Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin (2004), Postgraduate Education & The Malaysian Qualification Framework
be adhered by the institutions together with the Code of practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA) and the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA).

Despite the efforts by the Ministry in promoting APEL in Malaysia, APEL is often understood as the recognition of learning for course entry, rather than for credit. The MQA appears to have a role in laying down minimum conditions for entry to some courses. There is a clear hierarchy of providers and courses, especially for school leavers. The idea of APEL for entry and credit is seen as being enhanced by an outcomes based framework. It operates at the qualifications rather than the unit level, and the more outcomes-based SKM qualifications are only located on the MQF as whole qualifications within the Qualifications Register – their NOSS standards are within the Ministry of Human Resource Development and its MLVK.
Figure 6.5: MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: QUALIFICATIONS AND LEVELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MQF Levels</th>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Lifelong Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Vocational and Technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Skills Certificate 3</td>
<td>Vocational and Technical Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Skills Certificate 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Skills Certificate 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the MQA Act (2007) the formal purposes of the MQF are to:

- establish a single structure for all higher education qualifications – that is those issued by public and private universities and colleges;
- secure standards and reinforce policies on quality assurance;
- build mechanisms for progression and lifelong learning (LLL);
- support collaboration between sectors;
- build parity of esteem between different qualifications;
facilitate credit systems, transferability and external linkages;  
provide better information to facilitate evaluation; and  
facilitate comparisons of qualifications.

In relation to this, APEL is the mechanism in this framework, in its effort to enhance the culture and development of lifelong learning. In addition, as in Figure 6.5, APEL provides pathways for individuals to progress in the context of lifelong learning by:

i. Providing mechanisms for progression or articulation between qualifications;  
ii. Providing alternative routes to access higher education; and  
iii. Establishing a credit system to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer.

APEL serves as an 'alternative' entry route and a means of gaining credit within formal programmes of study, keeping the MQF open to recognition of the value of learning gained outside formal system. The provision of an open, inclusive, accessible and integrated post-secondary education and training system, allowing individuals to have their formal, non-formal and informal learning assessed is critically needed. This can be done through assessment based on national standards - MQF level descriptors as in Figure 6.2. However, it is not apparent how the MQF alone can enhance the capacity for its realization. There are issues in APEL implementation that act as barriers to the effectiveness of the practices.

6.5 APEL/RPA and TVET in Malaysia

In the VET system in Malaysia, APEL and RPA is becoming an integral component. APEL and RPA can enable an organization:

- to audit the skills of its employees and assess where further development should be focused.
- If the organization is seeking to get its workforce better qualified then RPL is a time efficient way of ensuring individuals receives credit for what they already know and do not have to repeat learning where they are already knowledgeable and competent.
- help an organization to articulate the competences and qualities which it requires of its workforce in line with its business aspirations.
- Individuals may also seek to gain credit for their prior learning and experience, perhaps as a starting point for further study. The RPL process benefits them by providing a structured and supported opportunity to collate evidence of what they already know and possibly gain credit for it. As well as possibly reducing the time it takes to achieve a qualification, this process can also provide motivation by validating knowledge which they have acquired informally.

and stimulating a reflective process which will enhance their ability as learners throughout their study.

6.5.1 Recognition of TVET Certificates as Entry Qualifications into HEIs

Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) has become a mainstream education option in many developed countries. Many high-income countries adopt a binary or ‘dual-pathway’ model of education that allows significant flexibility and mobility between the academic and technical or vocational streams, with equivalent career prospects. However, only 10% of students enrol in upper secondary technical and vocational education in Malaysia, whereas the average enrolment rate for OECD countries is 44%.77 Improving the availability, access and quality of TEVT for the technical pathway is equally as important as the academic pathway of tertiary as well as higher education. Thus the dual-pathway approach that is currently being pursued with some degree of mobility between the two pathways, provides a potential method in addressing this issue. Figure 5 highlights the different components of TEVT currently available in Malaysia, as well as the transition options to and from the academic pathway.

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TEVT certificates have yet to be fully recognized as entry qualifications into higher education institutions, and there is currently no single TEVT certification system in place. Currently, Malaysian Skills Certificate, Diploma in Technology and Degree in Technology are not fully recognized by higher education institutions and the Board of Engineers Malaysia. There is an opportunity to improve the acceptance of TEVT certificates among students, parents and employers by removing the uncertainty over the quality of training delivered by different agencies and also through standardization and recognition of TEVT certification. To enhance standardization and recognition of TEVT certification, the Malaysian Skills Certificate will be adopted as the national certification for TEVT. APEL could serve as a viable tool for the standardization and recognition process.
6.5.2 Large Segment of Unskilled Workforce

Currently in Malaysia, only 28% of the total workforce is employed in the higher skilled jobs bracket reflecting the low level of educational attainment among a large segment of the workforce. There is an urgent need to upgrade and re-skill the existing workforce, to move the economy up the value chain. The Government aims to achieve a target of 33% of the workforce being employed in the higher skilled jobs bracket by 2015, and up to 50% by 2020.78

The APEL and RPA programme will be expanded with the goal of formally recognizing the experience and expertise of workers, as well as to encourage and reward lifelong learning among the workforce. The programme will enhance the career prospects of the workforce by conferring the Malaysian Skills Certificate on workers who do not have any formal certification, but who have obtained relevant knowledge, experience and skills in the workplace. It is expected to benefit more than 60,000 workers annually. Financial assistance for workers to undertake training to qualify for the Malaysian Skills Certificate will commence in 2011. In addition, a skills credit bank will be established by the Department of Skills Development to maintain a database for training records and facilitating the certification of skilled workers. Collaboration on career building and coaching between universities, TVET institutions, and industry to enhance career and professional development, is needed. APEL will be instrumental not only for recognition, but also act as a mechanism for human resource development in the analysis and identifying gaps in their competencies as a feedback for training needs.

6.6 Why APEL-RPL has not been implemented widely in Malaysia?

APEL in Malaysia has not been implemented widely. There is no exact data on the rate of APEL activities in Malaysia, as it is relatively new here as compared to other part of the world, nevertheless overall it is perceived as low. The limited literature review available only shows that APEL-RPL mainly occurs among the open universities (under the open entry system) and some public and private institutions and training organizations. Some of the reasons may be that the MQA is just recently set up at about the same time with the launching of PSPTN. Therefore APEL was emphasized in a time where MQF which is under the prerogative of MQA is under intense ‘development’. Similarly, at this point of time, tertiary and higher education and training are also under intense ‘change’ - restructuring and ‘rebranding’ in terms of structure, curricula, learning programmes and approaches of assessment. Apart from that, there were also sceptism over the quality of the outcomes whereby they perceive that standards of APEL qualification are lowered to accommodate learners who were not eligible for admission to learning programmes through the

conventional way. Although not many, there are also views that perceive APEL as a ‘threat’ to the integrity and quality of higher education and training. But most of all, there are also who view APEL as a complex and complicated process and it is not worth the trouble.

6.6.1 Issues and Challenges

There is a list of issues and challenges in APEL implementation, similar to what has been highlighted by Harvinder and Yousof (2006), and Kuldip and Nirwan in (2007) in Page 108 and 110. Many of the issues discussed in their study reports are common across all sectors, despite differing policy frameworks and approaches. Nevertheless the key issues that are not discussed by the researchers that may inhibit the development and implementation of APEL include;

- **Lack of public awareness of APEL**
  Many students, academicians, administrators, individuals reported that there was not enough information, and the information that was available was often difficult to understand. Similarly, stakeholders, employer bodies and unions perceived that workers and employers did not know about APEL, or how to access it. This situation is worsened by the complexity of the VET system, and the language which at times can appear impenetrable to those not directly working in the system.\(^{79}\)

- **Candidates ability to Document Prior Learning- Complex Processes**
  The main obstacle to APEL is the difference in focus between vocational and professional courses. University courses tend to be theoretical while vocational courses focus on practical skills. People wishing to be considered for APEL must document their work and focus on the theory and reason behind things and tasks they do at work. The reality is that prior learning and competency do not follow the stated outcomes of a course, and neither do they result in a singular experience. The task of colligating and finding commonalities among a series of learning events is difficult as is determining gaps in knowledge related to a particular course or discipline- both for the candidate and the assessor.\(^{80}\) Apart from problems in articulating what the student knows, problems in ‘translating’ learning acquired through life and work in post – compulsory education and training is also critical. Thus, Institutions need to look into ways of standardizing curriculum content to ensure portability of courses. Report writing and portfolio preparation may determine the success or failure of an RPL system. However this is challenging to candidates who have not been involved in academic work for a long period of time.

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c. Inadequate support
It is sometimes extremely difficult for students to get the evidence they need, if it is based on work they have undertaken in the past. Sometimes it proves to be costly and difficult to find the information required since many students have moved around, therefore evidence or references were almost impossible to find. Apart from that students are not very clear of the evidence needed. Thus students need assistance to gather evidence. For the staff and assessors to be able to give the relevant support, they need to go for training and ongoing professional development.

d. Staff Development
There is lack of staff training in APEL. Considerable staff development is required before the introduction of an APEL practice to enable staff to provide students with the appropriate degree of support and guidance. Effective documentation for students is vital to the success of any APEL system. They require clear and comprehensive guidelines on the definition and concept of APEL, the APEL process, and the type(s) of documentary evidences that are required to support the claim for the award of credit. In addition, it is normal to provide tutorial support for the student in the development of the portfolio.

e. Incompetent Assessor
Assessors involved in APEL-RPL need to be:
- Accepting of the concept of RPL
- Be highly skilled in their vocational field
- Have industry ‘currency’ and be conversant with the Training Package
- Be highly skilled assessors and assessment tool developers
- Have confidence in their judgements.81

RPL assessors also require:
- supportive systems, tools and processes, without excessive paperwork
- well advised candidates

Nevertheless, making judgements about prior experiential learning or competency on the diverse evidence (drawn from a range of different contexts) provided in interviews and portfolios requires highly skilled and professional assessor. Among the issues related to assessors are;
- lack of ability to undertake assessments using supplementary evidence
- lack of holistic assessment

• lack of technical assessment skills
• lack of ability to make decisions based on evidence drawn from a range of different contexts
• lack of consistency of interpretation, adequacy of evidence and the lack of verification in place.
• assessors ‘over-assessing’ to ‘undertaking a ‘tick-and-flick’ process

The involvement of industry in the recognition process was also seen to be of critical importance to valid assessment decision-making. APEL-RPL assessors needed clear advice on evidence requirements and this needed to be informed by industry technical experts. Professional development and resource support for assessors are essential for effective APEL-RPL assessment.

A small number of public and private registered training organizations commented that one of the problems they encountered with the process was the lack of assessors with the skills to make judgements about evidence drawn from often wide-ranging experiences and industry contexts. The discussion revolved around;
• the technical assessment skills of the people making the decisions, and
• their ability to make decisions based on evidence drawn from a range of different contexts. Making judgements about competency on the diverse evidence provided in interviews and portfolios requires highly developed skills.

Professional development and resource support for assessors were seen to be essential for improved assessment practice.

e. e-Portfolio

At present, RPL assessment processes are many and varied, and largely manual. There is a need for individuals to be able to identify and describe evidence for RPL claims in a meaningful, consistent way, which would enhance their chance for a successful RPL claim, as well as support the RPL assessment process.

An e-portfolio can support this good practice model by capturing self-assessment results, skills profiles and reflections, the validation of a mix of direct and indirect evidence, third party reports and can aid communication between the candidate and the assessor. Such tool should assist learners in documenting their RPL claim and maximize their chances of making successful claims, as well as make the process more streamlined, and potentially usable beyond the RPL process.
f. Fees

In the case of APEL, the 'learning' has, by definition, already taken place, and the focus is on assessment alone. Thus, it might appear that APEL should cost very little. After all, for traditional students in higher education, the costs involved, cover both teaching and assessment, as well as involving both facilities and staff, which APEL would seem of using much less of the resources. Theoretically, then, APEL should cost the institution, and therefore the student (or sponsor), significantly less. However, this does not always happen.

Nevertheless, APEL services should be more cost-effective for applicants, employers and employees if it is meant to help the ‘disadvantage’. The initial start-up costs for developing the system may be relatively high as compared to developing a new learning programme. However, the costs will be reduced and spread over a period of time with more learners enrolling the programme and also by reducing the cost of training (modules for which the applicant already meets the requirement, will not be taken). For APEL to be attractive, the services should not cost more than a full-time face-to-face programme particularly if such services are integrated into the existing infrastructure. Logically, the APEL cost should never exceed the costs of the traditional route regardless of the actual costs involved to the institution. Nevertheless, the cost of developing APEL systems and capacity must be seen as an investment in the development of a credible lifelong learning system in Malaysia.

6.6.2 Recommendations

a. Steps For Effective APEL Implementation

The elements outlined below are steps that could be taken to ensure effective APEL implementation82;

- awareness and understanding of APEL
- guidance and support of candidates for the processes of assessment
- User friendly and efficient mechanism and processes are Streamlined
- Processes that are client focused and provided support for applicants
- Establish formal networks
- Adjusted student enrolment
- Effective counselling procedures
- Course standards processes are to be inclusive of APEL processes
- Ensure evidence of prior learning is consistent with assessments within training programs

• Ensure consistency across all education and training organizations
• Targeted marketing
• Include self assessment in the process
• Non-graded assessments to be used with APEL

b. Strategies to Enhance the Assessment Process

Assessment processes of APEL-RPL in Malaysian HEIs need enhancement and the practitioners/researchers are working on it. HEIs and other providers have to ensure that assessors have the necessary skills and are performing well. It has to be supported and backed up by the relevant managers, supervisors and other working colleagues. Among the strategies identified for developing an assessment system in HEIs;

• Workshops
• Taking time to consult with other assessors
• Training/retraining of assessors
• Collaborative assessment and validation
• Internal moderation activities
• Provision of exemplar assessment information, evidence or benchmark materials

6.7 Research on APEL practices

Although very few research related to APEL-RPL has been done in Malaysia, there are a number of researchers in developed countries that have attempted to identify criteria of an effective and sustainable APEL system and the factors which promote or enable an effective APEL processes. Nevertheless, a brief scan of existing research into APEL-RPL in Malaysia quickly reveals that there are many questions still unanswered around both the theoretical concept and implementation of APEL in the country. In considering the significance of APEL in relation to TVET and particularly in human capital development, a number of issues come to the fore. Much of the literature has focused on conceptualizing RPL (Harvinder and Yousof (2006), Kuldip and Nirwan, 2007), the potential of RPL for widening access and human capital development (Kuldip and Nirwan, 2007), case studies of Open Entry and RPL in OUM (Harvinder and Yousof (2006)84, Latifah et al, 2009), Qualification Frameworks and Impacts related to RPL (Keating, 2010), and Framework of Portfolio development (Noraini et al, 2010).

The following are among the publications the author found in which certain aspects of the article relate to the focus of this booklet:

i. An analysis done by Harvinder and Yousof (2006) on the initial experience in Open Entry implementation and RPL in Open University Malaysia reports on the importance of Open Entry and RPL in enhancing knowledge society and an initial experience of OUM in implementing these initiatives. This analysis also looks into the processes and procedures applied for executing the national agenda of Malaysia. The analysis will be of useful feedbacks not only to OUM but also to other HEIs in establishing guidelines for effective implementation of Open Entry and RPL. The key issues and challenges faced by OUM during the process includes;

- Clear direction – clearly outlined processes and procedures is vital,
- Shift of paradigm – change society mind-set is needed as the whole idea of APEL is very new in Malaysia and they might have prejudices.
- Model of open entry, Institution should adapt the most appropriate model that suits best to local context and culture.
- Policies and guidelines – Proper policies and guidelines on the standards and procedures should be clearly drawn earlier. It should be review and updated regularly to prevent miscommunication and confusion in the later state and serve as a reference point.
- Quality assurance – The processes, procedures and assessment must be explicitly included in the institutional quality assurance processes to assure all stakeholders on the integrity of the academic standing and outcomes
- Entry criteria – It can be a daunting task to determine the mode of assessment especially when it is still ambiguous if the learner had acquired the right amount of ‘learning through experience’.
- Assessment methods - the assessor must have the competency in the assessment of prior learning, while the student must be able to demonstrate and document his/her learning in accordance to academic assessment methods.
- Student support – it is pivotal to plan and develop strategies to support learners on a variety of task.
- Planning – like any projects, key activities and its deadlines must be thoroughly planned.
- One-to-one mapping to course for APEL – candidate must be able to ‘match their own learning with the stipulated learning outcomes, competencies and standards’ against a specific course, and also provide evidence.
- IT support – Institutions should optimize the use of IT in its processes. e portfolio is a sustainable way of documenting evidence.
• Acceptable time gap of learning – a candidate might not remember what has been learned a long time ago. How much gap of time between the point of receiving and presenting knowledge, need to be spelled out.

ii. The research done by Latifah, Mansor and Lilian (2009) on the persistence and performance for both normal and open entry learners of OUM highlighted useful insights that serve as a reality check on the effectiveness of Open Entry practices and learn the success and failure rates of Open Entry learners to give feedbacks to universities. This study addressed issues of interest, ranging from: What is the persistency level? and how are the performance results of the normal and the open entry learners? and what is the extent to which differences may exist between the two group? The research results in this study reveals that that the open entry learners need to be given special attention, guidance and support particularly at the third semester, when the average re-registration rate starts to decline. The study also indicates that although the persistency levels for open entry learners exceed those of the normal entry learners, their performance were relatively lower. However the researcher believe that this does not necessarily mean that Open Entry learners are inferior compared to their normal peers in terms of performance as the differences found were rather marginal. The study concluded that despite lacking in terms of the academic entry qualifications, the Open Entry learners were able to cope with the demands of their programmes and they could perform almost at par with their normal entry peers. The study suggested that institution should provide appropriate intervention where necessary and continue to monitor the performance and persistency of these groups.

iii. The research done by Noraini, Wahid and Raja Norazillah identified dominant assessment method, major domains and the necessary criteria in generating a Portfolio Framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The findings of the study gave valid inputs to the design of a portfolio framework for the RPL, for technical programmes in Malaysia. This quantitative research is based on document analysis, questionnaire and interviews of experts. About 28 experts from nine public and private institutions of higher learning (IHLs) have been chosen as the key respondents to undertake the questionnaires while a few RPL experts were selected for the interviews. The represented institutions involved in this research includes Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), Ministry of Higher Education, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), The Open University Malaysia (OUM), Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL), Institut Latihan Perindustrian (ILP), Ministry of Human Resource and industries. The result from this research found that portfolio is the most dominant assessement method used in the Malaysian HEIs. Nevertheless, other
assessment methods like interview, challenging test, workplace assessment, artefact product assessment, assignment and demonstration are also used. Research findings showed that the assessment method through assignment and demonstration can still be used but with a caution. Researcher is of the opinion that candidate who has skills and a work experience does not have enough skill in producing a report as well as using computer software. On the other hand, candidates that have some experiences in management and administration do not have any problem to complete their task to assess their prior learning. This study also indicates that there are seven domains required in the development of portfolio; namely candidate’s profile, academic qualifications, non-academic qualification, prior learning courses attended, lastest skills acquired, generic skills, and academic skills and work experience attestation. The findings may be used as guidelines for RPL assessment performance in Malaysia. By referring to the level of necessity for each domain, the researcher designed an effective portfolio framework for RPL in TVE programme in Malaysia. The researcher recommended a further study employing more data through a Delphi method as well as conducting an evaluation of the RPL processes.

iv. The article written by Kuldip and Nirwan in 2007 on: ‘Human Capacity Building Through the Recognition of Prior Learning: Implications for Higher Education’, identified and addressed a number of issues related to the implementation of RPL, as well as to the mechanisms used to harness the competence, experience and abilities of employed adults seeking further education. The issues and concerns outlined by the researcher are:

- Candidate’s ability to learning – Demonstrating prior learning in written form, such as through a portfolio, means that candidates have to use language effectively to communicate prior learning. This would be a challenge to candidate who has not been involved in academic work for a long period of time.

- Using appropriate methods of assessment -

- Matching prior learning to course requirements

The researcher highlighted the strategies in addressing the issues in a number of ways:

- Matching candidates to assessors who have similar work experience or by providing candidates with clear criteria for what to demonstrate as evidence of prior learning.

- Provide the support necessary for candidates to demonstrate evidence of prior learning by showing models of portfolio or by talking through their experiences.

The researcher also calls emphasized on the need for a new agenda in higher education that clearly define the role of HEIs in human capacity building. Higher education must be brought closer to the world of work and to make apparent the relevance of higher education to the work place.

v. A completed Med Dissertation done by Heyns, J.P. in 2004 identified the characteristics of a valid, practical and effective RPL system and also the elements required to implement a
sustainable RPL system\textsuperscript{86}. The study indicates that the three crucial elements in establishing an effective and sustainable RPL system are:

- Having a quality assurance framework
- Creating an enabling environment for RPL provisioning, and
- Reviewing policies and regulations that govern access.

For further advancement of APEL practice in Malaysia, further research is recommended:

- Exploring criteria and standards for sustainable APEL
- What level of APEL is desirable: what is a ‘successful’ APEL
- Exploring the process and Framework of granting ‘partial RPL’ – granting APEL-RPL for units of competency which form part of a larger unit of delivery
- Investigate the alternatives for unsuccessful APEL applicants
- APEL-RPL conducted within enterprises and industries at private expense and not involving higher education and/or training institutions
- Quality Assurance in APEL

6.8 APEL Practice in University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM): How Do We Start?

Adults in Malaysia have a vast array of skills, knowledge, and values to contribute to our communities’ and our nation’s future. They have learned from peers, family, and elders; they have learned from experience, from observation, from traditional knowledge, and from skill trainings. However, this foundation of abilities and wisdom often goes unrecognized because it is not formally credited. In the case of those from the skills training institution, the certification are not ‘recognized’ to get themselves enroll into the universities or academic institutions. Thus with APEL, UTHM under the Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN), will be more significant in its drive into technology based programmes, if it could provides trainees from skills institutions and industries, effective ways to recognize of the capacity already present in them and get them enrolled themselves for a programme in UTHM. UTHM can move forward together with the industrial community and building on its strengths in technology programs which are practical oriented.

The recognition of their learning and training also has important benefits for individuals, training institutions and industries. Many of us undervalue the skills and knowledge we have learned outside of formal academic settings. As such, we suffer from not believing in our true potential and the opportunities available to us. For most adults, the process of documenting and reflecting on our learning and training experiences reveals surprising amounts of learning. In fact, the combination of

reflecting on our ‘learning and training’ in a supportive environment and valuing all that we have learned can have a major impact on our self-concept and our mental health – and therefore, on our life choices, our relationships, our careers, and the roles we have in our community and country.

Besides, UTHM is now offering many professional programmes like the Executive Diploma/Advanced Diploma Programs which are focused and targeting working adult learners who may have substantial workplace experience but lack of the qualification required for the conventional academic programmes. The rapid growth of professional programmes and continuing education programmes at CEC, UTHM – under the offshore programmes particularly for adult learners, is generating a ‘call for action’ on APEL development to address the issue of ‘non-conventional students’. However, the policy and regulations of APEL implementation has yet to be developed. The mechanism of a sustainable APEL system needs to be worked out.

In relation to this, the South African Qualification Authority (2004)87, utilizes six steps as part of the strategic framework and the core criteria for quality assurance to develop an implementation guide for RPL, which are;

i. An audit of current practice
ii. The development of detailed sector-specific plans
iii. Capacity building of resources and staff
iv. The design and moderation of appropriate assessment instruments and tools
v. Quality management systems (QMS) and procedures
vi. The establishment of a research base

Incorporating the steps (like above) and emulating practices from other countries, an outline of process in undertaking APEL and Strategic Plan are proposed by the author as follows;

**6.8.1 Outline of Process in Undertaking APEL**

In setting up an APEL Programme, UTHM need to consider several essential elements to provide a good starting point. As with the design and delivery of any new procedure in a university, it is essential that the effects on the wider university systems and procedures are also considered. The following is an adapted88 outline of the process in undertaking APEL might look like;

i. Select an Form an APEL Committee

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88 Be Flex Project (Undated), Recognition of Prior Learning, http://www.eucen.org/BeFlexPlus/index.html
ii. Develop an APEL policy and guidelines - It should outline its policy intent, objectives, scope, definitions and categories, policy provisions, responsibilities, communications, and other related information.

iii. Identify study programme that will accept for entry or for credit or for part of a programme. This may need to be negotiated with individual programme ‘owner’ or may be cross faculty. Procedures/rules must spell out on how much credit or exemption can be achieved by APEL when using it towards a specific programme. University may place limits on which programmes can accept APEL based on professional body requirements.

iv. Set up an advice and guidance process for learners wishing to take up APEL. University need to train staff to have the understanding of is needed to be demonstrated to meet learning outcomes of the receiving programme and staff need to be confident in giving advice on the types of evidence that are appropriate especially when demonstrating learning through experience or informal learning.

v. Design Process for assessing evidence of prior learning produced by learners. The process should allow the volume of credit awarded for evidence produced to be judge. – University need to develop guidelines on assessment of APEL to ensure consistency of judgement made across departments. The design and moderation of appropriate assessment and tools must be carried out. Collaboration between units/departments and subject specialists from the programme need to take place. The assessment process will also need some form of external verification of the results.

vi. Design process for giving individuals feedback on their submission of evidence and support in planning for future study. – University need to ensure an appeal process is in place. Staff will be required to give feedback on individual basis and guide student for their future learning plans.

vii. Integrate the APEL system into The University’s Quality management System (QMS) to ensure it aligned to quality assurance processes for the programmes into which APEL is accepted. – This is to ensure transparency and parity between those gaining credit through APEL and those gaining it through a programme of learning.
6.8.2 Planning for an APEL Policy

At macro level, UTHM planning and preparation must include (but are not limited to) these five functions\(^89\):

i. Formulating UTHM APEL policy

ii. Assigning responsibility for APEL functions to specific agencies (e.g., individuals, departments etc)

iii. Identifying decision-makers at different levels

iv. Planning awareness campaigns

v. Addressing UTHM staff issues.

6.8.3 Formulating UTHM APEL Policy

In formulating UTHM APEL Policy, a number of requirements need to be taken into account, and among them: policies need to be benchmarked against organizational and national criteria and standards, and must also meet the candidate’s requirement.

6.9 Way Forward of APEL Practice in Malaysia

The theory of human capital is the concept that acquisition of more knowledge and skills raises the value of a person’s human capital, thereby increasing their employability, income, potential and productivity (McIntyre, cited in Harvinder, 2006). Human Capital is one of the key factors in building a competitive position in a knowledge-based economy. Under the human capital theory, investment in education, training and employment scheme can enhance skill levels (Fitzsimons, 1999)\(^90\), thus transforming the nations into a productive and prosperous economy.

It is obvious that having a shortage of skilled workers - 60,000 workers have yet to get recognized for their current skills, introducing APEL to Education and Training Institutions is a way forward into Malaysian Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training system as reflected in Figure 6.6.

Universities like UTHM will continue contributing in this course despite of many challenges. APEL could be a viable and powerful mechanism to UTHM and other MTUN universities, in realizing the intake of students from training institutions to diploma/ degree programmes, as outlined in the tenth

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Malaysian Plan. Thus, HEIs, particularly the MTUN universities need to collectively plan and strategies to implement effective and sustainable APEL system. But firstly, the academician and administrative staff need to be developed in handling the whole operational processes and selected staff need to have the knowledge and skills in assessing the prior learning. To acclaim prominent standards in APEL for Higher education and TVET, UTHM need to engage and learn from the best practices from international projects and industries. HEIs and VET need to work closely with industries particularly on curriculum development. For APEL to succeed, the profession needs to articulate its curricula needs rather than importing the curriculum that may not be directly related to a country’s economic development\(^9\).

Figure 6.6 Enhancing APEL Towards Sustainable High Income

On its own, APEL is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment, but it is an important strategy to address access to education and training for those previously excluded. As such, APEL should be seen as a key developmental strategy-both for the system and for individuals wanting to receive recognition for their learning achieved outside of formal institutions. For this reason it is placed within a framework for the enhancement of lifelong learning. MQA and providers must commit to the principles of access and develop context-specific plans to materialise this.

For effective APEL development in HEIs, the following are among the elements recommended to be considered in the formulation of the policy on APEL in Malaysian HEIs:

- Governance structures to ensure roles are defined, effective allocation and management of resources, and monitoring of KPIs.
- Adoption of cost-effective mechanisms e-portfolio.
- Mechanisms to promote, inform, motivate and guide community of APEL opportunities.
- Collaborations to facilitate policy implementation – Leverage on experts and facilities of other public and private institutions, training providers and industries.
- Mechanisms to facilitate assessment and certification through MQF.

In reflecting on the current status of APEL-RPL in Malaysia, several key initiatives could be taken up by our HEIs or training institutes that will enhance the future directions for life long and life wide learning in Malaysia: APEL-RPL visibility need to be enhanced among clients and stakeholders.

- APEL-RPL must provide transparent mechanism, friendly learning path, client centered. This could encouraged learners, job seekers and employers to embraced the tool.
- APEL-RPL services must be cost effective and timely. Integrated RPL processes and mechanisms enables various delivery mode of RPL (life-wide learning) and realizing PSPTN, promoting access and equity in education and training (borderless environment for human capital development)
- APEL-RPL implementation need smart partnerships and strong collaborations among institutions, government, providers, industry, practitioners, voluntary sector, community and clients.
- APEL-RPL need competent practitioners, assessors and administrative staff.
- APEL-RPL need government or industrial financial support for the early stages of implementation.
- APEL-RPL embraces diversity in strategies and planning, services, human resources, programmes offering, due to its dual nature (APEL-RPL is both process and product).
- APEL-RPL need a policy that provides direction and support for an evolving sustainable system of APEL-RPL that will be able to go to scale in uplifting its social, economic and human capital development so as to meet the challenges of the new economic model (NEM) of Malaysia and at the same time establish quality and integrity of MQA.
APEL-RPL has tremendous potential to address human capital development and thus the labour market challenges through innovative approaches. APEL is now considered to be an important vehicle in Malaysia whereby access of adult learners to higher education and vocational training is facilitated. Thus a valid and sustainable system seems to point to the need for well-defined structures, policies and quality assurance mechanisms. The extent to which the emerging education and training system in Malaysia has already put such structures in place, is compared with best practices in countries where APEL has become an integral part of their education and training. Based on the analysis of the scenario in Malaysia, the author believes that;

i. the use of APEL processes in Malaysia is very limited and restricted mainly to specific settings and particular types of study program.

ii. The potential for wider use of APEL in Malaysia, is currently not being realized.

iii. APEL processes have not had a high profile in higher education and, as a result, the funding of APEL initiatives (e.g. research) has been somewhat being not taken seriously. It appears that, apart from the Open Universities, APEL development is not keeping up with other developments in education. Recommendations are proposed for strategies that could enable APEL to contribute to the success of lifelong learning and social inclusion policies in Malaysia.

Despite the challenges, APEL remains a viable way of empowering marginalized communities/employees. This is important as employees in organizations are facing increased social and cognitive complexity. Leveraging APEL, enables human capital development to nourish and thus enables the development of the capability of our organization, to change appropriately with its environment (Rauner and Maclean, 2008). Besides, the use of APEL can save resources, give access to tertiary education. With the adaptability and flexibility due to developed and ‘learning’ employees, this implies APEL could be a catalyst for nurturing a Learning Organisation that will finally lead to a sustainable organization. However, without careful planning, effective policy and regulations, dedicated staff and assessors as well as conducive support and environment, APEL practice may not succeed.
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