

**PRIOR NON-CERTIFICATED LEARNING: A CRITERION FOR THE  
ASSESSMENT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR ACCESS TO  
NAMIBIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research investigated the assessment and evaluation of Prior non-certificated Learning (PncL) as a criterion to access Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL) through the Mature Age Entry (MAE) scheme. It also examined how the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) accredits prior learning attained and non-certificated. Internationally framed in the discourse of equity and redress, PncL assessment is a strategy likely to encourage and open flexible opportunities for workers to access institutions of higher learning. Despite calls by the Namibian government to widen access to higher education (National Development Plan 3 (NDP3), 2007/8-2011/12), admission requirements to institutions of higher learning remained very low and biased (Education Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP), 2005). The current production rate of graduates from NIHL is too low to sustain and maintain the country's knowledge-based economy (NDP3, 2007/8-/2011/12). The study has utilised critical and interpretive theories to critique ideological views on the assessment of knowledge through MAE admission tests and to interpret data from respondents. A qualitative approach was employed through the case study design to solicit perceptions of assessors and administrators of how knowledge is assessed, both through the MAE scheme at the University of Namibia (UNAM) and the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select respondents from the two institutions and the NQA. In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 respondents, consisting of 17 assessors (lecturers) and three administrators. Interviews were also conducted with four accreditors from the NQA. Purposively selected institutional documents, including 2010-2011 MAE

test scripts, were analysed to find out the knowledge assessed through MAE. Content analysis was used to analyse data from the interviews and documents. Categories were generated through grouping related answers and labelling them, by linking and aggregating related categories to form themes. The findings of the study revealed that MAE schemes neither at UNAM nor PoN provided for the assessment of PncL. The knowledge assessed through MAE tests is academic, based on subjects taught at these two institutions. The findings showed norm-referenced tests as the only assessment strategies employed by UNAM and PoN through MAE. The study recommended a review of the criteria for the assessment of MAE admission and proposed alignment of PncL against National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level descriptors to accommodate candidates with work learning experiences. The study suggests future areas of research on issues pertaining to PncL practices, such as conceptual and philosophical understanding of it.

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ix
DEDICATIONS .....	x
DECLARATIONS .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Orientation of the study .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	18
1.3 Research Questions .....	20
1.4 Research Assumption.....	21
1.5 Significance of the Study .....	21
1.6 Limitations to the Study.....	22
1.7 Delimitations of the Study .....	23
1.8 Definitions of Operational Concepts .....	23
1.8.1 Formal Learning.....	23
1.8.2 Non-Formal Learning .....	24
1.8.3 Informal Learning .....	25
1.8.4 Knowledge .....	25
1.8.5 Access .....	26
1.8.6 Advanced Standing .....	26
1.8.7 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) .....	27

1.8.8	Experiential Learning.....	28
1.8.9	Assessment of Recognition of Prior Learning .....	29
1.8.10	Evaluation of Recognition of Prior Learning.....	29
1.8.11	Mature Age Entry .....	30
1.8.12	Accreditation of Prior Learning .....	30
1.8.13	Equivalency of RPL learning.....	31
1.8.14	Credit Transfer .....	32
1.9	Summary .....	33
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....</b>		<b>34</b>
2.1	Introduction.....	34
2.2	The Theoretical Frameworks of the Study.....	34
2.2.1	Critical Theory and the Assessment of Experiential Learning .....	36
2.2.2	Interpretive Theory in the Admission of Experiential Candidates .....	41
2.3	The Conceptual Framework.....	43
2.3.1	Knowledge in Recognition of Prior Learning .....	44
2.3.2	Conceptualising Prior Learning .....	47
2.3.3	Models of RPL Procedures in Higher Education.....	65
2.4	The Conceptual Framework of RPL derived from the Literature.....	71
2.5	The Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education.....	80
2.5.1	The RPL in Namibian Higher Education.....	86
2.5.2	Admission Systems in Namibian Higher Education System.....	87
2.6	Assessment, Evaluation and Accreditation of Recognition of Prior learning .....	96
2.5.1	Assessment Process of Prior Non-Certificated Learning.....	97

2.6	Evaluation of Prior Learning .....	112
2.7	Principles of assessing Recognition of Prior Learning .....	115
2.8	Issues in RPL .....	119
2.8.1.	English Language Proficiency .....	119
2.8.2	Credibility and Acceptability of RPL Knowledge.....	120
2.8.3	Financing Recognition of Prior Learning .....	122
2.8.4	Challenges.....	123
2.9	Summary .....	128
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>		<b>129</b>
3.1	Introduction.....	129
3.2	Research Design.....	129
3.2.1	The use of the qualitative approaches in this study .....	129
3.2.2	The method used in this study .....	132
3.3	Population of the Study.....	133
3.4	Sample of the Study .....	133
3.5	Research Instruments .....	135
3.5.1	The Interview Guides.....	135
3.5.2	Document Review Guide .....	136
3.5.3	The pilot study .....	138
3.6	Data Collection Procedures.....	140
3.7	Data Analysis .....	142
3.7.1	Transcription of data .....	142
3.7.2	Organisation of data .....	142
3.7.3	Coding and analysing data .....	143

3.8	Ethical Considerations .....	146
3.9	Trustworthiness and Reliability .....	147
3.10	Authenticity.....	150
3.12	Summary .....	150
<b>CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATIONS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA .....</b>		<b>151</b>
4.1	Introduction.....	151
4.2	Presentations, Analysis and Interpretations of Data from UNAM Assessors .....	152
4.2.1	Knowledge assessed through MAE Test Papers.....	152
4.2.2	Prior learning assessed in MAE assessment paper .....	155
4.2.3	Methods through which RPL contents were assessed in MAE.....	172
4.3	Evaluation of Prior Learning and Accordance of Academic Recognition in NIHL .....	180
4.3.1	Methods of evaluating Prior Learning through MAE.....	180
4.4	Summary of Findings from UNAM Assessors' Data .....	186
4.5	Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from UNAM Administrators.....	187
4.5.1	Administrator's views on the implementation of RPL in higher education .....	188
4.5.2	The Administrators' views regarding the implementation of RPL for access .....	190
4.5.3	UNAM's intentions to implement RPL for Access .....	192
4.5.4	Summary of Findings from the UNAM Administrator .....	193

4.6	Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from the PoN Assessors	194
4.6.1	Knowledge assessed through MAE Test Papers.....	195
4.6.2	Prior learning assessed in MAE Assessment Paper .....	198
4.6.3	Method used to assess English Language and Numberacy at PoN .....	204
4.7	Assessment of Portfolio of Evidence .....	206
4.7.1	Methods of assessing portfolio of evidence.....	213
4.8	Evaluation of Prior Learning and Accordance of Academic Recognition in NIHL .....	217
4.8.1	Evaluating prior learning at PoN .....	217
4.8.2	Summary of Findings from PoN Assessors Data .....	220
4.9	Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from PoN Administrators	223
4.9.1	Administrators' views on the implementation of RPL in higher education	224
4.9.2	Views on the implementation of RPL for access at PoN.....	228
4.9.3	Assistance that PoN requires from the NQA .....	232
4.10	Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) .....	234
4.10.1	Definitions of accreditation.....	235
4.10.2	Accreditation of RPL providers .....	236
4.10.3	Assistance that NQA can offers to institutions of higher learning .....	239
4.10.4	Criteria for accreditation .....	242
4.10.5	Monitoring the Implementation of RPL.....	243

4.10.6	Summary of Findings from the NQA Accreditors.....	244
4.11	Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from Institutional Documents .....	245
4.11.3	Knowledge Assessed through Portfolio of evidence (PoN) .....	270
4.11.4	Accreditation of learning by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) .....	271
4.11.5	Summary of Findings from Document Analysis .....	273
4.12	Main Findings of the Study.....	274
4.13	Summary .....	275
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....</b>		<b>276</b>
5.1	Introduction.....	276
5.2	Discussion of Findings.....	277
5.4	Summary .....	323
<b>CHAPTER 6: CRITICAL REFLECTION OF KNOWLEDGE, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>		<b>324</b>
6.1	Introduction.....	324
6.2	Synopsis of the Literature Review .....	326
6.3	Limitation of the Findings .....	329
6.4	Contribution to Knowledge.....	330
6.4.1	Clarification of confusion surrounding the term RPL .....	331
6.4.2	Assessment of Mode 2 knowledge through the process of Alignment.....	334
6.5	Recommendations.....	338
6.6	Conclusion .....	347
References .....		349

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## **DEDICATIONS**

This dissertation is dedicated to a special woman - my mother, Maria Panduleni Ndashaala.

**DECLARATIONS**

I Lydia Nghinanghone Shaketange, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part of thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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L.Nghinanghone Shaketange

## LIST OF FIGURES

2.1	Further Education Training Award Council in Ireland	67
2.2	AU PLAR Process Flowchart	69
2.3	Framework for Assessing RPL in Higher Education	72
3.1	Steps Employed in analysing data for this Study	145
5.1	Emerged Framework	317

## LIST OF TABLES

1.1	Number of candidates who applied and enrolled at UNAM	16
1.2	Number of candidates who applied and enrolled at PoN	16
2.1	Assessment, Evaluation and Accreditation of RPL	96
3.1	Criteria for choosing the Sample of the study	134
4.1	Definitions of RPL	153
4.2	What is assessed in Specific Subjects Matters?	166
4.3	Determinants of competence in a candidate Factors	175
4.4	Alignment of prior learning into academic learning	183
4.5	What knowledge is assessed through portfolios of evidence?	208
4.6	Definitions of accreditation as perceived by accreditors	235
4.7	Assistance that NQA may provide to RPL providers	239
4.8	Criteria for Accreditation of RPL	242
6.1	Critical Reflection: The Framework for assessing PncL through Alignment of NQF Levels	337

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP(E)L	Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning
AU	ATHABASCA University
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CAEL	Council for Adult Experiential Learning
CLA	Centre for Learning Accreditation
DRPL	Developing Recognition of Prior Learning
EFA	Education for All
ETSIP	Education, Training Sector Improvement Programme
FETAC	Further Education Training Award Council
FNTI	First Nations Technical Institute
HETAC	Higher Education Training Award Council
IUM	International University of Management
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MAE	Mature Age Entry
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
NCHE	National Council of Higher Education
NDP3	Third National Development Plan
NIED	National Institute for Education Development
NIHL	Namibia Institutions of Higher Learning
NSSC	Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework

PoN	Polytechnic of Namibia
PLA	Prior Learning and Assessment
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
PncL	Prior non-certificated Learning
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
UNAM	University of Namibia
VAE	Validation del'Experience
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTE	Vocational Training Education
WWW	University without Walls

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This study investigated the assessment and evaluation of Prior non-certificated Learning (PncL) as a criterion to access Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL) through the Mature Age Entry (MAE) scheme. It also examined how the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) accredits prior attained and non-certificated learning. The study identified mechanisms that could ensure credible assessment and evaluation processes in MAE to promote wider accessibility into institutions of higher learning in Namibia. This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, postulates and significance of the study, limitations, delimitations and operational concepts used.

### **1.1 Orientation of the study**

Namibia's population was recently estimated at 2.3 million (Population Census, 2010) scattered around 824,290 square kilometres (Cohen, 1994). The country has one national university, and a polytechnic, which are expected to accommodate all the demands for higher education. The International University of Management (IUM), a private university, subsequently became the second university in the country. At present, most of IUM's offerings are aligned to Management Studies. Candidates willing to study in areas other than management will have no option but to seek admission to the University of Namibia (UNAM) or Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN). These limited choices for diversity of institutions in the country constrain the

enrolment rate of candidates. The admission requirements for UNAM specify that a candidate can be admitted to the undergraduate degree provided he or she has passed five subjects, normally in not more than three examination sittings, with a minimum of 25 points and with a C symbol in English Language (UNAM's General Information and Regulations, 2010). Admission to the diploma level requires 22 points on the UNAM evaluation scale, with English as a Second Language Grade D or better. A candidate can be admitted to the undergraduate certificate programme, provided he or she has passed five subjects with a minimum of 17 points on the UNAM evaluation scale. English is a compulsory subject and a Grade C or better symbol is normally required to earn a place in a degree programme at the institution.

For admission to the PoN, candidates must also pass at least five subjects, including English with a D symbol or better. The passed subjects must yield a total score of at least 25. Candidates who do not comply with the general academic requirements for admittance to these institutions may, in the spirit of lifelong learning and redress of past disadvantages, apply for admission through MAE (UNAM-Prospectus, 2010; PoN Prospectus, 2010). Conditions for eligibility to MAE at both UNAM and PoN require that a candidate must have five years and three years, respectively, of work experience relating to the proposed study programme, and must possess a Grade 10 certificate. In other words, only those with Grade 10 certificate are considered. This requirement constrains those with experiential learning but without paper qualifications as they are left out of the admission requirements. The use of critical theory in this study critiques the practice and ideology behind these exclusions and

explores mechanisms that could bring about an inclusive and flexible admission system through MAE in the Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL).

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed the emergence of a framework for RPL, as an alternative strategy of assessment, in which credit is awarded for its demonstration either by auditioning or by writing. It is a scheme through which non-formal and experiential learning can be assessed and validated to give it the same value as that of formal education (Harris, 2000). The RPL is believed to have the potential to challenge traditional entry requirements and certification and to advance, increase and promote wide access for workers to academic institutions (Michelson, Mandell & Contributors, 2004).

An international perspective on RPL indicates that in a time of rapid change of knowledge, as experienced in the working world, theory alone is no longer adequate to guide action in the workplace (World Bank Report, 2004), in which individual workers are forced by their own dispositions to continuously review their knowledge and experiences in light of new and changing information (Dyke, 2009). The trend currently depicts a situation in which people are moving away from lifetime employment and are opting to change jobs several times during their working lives. In these cases they have to be able to transform their knowledge and skills into new work categories, necessitating the recognition of previous knowledge. Some have accumulated a great amount of work experience and they wish to use such knowledge for admission to learning programmes.

The practices of RPL by various countries have resulted in several acronyms referring to the same concept. In the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, RPL is referred to as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). In the United States of America (USA), the term is construed as Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), whilst in France it is known as *Validation des Acquis de l'expérience* (VAE). In Canada, the term is Prior Learning, Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), whilst in Australia and South Africa it is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (Harris, 2006). The Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) Act, (1996) also refers to the concept 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL), hence its dominant use in this study. The term refers to learning acquired experientially; hence it is synonymously employed with 'experiential learning.' Despite variations in terminology the underpinning concepts denote learning previously acquired in most cases from contexts outside the formal system of education.

The history of RPL developed in the USA in the G.I. Bill of 1946, when returning World War Two veterans wished for their various skills to be recognised by universities (Harris & Saddington, 1995). At the time their prior learning was evaluated against traditional course content as was found to fit the knowledge required by host institutions. The RPL is more associated with adult learning than traditional formal education because, given the requirements of working experiences, it would be adult learners who would seek admission to universities on the basis of it. In the 1970s the practice became firmly established in academic institutions in the USA through the work of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)

(Harris & Saddington, 1995, p.4). Countries such as the USA, UK, Australia, Ireland and Canada have practised RPL as a response to the various demands to widen access to learning opportunities for equity reasons. The two researchers also stressed that CAEL has introduced member institutions to RPL and mandated them to research broad ranges of activities on experiential and prior learning (Harris & Saddington, 1995).

The establishment of systems for the assessment and recognition of prior learning, particularly for non-formal learning, has been valued as significant for the lifelong learning policies internationally (Joosten-ten Brinke, Sluijsman., & Jochems, 2009). Lifelong learning has become crucial in the education of adults as it encourages learning among workers and competition in the global market. In the world of rapidly changing knowledge, employers can no longer rely solely on new graduates who have just completed formal education as the best source of skills and knowledge. Although graduates have the knowledge, skills and competence, employers need workers who understand the job history, who have been in employment and who have practical experiences of the work environment. Given the opportunity, the majority of workers in job markets are willing to upgrade their current skills and knowledge (World Bank report, 2004) and face the challenges of new developments. Therefore, provision of assessing learning acquired through work must be created for all those who wish to have their learning assessed in their pursuit of higher education credentials. According to the World Bank report, Lifelong Learning is a core aspect of society's economic and educational development.

In the opinion of the researcher, the knowledge-based economy should adopt a new pedagogical model, by which the site of knowledge production is defined by context and all forms of knowledge produced at various sites are recognised. Insights in a knowledge-based economy should strive for understanding that learning is democratically acquired through various contexts, hence outcomes of these various forms of learning should be assessed against the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level descriptors. There are several forms of learning, such as formal learning acquired from short courses or training that are accredited by accrediting institutions. There is non-formal learning obtained from non-formal contexts in which the education provided was not accredited. There is informal learning which takes place randomly with no intention of being accredited. Unless a formal credit arrangement has been issued it becomes impossible to differentiate which learning is accredited and which not. Hence, the assessment and evaluation of learning acquired non-formally becomes significant. Such assessment will transform acquired professional knowledge and skills into academe (Pouget & Osborne, 2004).

One of the recommendations made at the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) in Belem (2010) was a call for countries of the world to enact laws and policies that embrace flexibility and reduce barriers to accessing institutions of higher learning. It advocated commitment to the development and improvement of structures and mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning by establishing equivalency frameworks (CONFINTEA VI, 2010), essential in RPL as they demand equal values in learning. Equivalency postulates that experiences can be different but the learning outcomes

derived from them should allow comparability to the criteria of assessment (Lapsley, Kulik, Moody, & Arbaugh, 2008).

Many countries have become interested in the practising of RPL, with European ones such as the UK, France, and Sweden allowing mature students to enrol in higher education institutions not only for the provision of lifelong learning but also as an opportunity to benefit from inclusiveness in education. Similarly, some countries in Asia have also opened up to academic credit awards systems, with Korean and Japanese universities, for instance, being identified as among the Asian universities that have been through structural adjustment in order to accept into their institutions more continuing adult learners (Han, 2007).

On the African continent, a study was conducted by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2004 to map out the practices of recognising experiential learning in various sub-Saharan countries (UNESCO, 2007). The study found that there were countries whose experiential learning was legally accommodated within their national frameworks, including Benin, Botswana (albeit in the early stages of development) and Uganda (also in the process of establishing a national professional qualification). These countries have several projects on recognition of competencies according to their National Qualification Frameworks developments. South Africa and Namibia have implemented ones that harmonise components of the education and training system in order to facilitate the evaluation and recognition of previous apprenticeship and experiential learning (UNESCO, 2007, p.9).

The UNESCO study found that in some countries, such as the Central African Republic and Togo, recognition of experiential learning was the object of specific procedures based on the national curriculum with which experiences acquired by the learners complied. The third groups of countries included those that had not entered into a legal or official framework, such as Malawi, which had organised activities within the structure of its national certification, Kenya and Madagascar, which were creating national juridical frameworks, and Gambia, which appreciated the recognition of informal experiences but “the population’s confidence in informal systems [was] lacking” (UNESCO, 2007, p.11). The ideal of sub-Saharan countries was to put in place national qualification frameworks to authenticate the recognition of experiential learning.

In addition to UNESCO’s literature a considerable amount of work on RPL has also been conducted in South Africa, placing it on the formal part of the assessment policy in the country (SAQA, 2004). The RPL experience in South Africa followed the redress aspects of the country's historical perspectives related to the legacy of apartheid (Osman, 2006), with extensive research having been conducted and literature published on RPL in the country’s education system.

The term ‘recognition of prior learning’ (RPL) emerged in the Namibian context with the establishment of the Namibia Qualifications Authority Act (1996), as a means of enhancing learning opportunities for lifelong learners. It can be viewed as a way of adhering to the government's agenda of social justice and social change (Draft Namibian RPL Policy, 2010), one of the critical issues of which was concern

to tackle a skills shortage and high unemployment rate (Office of the President (Vision-2030), 2004). Through its policies Vision – 2030, it expressed a need for upgrading skills and development as well as job creation, an agenda influencing policy development and educational transformation towards social change. Similar to the South African situation, the significance of RPL in Namibia also stemmed from the country's historical perspective, characterised by colonial and apartheid systems prior to independence. The apartheid system reinforced the principles of Bantu Education, which encouraged the introduction of school segregation, and discrimination in the allocation of educational resources on the basis of race, skin colour and ethnicity. The imbalances in the administration of education created a lack of interest and participation in learners for educational activities (Cohen, 1994). As a result, the majority of black children failed to attend schools. Of those who did manage to enter the education system many dropped out in the early stages of their schooling (Ministry of Education & Culture (MEC), 1993).

After Namibia's independence in 1990, the country adopted a policy of affirmative action, under the auspices of the office of the Prime Minister, which aimed at redressing past imbalances and allowed formerly disadvantaged people to access resources. The Government requirement on national reconciliation and affirmative action necessitated that all posts in various ministries be filled, but in the process of recruitment some people who had not completed Grade 12 were also employed and assumed duties and responsibilities for which their training and experience were not adequate (MEC, 1993).

The government strongly believed in the notion of mobility between workplaces and institutions of learning, reinforcing the understanding that, if incorporated into the education system it could broaden not only the knowledge base of the country but also the attainment of qualifications by a broader group of users (MEC, 1993). It would also increase access to higher institutions of learning. Given this belief, the government encouraged workers to access educational institutions to upgrade their skills, develop capacities necessary for their jobs and attain qualifications through study (MEC, 1993). The assumption by the Ministry was that, upon completion of studies, these workers would return to their workplaces with improved knowledge, skills and qualifications, the consequences of which would be improved wages and thus quality of life (MEC, 1993). Concurring with the notion of mobility was a discussion paper for a national stakeholder meeting and draft chapter on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (UNESCO, 2007), which highlighted the significance of mobility between education and training, thus reinforcing the argument for attainment of qualifications and knowledge by individuals.

Realising the delays in enhancing mobility between work and educational institutions, the government resorted to the development of policy and legislation compelling institutions of higher education to create alternative entry routes to their programmes. For instance, the Presidential Commission on Education, launched in 1992, recommended that formal education alone could no longer achieve the required human resources needed for the country's growth (Presidential Commission on Education, 2001). Non-formal paths should be sought to supplement the available

routes to formal education. In 1993, an education policy titled ‘Towards Education for All’, A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training (MEC, 1993) was developed, describing the objectives (Access, Equity, Quality and Democracy) of education as the pillars of the education system (including higher education). Consequently, the NQA Act, No. 299 of 1996 was introduced, to address past social injustices and encourage economic development. The Act categorically stated that it recognised all learning, irrespective of where it occurred, providing it could be verified.

In 2003, the National Policy on Adult Learning (2003) provided opportunities for adult learning programmes to be available through equitable access and additional routes to accessing higher learning. Another policy developed by the government was the ‘Vision-2030,’ a long-term national objective to transform Namibia into a knowledge-based, highly competitive, industrialised and eco-friendly nation. It legislated for the development of diversified, competent and highly productive human resources and responsive technology to help the country shift from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy (Office of the President, 2004). It is apparent that such diversification of competent and highly productive human resources included knowledge acquired non-formally.

Despite the belief in mobility and knowledge base of workers between education institutions and employment places, this strategy was too slow to resolve the perceived concerns. The envisioned mobility between education and workplace did not take place at the pace expected (Vision-2030, 2004), and as a result this

limitation started to affect the government's own policy implementations and the redresses of past inequities in education (Education Training Sector Improvement Programme, (ETSIP), 2006). The programme highlighted the need to improve the existing skills at secondary and at tertiary levels as well as through pre-entry and foundation programmes.

Government's failure, through the development of a policy framework, to enhance mobility between workplaces and education appears to have been attributed to the lack of qualifying entry criteria needed by candidates to access Namibian institutions of higher learning (NIHL), which despite the government's advocacy of mobility maintained their statutory rules of access. The policies on admission to NIHL remain highly restrictive, exclusive and based on matriculation exemptions (Draft Namibian RPL Policy, 2010). The University of Namibia Act 18 of 1992, section 18, stipulates that UNAM may not confer a degree upon any person unless he or she has attended as a student of the University for a certain period or attained the standards of proficiency in an examination or other tests as determined by the Senate. However, it also makes provision for the admission to university programmes and for conferment of a qualification to any person who has attained the standards of proficiency considered by the University in an examination or test. The Act did not explicitly specify the type of test or examination, therefore testing of experiential learning is valid.

Similarly, the Polytechnic Act 33 of 1994, section 25, also provides opportunities for candidates who are graduates of other institutions of higher learning. One of the

findings of a study conducted by the National Council for Higher Education “In Pursuit of Access with Equity in the Higher Education System in Namibia” (NCHE, 2010), showed that weak academic performances at higher schools level constitute barriers to expanding access to higher education in the country. The implication of this finding is that higher education in Namibia appears to look up to high schools solely to provide them with potential candidates rather than keeping an open and inclusive admission system in which every qualifying candidate, such as those coming from a work environment, has the chance to enrol.

Given that the two institutions (UNAM and PoN) only admit graduates from formal institutions of learning who are considered by their Senates as having learning equivalent to that of their programmes, this provision has ignored candidates who have acquired learning from other contexts, such as experiential learning.

The literature from NIHL shows that the MAE scheme is the only alternative that permits candidates to access higher learning without normal entry requirements but with work experience (UNAM & PoN, Prospectus 2010). However, this provision is restricted to candidates who are employed and in possession of a Grade 10 certificate. Those adult workers who have gained extensive work experience but lack a Grade 10 certificate, or those who cannot be included due to limited spaces in MAE tests, are excluded from accessing institutions of higher learning. This study is based on a belief that these conditions of admission constitute restrictive measures that must be addressed. Measures are needed to emancipate workers from the infringement of educational restrictions. Workers who feel they have obtained

learning from their jobs, equivalent to National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level three, should have their learning assessed, to allow maximum use of available skills and knowledge and promote the development of lifelong learning in the country.

In line with the NQA Act of 1996, the (NQF, 2006) was significant to RPL in stipulating the relative level of each qualification attained and encouraging consistency. This means that each qualification registered on the NQF has characteristics such as unit standards for benchmarking, which are crucial for assessing experiential learning. The NQF states that it recognises all learning, irrespective of where it was acquired, providing only that it can be justified (NQF, 2006). Within this view, the NQF called for measures that determine policies and procedures for assessing competencies, skills and abilities learnt outside the formal system of education. This study is responding to these calls.

The Report of the Presidential Commission (1992) recommended the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), with a mandate to accredit higher educational programmes in concurrence with the NQA. The Higher Education Act 26 of 2003 (part 3, 6c) articulated one of its functions as being to seek measures to promote access of students to higher education institutions. Another role of the NCHE is the management of quality assurance mechanisms of learning in higher institutions. However, given that the NQA has the sole responsibility to oversee quality of education in the country, this study finds it appropriate to purposively select NQA as representative of quality providers for educational programmes.

The NCHE (2010) also has called for equitable higher education through foundation programmes, distance education and lifelong learning, however, it failed to maintain the restrictive admission criteria which many candidates from lifelong learning backgrounds would find hard to meet. According to the NCHE (2010), the practice has been to lower the admission points, which it argued also lowers the exit standards of graduates. The introduction of RPL would not require lowering of entry standards, but rather seek the assessment of work experiential learning to equate with the NQF level expected to access higher education.

Another policy, Education for All (from a Namibian perspective) (EFA, 2011-2015), advises the educational institutions to “ensure that learners in all education programmes should progress between institutions with their prior knowledge and skills recognised by 2006” (EFA, 2011-2015, p.24). Despite the enormous amount of learning accumulated from years of work experience, the Namibian adult population in the workplace was in urgent need of educational development.

Apart from the NQA Act of 1996 and PoN Act 33 of 1994, the researcher has not found any document from UNAM that explicitly defines RPL or outlines means of implementation. Equally, the national policy on Recognition of Prior Learning remains in a draft form.

Namibian adults without academic qualifications have shown interest to access higher education through MAE in which work experience is a criterion for eligibility,

however, there appeared to be restrictions in the assessment of knowledge required for eligibility that prevent candidates from pursuing their academic opportunities. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 present statistics provided by UNAM and PoN respectively on the rate of admission of candidates who applied through the MAE scheme during the period indicated. The University enrolls fewer than 10% whereas the PoN admits fewer than 25% of the applicants.

**Table 1.1:** Number of candidates who applied and enrolled at UNAM's MAE (2007-2012)

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Applied</b>	528	847	753	1443	906	1336
<b>Enrolled</b>	17	58	104	40	65	62
<b>%</b>	3.2%	6.8	13.8	2.8	7.2	4.6

(Information provided by UNAM Statistical desk, 2013).

**Table 1.2:** Number of candidates who applied and enrolled at PoN's MAE (2010-2012)

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Applications</b>	2067	2150	2369
<b>Admitted</b>	327	349	497
<b>Enrolled</b>	279	321	405
<b>%</b>	15.8%	16.8%	24%

(Information provided by PoN Statistical desk, 2013).

The two tables illustrate the level of commitment of UNAM and PoN towards the inclusion of adult workers in their study programmes for redress and promotion of lifelong learning. Despite the Polytechnic having made a significant effort to enrol more students than UNAM, the enrolment rate remains below average for the two institutions. What constrains access to Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning?

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although the assessment and evaluation of RPL is internationally justified and valued through policies and frameworks, its implementation and practices in higher education in many countries remain extremely low (Wihak, 2006; Han, 2007; Valk, 2009; Joosten-ten Brinke, Sluijsmans, & Jochems, 2009). Only a few higher education institutions have introduced options for the assessment and recognition of prior non-certificated learning to their study programmes, and as Omerzel and Trunk Sirča (2008) have argued, failure to implement RPL practices was not necessary because the higher education systems were opposed to it, but most institutions of higher learning have neither felt the need nor devoted sufficient effort to implementing such a system.

Equally, in Namibia, various calls to widen access to higher education have been made through government policies and documentation (NDP3, 2001-2011; Draft National Policy on RPL, 2010) to seek non-formal paths to supplement available routes to higher education and to create wide and impartial admission criteria for accessing higher education in the country. In spite of these calls, the current criteria for admission to Namibian institutions of higher learning remain low and biased (ETSIP, 2005, p.38; NCHE, 2010, p. 15). Whereas access is one of the goals of Namibian education (MEC, 1993), the search for eligibility requirements to facilitate access to higher education is immensely constrained.

The current admission practices are biased towards formal qualifications as access is limited to meeting set criteria on the basis of school leaving certificate or prior higher education (National Council for Higher Education (NCHE, 2010). Even the MAE scheme, which accommodates adults with working experience, seeks Grade 10 certificate for eligibility. Candidates who do not possess Grade 12 for regular entry or Grade 10 for MAE have no options to access Namibian institutions of higher learning. The current UNAM Foundation programme only accommodates school leavers to upgrade their points in science subjects. The restrictive admission criteria inherent in the Namibian education system not only suppress the nation's ability to produce the required human capital needed to sustain and maintain Namibia as a knowledge-based economy (NCHE, 2010), but also constrain efforts to produce professional knowledge critically needed in the economic development of the country (NDP3, 2001-2011). In the report of a tracer study conducted by NCHE (2011) of graduates from higher education institutions during the period ranging from 1999-2008, UNAM and PoN together only graduated 25,062 (12,624 from PoN and 12,438 from UNAM) (NCHE, 2011, p.4), an average of about 1,200 per institution a year.

Studies (Donoghue, Pelletier, Adams & Duffield, 2002) have revealed that the assessment of prior learning acquired non-formally is feasible and viable for entry purposes to institutions of higher learning. In a study that investigated the differences in performance between students who accessed higher learning through formal school certification and those who accessed higher learning through RPL, no significant differences in the performances of the two groups were found (Donoghue

et al., 2002). Procedures for admitting candidates to higher education on the basis of RPL could thus be considered appropriate and beneficial (Stenlund, 2010).

The purpose of this study was therefore to explore what and how knowledge was assessed and evaluated to enable access to Namibian institutions of higher learning (NIHL). Also explored were mechanisms that could bring about inclusive and flexible admission system through MAE in NIHL. The study intended to find out how the accreditation of prior non-certificated learning was conducted by NQA.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Following the purpose of this study, the research questions were formulated as follows:

- What knowledge is assessed for admission to Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning through the Mature Age Entry scheme?
- What methods are used to evaluate prior learning for admitting candidates to Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning?
- What are Administrators' views regarding mechanisms to implement the assessment of prior non-certificated learning as a criterion to access Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning?
- How is prior non-certificated learning accredited by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA)?

#### **1.4 Research Assumption**

The study assumes that experiential knowledge of appropriate standards, wherever it occurs and in whatever context it is generated, if properly assessed can receive academic recognition (Andersson & Hellberg, 2009; Walsh, 2007). Therefore, the researcher of this study argues that any relevant non-certificated learning can be assessed to aid academic progression.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in its aim to create awareness of an assessment strategy that has not been commonly used in higher education. The assessment and subsequent recognition of prior experiential learning in MAE would facilitate wider access to higher education and encourage diversity in the student population enrolling in higher education, thus promoting inclusiveness in education (Berggren, 2007). The study should contribute new knowledge on emancipating adult workers whose learning from experience has previously been ignored. A more flexible access route to higher education should boost motivation among adult workers wishing to participate in lifelong learning and so increase productivity in the workplace and enhance quality of life of individuals. The study would facilitate a platform for debates, sharing of ideas and understanding of the processes of assessment and recognition of experiential learning by educational providers and stakeholders.

The contribution to new knowledge should be enhanced, resulting in reduced problems associated with fear and uncertainty of learning from experience. Institutions of higher learning aspiring to implement the assessment and recognition of prior learning would have a base on which they can develop institutional policies and guidelines. Institutions can discuss and practice the assessment of prior experiential learning of their workers. The debates about assessing prior experiential learning and its credibility would give assurance that RPL is not the soft target of achieving credits but the hard-earned attributes of learning. The assessment of experiential learning would eventually influence the policies concerning admission to higher education to accept RPL as one of the eligible criteria to enter institutions of higher learning.

## **1.6 Limitations to the Study**

Respondents sampled were assessors of MAE tests and administrators related to admissions. The researcher could not identify groups or individuals candidates who lived the experience of having their experiential learning assessed for access to higher learning. This may have been attributed to lack of practices of assessing prior non-certificated learning in Namibia. This limitation constrained the research exploration of practical issues. Examiners who assessed knowledge in MAE tests were used as respondents to the study in an effort to find out what knowledge is required by institutions through the MAE access programme.

Another limitation experienced during this study was the variation of institutions from which to choose, which constrained the comparison of wider responses. The merger of colleges into UNAM left only two public institutions of higher learning for inclusion in the research. Despite this limitation, the units of analysis sampled from these two institutions of higher learning were sufficient to provide in-depth information that contributed to answering the research questions.

## **1.7 Delimitations of the Study**

Due to the limitations outlined above, this study had to be conducted in the only two public institutions of higher learning in the country (UNAM and PoN), both located in Windhoek (the capital city). Nevertheless, the findings remained objective in accordance with the data collected.

## **1.8 Definitions of Operational Concepts**

Different meanings and connotations were ascribed to concepts central to this study. This section describes operational concepts that were used in this study, to be further explained in chapter two.

### **1.8.1 Formal Learning**

Formal learning takes place in an organised and structured context such as a school, training centre, college, or institution of learning which leads to certification

(Salling-Olesen, 2007). Formal learning in higher education involves formal presentation of a combination of theory and application of it. This learning is often described as fixed, objective, adaptable and universal (Harris, 2000). In the context of this study, formal learning refers to learning that resulted from a pedagogical orientation of the classroom presentation or any structured learning that represents a formal curriculum. Formal learning is assessed through objective tools of assessment, such as norm- or criterion-referenced assessment and results in awarding of a qualification.

### **1.8.2 Non-Formal Learning**

Non-formal learning is any organised learning or activity that occurs outside the structure of the formal education system. It is undertaken by people who are considered to be adults in their societies (Mpofu & Amin, 2003, p.3). The term implies that it is learning derived from experience, such as in work or in daily life, but this learning does not always lead to accreditation or certification. In the context of this study, non-formal learning is understood to be implicit knowledge acquired from contexts outside the formal system of education which have not been certificated. However, such learning can yield valuable results, referred to as ‘experiential learning’.

### **1.8.3 Informal Learning**

Informal learning stems from day-to-day experiences, such as family leisure activities, or informal workplace learning, such as planting flowers to decorate one's house. Normally, this learning does not lead to certification and education within this tradition is usually informally organised, unstructured and un-intentional. It is incidental in nature, and not explicitly developed or formulated (Andersson & Hellberg, 2009). It is not explicit knowledge and is not bound by pre-determined learning objectives. Nor is it criterion- or norm-referenced (Salling-Olesen, 2007). In the context of this study, any accumulated learning that can be justified as contributing to required knowledge can be perceived as worth assessing and recognising. Learning can thus be acquired informally, and if assessed and found valuable to knowledge required for admission can also be referred to as 'experiential learning'.

### **1.8.4 Knowledge**

Knowledge is described by Mankin (2009) as complex, multi-faceted and problematic to define in one single concept, and may be referred to as 'information', 'learning' or 'practical skills'. Mankin explained that knowledge is divided into two components: (i) scientific, which denotes general rules and principles, and (ii) technical, in which specific knowledge is applied. In this study, knowledge is referred to as technical expertise, acquired through experience outside the formal

learning contexts, such as in work or life activities. It is an individual attribute in which application of expertise is exhibited by the individual.

### **1.8.5 Access**

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Wehmeier, McIntosh, & Turnbull, 2005 p.8) defines 'access' as a way of entering a place. The NCHE defined it as availability of something to an individual or community of individuals. In their perspectives the NCHE looked at access as availability, entry and exit to and from higher education, and what constraints individuals face to accessibility (2010, p.16). In RPL, access is a way of entering an institution or a programme of study. In this study, access denotes formal acceptance of an applicant into an institution of higher learning based on the candidate possessing the entry requirements of the host institution as a result of the assessment of experiential learning.

### **1.8.6 Advanced Standing**

Advanced standing is used as a route by which a candidate requests exemption from a specific subject in a qualification (Ralphs, Deller, Cooper, Moodley & Molcadam, 2011). A registered candidate in an institution who feels that he or she possesses equivalent learning with the competencies taught in a module can ask for exemption from attending such a module. This strategy implies awarding of units of competency that form part of a qualification, leading to full exemption of the requirements of a particular course (VET, 2008). The competencies acquired should be validated both

in scope and in volume against defined assessment criteria (Andersson & Hellberg, 2009). In this study, advanced standing is the possession of credits for exemption from a specific subject on the curriculum.

### **1.8.7 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

In a definition by Wheelahan, Dennis, Firth, Miller, Newton, Pascoe and Veenker (2006, p.10), recognition of prior learning is a strategy that:

... assesses the individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which the individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes or standards for entry to, and or partial total completion of a qualification.

In most cases, recognition of prior learning is an official acknowledgment of previous skills, knowledge and competences acquired from any context before the commencement of the current studies (Harris, 2006). In this study, prior learning follows the term used by the NQA as official acknowledgement of previous learning acquired through any contexts (in a classroom, project or community), not specifying non-formal learning, as long as such learning has not been certificated by the time of its assessment. This learning, if assessed, should yield valuable and adequate learning outcomes that can aid the candidate to attain the criteria of admission required by the institution.

### **1.8.8 Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning connotes skills, knowledge and competences which candidates have acquired from experience (Harris, 2000). This experience can be derived from work or life experiences, for instance, in project management tasks. Experiential learning could result from the activities undertaken while a person is managing a project. Michelson et al. (2004) emphasise that credit is never granted as a result of experience alone, but rather the candidate must demonstrate the learning (at the level of the assessment criteria) as a result of the experience. Michelson et al. (2004, p.123) presented an example of experiential learning from the Evergreen State College in the USA, which would likely not grant credit for learning a skill such as landscape gardening, but would take seriously the learning of a student who taught himself or herself the subject and went on to start a gardening business or taught courses on gardening in the community. The taught courses become the learning that an individual attained from practicing his or her gardening business.

In the context of this study, experiential learning comprises the knowledge, skills and competencies that a person acquires as a result of an experience that he or she has undertaken. They are acquired before the commencement of a current assessment and not certificated at the time of the assessment. The terms ‘experiential learning’ and ‘RPL’ are used synonymously and interchangeably throughout this study.

### **1.8.9 Assessment of Recognition of Prior Learning**

‘Assessment’ signifies judgment of knowledge, skills and competences conducted by the assessor in the act of measuring the candidate’s knowledge (Andersson, 2006; Joosten-ten Brinke, Sluijsmans, & Jochems, 2009). It is about gathering and discussing information to develop an understanding of what the candidate knows and understands as well as what he or she can do with the knowledge as a result of the experience undertaken. In the context of this study, assessment is about the candidate’s provision of an explanation of learning acquired from experience undertaken. In the context of this study, writing a test about a specified curriculum topic is not perceived as the assessment of experiential learning since it does not abide by what candidates claim to have learnt from experience, but rather about the competencies learnt from the subjects of the institutions. The assessment of experiential learning or of RPL in this study refers to examining whether knowledge, skills and competences that were previously acquired from contexts outside the formal system of education have been met at the equivalent level as the entry criteria of a formal institution (Haldane & Wallace, 2009).

### **1.8.10 Evaluation of Recognition of Prior Learning**

Gboku and Lekoko (2007) define ‘evaluation’ as a means of determining and ascertaining the effectiveness of the achievements of learning acquired in order to improve practice. In this study, evaluation of RPL (experiential learning) refers to making judgments and decisions about the outcomes of learning claims. It is viewed

as scrutinising in depth the evidence submitted by the candidates during assessment and assuring its authenticity. It is a way of ascertaining whether the learning acquired has value equal to the assessment criteria needed by the host institution.

#### **1.8.11 Mature Age Entry**

Mature age entry (MAE) is a matriculation exemption scheme accompanied by appropriate work experience. It is an alternative admission route for adults who lack the traditional entry qualifications for accessing university and other institutions of higher learning, but who have work experience relevant to the field they applied to study (Houston, Knox & Rimmer, 2007). Mature age entry schemes are designed to enable higher education to expand beyond the traditional target group of school leavers, and to serve the immediate needs of the workforce (Mpofu, 2006). In this study, the concept ‘mature age entry scheme’ is associated with a complementary scheme to an institution’s normal entry requirements, where a candidate applies to an institution to seek acceptance on the basis of meeting the requirements for entry. This is a scheme that allows young people and adults who have been employed for three to five years to re-enter formal education.

#### **1.8.12 Accreditation of Prior Learning**

‘Accreditation’ refers to verification of requirements set by the accreditation body in relation to skills and competences of learning providers. It determines whether RPL is employed by qualified assessors and ensures that the outcomes of learning

evidence are correctly and fairly conducted. Accreditation affirms that candidates are assessed at the right level of the assessment criteria (Wevell, 1996). Within the context of this study, accreditation of RPL refers to the verifications of skills and competences of providers to conduct RPL services.

### **1.8.13 Equivalency of RPL learning**

‘Equivalency’ is defined as learning of equal value to the criteria of assessment (Lapsley et al., 2008). The equivalency theory argues that the experiences themselves can be different but that the emergent learning outcomes should be comparable to the criteria of assessment. Therefore, in this study, RPL is an equivalent learning strategy rather than the exact match of the learning required in the assessment. An example of assessing RPL through an equivalency process was demonstrated by Deller, Chetty and Morapeli (2011) in a South African casino business. To these researchers, since matriculation (matric) level (12 years of general education) was required for promotion, and since the matric certificate could not be obtained, equivalency was opted for as a requirement for assessment. Deller et al. explained that the exact match of learning was not possible because matric consists of subjects with theory, such as Geography, Mathematics and History, but which workers did not use in their workplace. Workers would not have exact learning to assess in these subjects, therefore equivalency was an appropriate option. Consistent with the principle of equivalency the knowledge possessed by the workers was equated to the requirements of promotion. In this study, equivalency of RPL refers to equating the evidence of the experiential learning with the assessment criteria.

#### **1.8.14 Credit Transfer**

Conrad (2010. p.157) cautions that “if the language that explains and describes the process of a phenomenon is not clearly defined and articulated, it can be entangled with other better known processes,” such as ‘credit transfer’. Commonly used in formal education, credit transfer can be mistakenly referred to as RPL, despite both processes differing in their meanings and in the functions that they undertake. They are both ways of acquiring credits, but the former focuses on formal subject knowledge, through the establishment of transferable credit scheme (Harris & Saddington, 1995; Wheelahan et al., 2006). It assesses certificated learning, a course or module passed at other formal institutions. Learning is compared in terms of duration and equivalencies to the current courses for which credits are sought (Wheelahan et al., 2006). Credit transfer is the assessment of course units or modules against another course studied at other formal institutions. According to the Australia Qualifications Framework (AQF, 2007), the assessment determines the extent to which the two courses match each other and define the gap between them.

From the perspective of this study the credit exchange differs from RPL (experiential learning), so rather than assessing an individual’s competencies it determines the scope and depth of the learning of the candidate. The assessment therefore judges the extent to which the individual has learnt from the experience he or she has undertaken. RPL is concerned with the individual’s knowledge, skills and competences, and what he or she does with these.

## **1.9 Summary**

This chapter has presented an overview of the study, grounded in the statement of the problem, research questions and significance. The problem of the study speculated the inconsistency, biased and narrow opportunities available for candidates seeking admission into Namibian institutions of higher learning. An alternative means of assessment was required to supplement the current MAE scheme and to promote social justice.

The next chapter reviews relevant literature on the topic of RPL.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and its practices. The role of a literature review in a qualitative study is to justify the importance of investigating a research problem (Creswell, 2008). This study investigated the limitations associated with widening access to Namibia Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL), and necessitated the significance of recognising prior experiential learning as an additional criterion. The chapter is divided into two sections: Section one (2.2) presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning this study, and the international models of assessing RPL. Section two (2.5) reviews the practices of RPL in higher institutions of education, assessment, evaluation and accreditation of RPL. Reviewed also in this chapter are international principles of RPL and issues of concern in RPL.

### **2.2 The Theoretical Frameworks of the Study**

This study is grounded on two theoretical perspectives, namely critical theory and interpretative theory. Their use in this study is significant for two reasons. Firstly, critical theory is used to critique the ideological view of the admission systems of NIHL through Mature Age Entry (MAE). The admission system is believed to have created hindrances through statutory laws that operate within institutions to provide wide access to Namibian institutions of higher learning (NIHL). The absence of a

national policy to direct and control practices leaves the country vulnerable to diversity of applications according to institutional understandings. The requirements of the knowledge value for accessing higher education as stipulated by institutions provide room for exclusion of candidates who do not have paper qualifications to show, as only formal qualifications (Grades 12 and 10) are required (section 1.1). Adult workers who have accumulated work experiential learning but without Grades 12 and 10 certificates are excluded (through requirements) from accessing higher education. The researcher used critical theory to question the legitimacy of the exclusion of experienced candidates and of Mode 2 knowledge from the admission system. It is intended that the study will raise awareness of an alternative route that can supplement the current MAE system and suggest a democratic, emancipatory and flexible framework for admission procedures to overcome the current limitations.

Secondly, interpretive theory helps the researcher to understand the ideology behind the practices of RPL by assessors, administrators and accreditors, how knowledge was interpreted, evaluated and how RPL was generally understood in these institutions. This tradition argues that social ideologies and functions in institutions are not entirely objective, and hence are subjected to interpretations. The researcher believes that formal qualifications (Grades 12 and 10) are not necessarily the only route to enter institutions of higher learning. Any valuable learning, irrespective of how it was attained, can be assessed and made equivalent to formal learning in order to supplement and help candidates pursue their educational careers. Interpretive theory therefore creates meaning of what is assessed and how the entry requirements

can be supplemented by learning evidence from work experience. The two theories (critical and interpretive) and their relationships to this study are discussed below.

### **2.2.1 Critical Theory and the Assessment of Experiential Learning**

The history of critical theory is associated with the Institute for Social Research at the Frankfurt University in Germany (Nel, 1995), often referred to as the Frankfurt School or the philosophical tradition based on the work of Karl Marx. The theory was founded by members, among them Friedrich Pollock (1894-1970), Carl Grünberg (1861-1940) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) who became the first Director of the Institute from 1931, and Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno (1903-1970), (Nel, 1995, p.124). Max Horkheimer was the most instrumental in the development of critical theory, greatly influenced by the depression and rise of National Socialism. Nel (1995) indicated that all the prominent members of the Institute for Social Research were middle class German, of Jewish origin, and thus had been subjected personally to discriminatory practices. These members decided to flee Germany before the outbreak of the Second World War but later the majority regrouped in Frankfurt. They had no particular political affiliation but rather saw themselves as leaders of the intellectual revolutionary movement. They advocated anti-party sentiments and stressed the need for a complete transformation of society (Nel, 1995, p.126). Critical theory then is the product of a particular political and intellectual environment which emerged as a tool for expressing the sentiments felt during the political injustices in Germany, and as an instrument for changing the future.

One of the proponents of critical theory, Jürgen Habermas was not a member of the original Frankfurt School; his work was researched in post-War Germany and he had not been subjected to discriminatory practices or been through the trauma of exile that the founder members of the Frankfurt School had suffered. At the time there was a sense of optimism of a new beginning in Germany, and an increasing faith in the power of democracy (Nel, 1995). He developed his critical theory based on two aspects: purposive rational and social interaction (communicative rational) action. The former was governed by technical rules, descriptions, predictions and control, the latter by binding consensus norms undertaken by at least two acting subjects. Habermas condemned the purposive rational which underpins technical rules descriptions, predictions and controls, stating that such interest denies humans a role in the production of knowledge.

Three kinds of mental activities grounded in critical theory were also identified, namely technical activities, communicative action, and emancipatory interests (Nel, 1995). The technical activity subscribes to general rules and predictions, whereas communicative action adheres to consensus norms as earlier referred to in this section. The application of the critical theory in this study is highly influenced by the emancipatory belief, which promotes the equality of knowledge among candidates seeking admission and the verification of such equality (Biesta, 2010). Emancipatory belief was used to create awareness of injustice in the system of admission, in an effort to review systems that tend to hinder educational development by denying the equality of knowledge.

An emancipatory perspective in this study is grounded on the notion that knowledge (acquired by candidates seeking admission to institutions of higher learning through MAE) is equal, and it should be valued for what it can do rather than on the basis of the years it was generated. If emancipation is about the recognition of equality of knowledge then formal qualifications should not be viewed as the sole form of knowledge, given that there are multiple forms of knowledge in the universe. One form cannot predominate over or ignore others. Emancipation can take place when provision is made for assessing experiential learning in which candidates are involved in self-assessment and reflection of their previous learning. Through self-assessment they would understand the knowledge required and they can judge for themselves whether what they know constitutes the requirements of admission. Through this act, candidates would not only be emancipated in the way of learning and understanding the scope of their knowledge and how to use it but would also judge whether or not they have achieved the equality of formal knowledge required for accessing higher education.

Emancipatory action is significant to adult workers as it allows them to think, explain and judge for themselves. Similarly, it would counter the perception of experiential knowledge being inferior to scientific knowledge. This study advocates the use of emancipation interest for higher education to summon candidates seeking entry through MAE to use their learning and knowledge previously acquired rather than imposing on them subjects or knowledge that reproduce inequality. Candidates who were not educated in given subjects would be limited in the knowledge requirements

solicited by higher education facilitating exclusion tendencies from democratic participation. Therefore, such assessment becomes biased towards formal knowledge. The reflection of experiential learning should be made under the proposition of equality of knowledge, by which higher education accommodates lived experience that candidates bring with them.

The benefit of the concept of the verification of knowledge acquired and its alignment to formal knowledge will act as a guarantor of quality of standards in higher education and a motivational aspect to widen access and promote lifelong learning in the country. The ideology argued for in this study under the emancipatory field does not imply rejection of admission requirements or lowering of academic standards to accommodate adult workers but rather encouragement of higher education to devise strategies that would verify any knowledge claim submitted by adult workers through MAE tests and to reject any traditional requirements that tend to hinder the educational progress of Namibians. Therefore, the reflective exercise conducted during self-assessment is essential to emancipate the candidates to comprehend the requirements of equality of knowledge that higher education requires.

Critical theory is also employed in this study to critique ideological views on assessment of knowledge required for admission and assessment practices in MAE, which appears to restrict adult workers who seek admission to Namibian institutions of higher learning. The sole knowledge required for eligibility through MAE is Grade 10 certificate. Critical theory questions the ways in which knowledge is

selected, what knowledge is assessed, who defines such knowledge, and the legitimacy of the choice of such knowledge. The researcher, through critical theory, considers the selection and evaluation of knowledge required by higher education as a means of societal control in which there is neither consultation with candidates over decision-making concerning which knowledge is valid, nor extended consensus on how such decisions (of exclusion) were arrived at. The view on admission does not benefit all Namibian people but rather excludes the majority of those who can benefit from higher education. Critical theory provided a basis on which to question what defines worthwhile knowledge and what legitimates knowledge currently assessed in MAE. Emancipation on the other hand creates awareness of who benefits from MAE admission in NIHL and illuminates criteria used for exclusion.

The influence of emancipation implies equalising the knowledge (experiential learning and institutional requirement) to access higher education by employing flexible measures that can authenticate knowledge only as a result of verification and not based on the context in which such knowledge was obtained. In emancipation, prior experiential learning would be recognised, assessed and validated for eligibility through MAE. The critical theory, through its emancipatory interest, demands that knowledge brought to higher education be perceived as equal and candidates seeking admission be allowed to use their knowledge under the assumption that it bears equal value to knowledge acquired through formal contexts. Raising awareness of inequality in the admission systems of higher education is a significant step to emancipation and to overcoming the current exclusion. Transformation as a mandate of critical theory can be achieved in Namibian higher education through the

establishment of democratic participation in education whereby the politics of differences of knowledge dimensions are encouraged.

The notion of critical theory enhanced this study as it raised awareness among policymakers in institutions that are inspiring to implement the assessment, evaluation and accreditation of RPL to clarify their epistemological stance of knowledge they wish to assess through MAE. Institutions have the potential to make prior non-certificated learning a successful device for the assessment of learning and knowledge acquired from experience.

### **2.2.2 Interpretive Theory in the Admission of Experiential Candidates**

Interpretive theory is associated with social constructivism (Dekker, 1998; Creswell, 2009), which stresses the creation of knowledge by individuals and the interpretation of their intentions, beliefs and values. It embraces the practical cognitive interest, as social knowledge is concerned with understanding inter-subjective relations (Dekker, 1998). From the perspective of this study, social constructivism encourages individual candidates to reflect on the learning acquired through experience and be assisted to create meaning from what they know.

Interpretive theory is defined as sets of meanings which yield insights and understanding of people's behaviour (Cohen et al., 2010), and was employed in this study to interpret admission and assessment structures, as perceived by assessors and administrators who are participating in the admission of candidates through MAE. Its

use follows the argument that “the process of a human studying another human is not as straightforward as the process of one human studying a potato” (Dekker, 1998, p.282). Interpretivists believe that studying humans implies understanding the actions of fellow beings, therefore knowledge must be interpreted within such a context. Influenced by interpretive theory, the researcher seeks to understand meaning held by assessors and administrators on how admission practices at both institutions (UNAM and PoN) are conducted and compared between them. The theory appreciates knowledge as a creation of the human mind, and as dynamic rather than static. It can therefore change and influence the outcomes of interpretations.

Interpretive theory does not concern itself with application of laws and rules but rather develops descriptive analyses which emphasise deep understanding of phenomena (Henning, Rensburg & Smith, 2004). The interpretive theory in this study provided an understanding of what knowledge, skills and competencies are sought by institutions through the assessment of MAE tests. Therefore, interpretive theory is essential in explaining the knowledge advocated and the actual knowledge assessed. This would deepen the understanding and explanations of the implementations of RPL in the Namibian higher education system.

The theory offers explanations in relation to what is assessed, how prior learning is assessed, how assessment outcomes are evaluated, and the role of NQA. The knowledge derived from these interpretations is used to facilitate understanding of why wider access to the Namibian higher education system is required. Each of the two theories, including emancipatory interests, made an essential contribution to this

study as they complemented each other in advocating change in the country's institutions of higher learning.

The interpretive theory is used to gain understanding of data collected from the assessors, administrators and accreditors in different institutions concerning their perceptions, experiences and intensions of what they attach to RPL. The two main theories (critical and interpretive) adhere to the principles of communicative rationale, grounded by consensus norms which required at least two acting subjects (Nel, 1995). The consensus norm has influenced the decision of methodology that this study has taken, following a design that allows participation of subjects so as to understand and interpret the meanings of their perceptions. In addition, interpretive theory seeks to compare meanings derived from a specific context (institution) with the next and interpret the meaning as derived from data.

This section (2.2.) has reviewed theories and concepts that underpin the assessment of experiential learning. This assessment can facilitate the possibilities of admitting candidates who are seeking admission to higher education on the basis of RPL without formal qualifications.

### **2.3 The Conceptual Framework**

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005) saw the 'conceptual framework' as being determined by the function it fulfils. Equally, Neuman (2011) writes that conceptual frameworks refine abstract ideas and give explicit and specific meaning

to a phenomenon. In this study the conceptual framework is used to provide descriptions and enhance conceptual understanding of terminologies. According to Stenlund (2010), RPL is defined by two main aspects, the purpose of its use and the models used in its assessment. Section 2.3.1 provides the conceptual understanding of the term ‘knowledge’, what it and how it is assessed. Section 2.3.2 defines the concept RPL; 2.3.2.1 distinguishes RPL according to purpose, and 2.3.2.2 conceptualises RPL according to the models used in its assessment. Section 2.4 presents the researcher’s own perception of the framework of this study as derived from the literature.

### **2.3.1 Knowledge in Recognition of Prior Learning**

Mankin (2009) addresses the difficulties involved in defining the concept ‘knowledge’ and claims that any definition of it should depend on the context within which it is used. Harris (2000) and Mankin (2009) categorise knowledge into explicit (Mode 1) and inexplicit (Mode 2), explaining that Mode 1 is produced by academics and scientific knowledge, comprising facts and concepts. This knowledge is formal and relies on individual skills and cognitive abilities (Harris, 2000; Mankin, 2009). It is encoded in different types of media, such as in books and articles, through the process of codification. According to Mankin, this knowledge (Mode 1) is stored in books in teaching and training interventions and it takes the forms of who knows what. As explained by Mankin, Mode 1 involves facts and concepts because people can read the information and are aware of its existence and sources.

This knowledge is perceived as normal and as a straightforward kind of knowledge, easily identified and articulated, and can therefore be easily assessed. This knowledge is familiar to scientific knowledge, is used in formal institutions and enjoys a privileged status within Western cultures. Its popularity has gained it much more trust and potentiality than has Mode 2 knowledge. Osman (2003) indicates that administrators implementing RPL in higher education were attracted to academic (Mode 1) knowledge since it resembles that used in higher education and they can easily transfer academic norms with this form.

Mankin (2009) described tacit knowledge as one form of knowledge that involves a practice or skills component, described as 'personal knowledge' which resides within the individual's skills or expertise. Involving action, it is usually context-specific and implicit (Michelson & Associates, 1999; Harris, 2000). Mode 2 knowledge is socially produced and created outside the academic contexts, and is said to give value to performance and subjective reasoning (Harris, 2000). It is developed from experience, is personal and resides within the individual's judgment and intuition (Mankin, 2009). Mode 2 knowledge involves context-specific skills such as ability to perform a task through one's own judgment and expertise. In his explanations, Mankin states that a person who possesses Mode 2 knowledge (tacit) knows more than he or she can tell. Such a person can explain how a task is performed, for instance how to drive a car. However, such a person will have difficulty explaining why the car functions the way it does. Since this knowledge is embedded within an individual's experience and judgment, Mankin believes, it becomes difficult to identify it across contexts. Because this knowledge is so deeply embedded within

individual subjective thinking, and since it is invisible, it becomes difficult to articulate, identify and eventually to assess. Since it is acquired through experience (Polanyi, 1967, cited by Mankin), it is argued that it does not easily lend itself to codification (Mankin, 2009), and a person has to observe a situation in order to participate in it. Furthermore, it can only be transferred from one person to another through a long process of apprenticeship.

Mankin argued that although the explanations of these forms of knowledge differ there was a great deal of connectivity between them. Theorists Polanyi and Lam (cited by Mankin, 2009) argue that these knowledge types are not separable and discrete in practice. In both cases the distinction represents differences between interrelated dimensions of knowledge rather than different types (Mankin, 2009, p.299). However, Harris (2000) notes one major distinction between the two modes of knowledge, with Mode 1 knowledge appreciated according to the value and discourses of the context, and Mode 2 knowledge acquired through informal activities and associated discourses and values. Mankin wrote that if tacit could be encoded and articulated it could then be converted into explicit knowledge but the researcher questions the legitimacy of this convention. Can the two modes of knowledge be comparable and valued in terms of the learning achieved, rather than on the basis of the site in which it was produced? Can we merge the two modes of knowledge without converting one into the other?

Having described the two modes of knowledge, this study investigated the knowledge assessed in higher education through the MAE scheme. Ralphs et al.

(2011) maintain that there seems to be no definite answer to the knowledge sought through RPL or as to who determines the validity of that knowledge. In some circumstances, the validity of knowledge is left to individual institutions (for assessors and evaluators) to determine. In most cases the RPL candidates who apply to enter formal institutions through MAE are likely to have acquired knowledge from work experiences (Mode 2 knowledge). This study aims to find out what knowledge of their prior learning is assessed, to understand what and how prior learning is assessed, how it is accorded academic recognition, what views are held towards the implementation of RPL in higher education, and how RPL is accredited by the NQA. Harris (2000) advised that as much as the distinction between the two modes of knowledge is useful it should not be over-dichotomised, since neither of the modes exists in pure form. Writers (Eraut, 2004 cited by Harvey & Slaughter, 2007; Mankin, 2009) have also claimed that while the two modes of knowledge may have been produced under different circumstances and possess different characteristics they are not separate or discrete in their practical orientations. The two actually complement each other and, as Mankin has argued, they are best described as two dimensions rather than two different types of knowledge, therefore they should be viewed as related scopes of knowledge.

### **2.3.2 Conceptualising Prior Learning**

The term ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ (RPL) refers to practices developed to identify, assess and validate learning previously acquired (Stenlund, 2010). In this case, no precision of the kind of learning is referred to. This learning could have been

acquired from formal, non-formal or informal situations. Attention is placed on learning rather than on how such learning was acquired. The literature has acknowledged the persistent problem of conceptualising RPL (Valk, 2009; City & Guilds, 2010; the Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (DRPL), 2011). These researchers alleged that the term RPL on its own does not specify the type of learning being referred to or its intended purpose, but rather the period (prior) of learning. In this case readers are left to decide from the context in which the concept is used the type of prior learning being discussed. As a result, various definitions have emerged, but these have not only lacked precision on the types of learning being presented but made international comparisons of the concept difficult, particularly when different purposes for implementation are expressed by international providers (DRPL, 2011).

The concept of RPL advocated in this study is of the recognition granted to any learning that has not been certificated. It may have been acquired through work-based training, professional conferences, skills and competences developed on the job, through community involvement, employers' sponsored training or through voluntary activities (Conrad, 2009; Michelson, et al., 2004; Harris, 2000;), as long as such learning has not received formal recognition. Within the understanding of various sources from which prior learning can be derived, the demand for its assessment should equally be conducted through various assessment techniques (Michelson et al., 2004).

In institutions of higher learning the concept of RPL is defined according to the purpose of its use (Stenlund, 2010), which in higher education has two main

purposes, namely access to an institution or programme (section 1.9.4) and credit award (advanced standing) towards a qualification (section 1.9.5) (Triby, 2009; Joosten-ten Brinke et al., 2009; Stenlund, 2010; DRPL, 2011). Therefore, as Stenlund highlighted, these two purposes direct the assessment procedures of RPL. In cases in which it is used for access purposes the concept is often perceived as an assessment device (Stenlund, 2010), which exchanges the value of knowledge between candidates' prior learning and the required outcomes of assessment (Andersson, 2006; AQF, 2007). When the assessment targets the awards of credit (advanced standing) the assessment is aligned to equivalency in order to examine the equivalent value of learning (Stenlund, 2010). In this case, a candidate seeks exemption from attending a given module or course on the assumption that such a candidate had acquired learning equivalent to acquiring a qualification. The learning exempted must correlate with the course or module being exempted, both in scope and in-depth.

The literature in relation to RPL as an assessment device is reviewed in the subsequent paragraphs.

### ***2.3.2.1 RPL as an Assessment Device for Admission Purposes***

According to Stenlund (2010), when RPL is perceived as an assessment device its primary purpose is to design the most favourable characteristics. When admission is the purpose of assessment the results are used to predict whether the candidates have adequate knowledge and skills required to succeed in the academic studies once

admitted. This purpose differs from the credit award (advanced standing) in which the results of assessment are mainly used to control equivalency of prior learning against the existing course content for which exemption is made. It means two different kinds of assessments are required for these two purposes. As stated above, this study focuses on RPL as an assessment device for access purposes.

The literature (Harris, 2000; Simosko and Associates, 1988) identified three main phases through which RPL for access is assessed: the pre-assessment, the assessment and the post-assessment phases, as presented below.

### ***The Pre-Assessment Phase***

In this phase, the process of assessment normally involves publication of the availability of the RPL system to stakeholders and potential clients (Simosko & Associates, 1988; Harris, 2000). It includes a diagnostic process in which candidates' skills are identified and analysed. The process consists of career guidance and the familiarisation of candidates with the national standards or requirement criteria of assessment (Harris, 2000). Harris stressed the significance of informative meetings with interested clients since through such meeting preliminary interviews (pre-assessment) are conducted. During these interviews, assessors investigate the prior learning that potential candidates possess and inform clients about their potentiality and expectations of assessment requirements.

Simosko and Associates (1988), and Harris (2000) have suggested that situational analysis can be conducted during this phase to find out whether there are

stakeholders that would aspire to enrol their employees or inform interested candidates to inquire directly from the institution. The authors called for the institutional policy to ensure that RPL was conducted effectively with higher level of security and quality. Institutional policy is said to describe specifications such as the content and the level of assessment (Stenlund, 2010). It depends on the assessment model employed, otherwise candidates' guidance and support throughout the assessment process can start from this phase.

### ***The Assessment Process***

After the completion of the preliminary diagnostic interviews, an assessment is conducted in accordance with the models (section 2.4) and policies guiding the institutional assessment. Based on this, candidates' prior experiential learning is often matched and aligned against the academic criteria of assessment. The evidence submitted must be checked against validity, reliability, currency and whether it is sufficient to warrant credit (Wheelahan et al., 2006) for admission purposes.

A candidate is supposed to be accorded a chance to exhibit what he or she has previously learnt and to demonstrate the predictive nature of his or her future performances (Harris, 2000), however, such accordance is sometimes limited. Consistent with Simosko and Associates' (1988) views, institutions should develop a range of assessment tools that can exhibit the evidence of learning as required by assessment criteria. They argue that before an assessment of RPL can be made, the learning expectations for which it is made should be clearly defined and explained to candidates. Assessors too need to be clear why they are embarking on the assessment

activity, whether it is focused on obtained skills and knowledge to measure equivalency, or whether they are examining the future capability of candidates to succeed in higher education. Again, Harris advised that, where possible, assessment should be conducted against broad notions of levels descriptors, generic assessment criteria and broad programme outcomes. Institutions are therefore at liberty to decide what assessment tools they would employ, as determined by the purpose of assessment.

### *Standards*

The alignment of learning with requirements takes place through various options that are used to associate value of knowledge previously acquired with assessment criteria. Standards are other devices of assessment employed to examine learning, and determine the amount of credit that can be awarded for learning achieved (irrespective of the purpose of assessment). However, Fenwick (2006) argues that shaping and judging adults' experiential learning to fit institutional standards not only ensures institutional conformity and upholds existing dominant categories of knowledge but also distorts the experiences of candidates. Fenwick argues that fitting experiential learning into institutional standards divides knowledge into categories such as knowledge of English grammar and knowledge of comprehension. To Fenwick, this division alters such knowledge from the social contexts that give it a meaning.

Conversely, Deller, Chetty, and Morapeli (2011) have argued that unit standards often bear little resemblance to the real world of work, and that they do not mirror

the informal learning process that occurs in the workplace, hence giving rise to challenges for the majority of candidates. Many candidates do not have the language of academia to match what they know to the unit standards or to effectively make the transition from one system (informal learning) to the other (formal learning). Only those candidates who have the language to articulate what they know can be accommodated in such a system (Salling-Olesen, 2007). It appears then that only those candidates whose learning is similar to formal learning are catered for through the unit standard procedures.

### ***Post Assessment Scheme***

Harris (2000) advises that a preparatory module conducted after registration can act as a post-assessment scheme aimed at offering candidates the time and space to review their prior learning in relation to academic requirements. This module allows candidates to map what they know and how they can fit this into academic knowledge so as to help them to cope with academic demands. Post-assessment schemes assist candidates in identifying gaps in their learning and linking what they practically know to theory once admitted to the mainstream of education. The next section conceptualises RPL according to the models of assessment.

#### ***2.3.2.2 The RPL According to International Models of Assessment***

The review of the literature has provided three illustrative international models and perspectives of RPL procedures which portray another conceptual understanding of using RPL as an assessment device. These models are: the credit exchange, the

developmental model, and radical or transformational model of RPL. Each of these is critically reviewed to illustrate its assessment perspectives. Examples of existing practices of the credit exchange and the developmental models have been presented in subsequent paragraphs to reveal their commonalities and differences in practice. An understanding of these models is essential to this study as it can provide possibilities for optimal contribution for utilisation and implementation of RPL in the Namibian context.

### ***The Credit Exchange (Procrustean) Model of RPL***

The RPL in this model refers to the recognition of prior accredited learning, given that only people whose competencies are close to formal learning can benefit (Salling-Olesen, 2007; Ralphs, 2008). This model recognises only those aspects of individuals' prior learning which fit into prescribed institutional outcomes or standards of an accredited education programme (Volbrecht, 2009). The term 'Procrustean' illustrates the "myth of a Procrustean ruler who made everyone fit in his bed by either stretching the person out or by chopping off his or her feet" (Anderson, Fejes & Ahn, 2004, p.59). This description clearly portrays the power and rigidity that features in this model, as the knowledge, skills and competencies in the tradition are assessed according to the prescribed criteria put up by the host institution. The candidate must fit what he or she knows with what is prescribed by the institution (Salling-Olesen, 2007) (in the marking guide of the assessors) or risk failing the assessment. A candidate offers evidence of previous learning and if the submitted evidence indicates the required knowledge and abilities then credit is

awarded (Stenlund, 2010). The host institutions define and determine which specific competency and knowledge constitute the prerequisite for accessing them.

The business of the credit exchange model is to match experiential learning against academic learning (Joosten-ten Brinke, 2009) and to recognise the competencies, skills and knowledge that are similar to what is in the course content of institutional programmes. Joosten-ten Brinke, describing the underlying principles of this model, states that achieving approved (institutional) competences warrants direct exchange for course credit. This model adheres to the positivist tradition, and considers tuition knowledge as the valid and authentic way of acquiring knowledge (Andersson et al., 2004). Therefore, any knowledge learnt outside the tuition context is not only subjected to scrutiny but also described as merely habitual, and so must be appropriately filtered. Since this practice only engages with tuition knowledge it involves curricular content which adheres to Mode 1 knowledge (Harris, 2000), otherwise eligibility to this knowledge is denied (Andersson, et al., 2004). Mode 1 knowledge, also known as ‘explicit knowledge’ (section 1.9.8), is produced by academics and scientific knowledge, and comprises facts and concepts (Harris, 2000). It is formal and relies on individual skills and cognitive abilities (Harris, 2000; Mankin, 2009), however, in view of the rigid nature of the credit exchange model, assessors appear to employ a uniform assessment approach in which candidates are given standard assessment and expected to give correct answers despite their diverse background knowledge acquisition. The researcher of this study questions the legitimacy of this model in attempting to adhere to widening of access and to social inclusion in higher education.

The credit exchange model is rooted in the behaviourists' epistemology that portrays knowledge and skills acquisition as objectively measurable, hence either a candidate fits in with the learning prescribed or such a candidate is rated as incompetent (Volbrecht, 2009). Habermas criticised the view of knowledge that abides by descriptions, predictions and control, since to him such a notion denies humans the role of knowledge production. This model appears also to ignore the construction of knowledge by individual candidates as it focuses on prescribed knowledge as deemed fit by the host institution.

An example in which RPL was employed as an assessment device through the credit exchange model was the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) in South Africa (Volbrecht, 2009). Although the purpose of assessment was to award credit and not for admission purposes, the example clarified the use of the credit exchange model in practice. As described by Volbrecht, the assessment was purposely to phase out certificates, diplomas, higher diplomas and further diplomas in teacher education that were classified as ReQv 12 or lower. The NPDE was pitched at level five on the South Africa Qualifications Framework (SQF) and was a 240 credit qualification. The assessment envisaged an interim qualification to provide access for teachers through the programme of upgrading educators in schools. The provision of NPDE assumed that knowledge and skills gained from teaching experience could also be assessed. It was assumed that educators would have knowledge of two languages and at least four school subjects up to a Standard eight or ten level, and some professional training (Moll & Welch, 2004). The NPDE programme assessed credits for exemption on the basis of qualification already

achieved. Classroom observations and challenge tests were used as tools to assess prior learning (Mode 1 knowledge) in the NPDE programme. Candidates needed to exhibit proof of past achievements, such as qualifications, then credit was awarded if these indicated the required knowledge and abilities. It was not about the knowledge that teachers might have acquired from the long service of teaching but whether they had the necessary qualifications required (Standard eight or ten).

Researchers (Harris, 1999; Cantwell & Scevalk, 2004; Pougert & Osborne, 2004; Fenwick, 2006; Osman, 2006; Peters, 2005; Michelson, 2006; Salling-Olesen, 2007; Volbrecht, 2009) reject the fitting of experiential learning into the prescribed knowledge of institutions. Pougert and Osborne (2004) write that the fitting of experiential (non-certificated) learning into academic knowledge often presents inadequate and diluted knowledge distorted through the process of fitting experiential learning into other knowledge forms. Fenwick (2006) points to distortions of experiential learning that arise in the process of its being torn from the social context that gives it meaning. Fenwick maintains that this distortion divides experiential learning into invisible knowledge categories, whilst for Volbrecht (2009) the credit exchange model isolates prior learning from mainstream assessment and aligns the process with summative assessment practices. Volbrecht sees this isolation as creating serious shortcoming for the model, and further warns that making RPL an educational practice that stands exterior to and prior to mainstream institutional curriculum practices has implications for the characteristics of learners as well as for the identity of those working with RPL. Volbrecht explains further that the rigidity of

too detailed a description of functions in this model does not leave room for a practitioner's own inputs according to practice.

Similarly, the creation of standards and the demand by institutions to follow those standards with precision can minimise the assessor's learning ability and enthusiasm to explore alternatives (Andersson & Guo, 2009). Salling-Olesen (2007) and Ralphs (2008) allege that the credit exchange model only benefits people whose competences are either close to formal learning or those who had a familiarity with reading, writing and critical thinking as part of their job performances, while rejecting those whose learning is associated with non-formal systems. Ralphs (2008) also argued that RPL has not been as inclusive a device as suggested, rather as "... evidence-led assessment device, its potential to exacerbate the unequal distribution of knowledge and skills in society was greater than its capacity to redress these imbalances" (Ralph, 2008, p.5).

In view of the above arguments, this model appears to present implications for the Namibian context. Namibian workers who may decide to enter formal education through alternative entries may have lagged behind and the majority have nothing to show as past achievements, despite the extensive work experiences acquired. The limitation remains that they do not have the paper qualification to show and their learning experiences may not be close to academic knowledge, therefore the possibility of this model assisting the majority of Namibian workers who may aspire to access higher education through this model is minimal. This study intends to find

an alternative route to minimise these unequal distributions of knowledge and skills in society.

Salling-Olesen (2007) and Ralph (2008), consistent with Harris (1999), advise that instead of matching RPL knowledge to institutional learning outcomes, institutions should use it as a synergy between formal and non-formal learning to understand the knowledge diversity that exists between them.

### ***Developmental Model of RPL***

The developmental model is based on the liberal humanist theory that emphasises prior learning as a valued form of learning. The humanist theory urges that learning should arise from social and life contexts, such as in workplaces (compliant with Mode 2 knowledge). In this case, RPL is derived from the working environment wherein knowledge-based economy workers are seen as the masters of their production. The RPL in this model refers to the way candidates are assisted in the process of demonstrating what they know, usually through the development of a portfolio of evidence. Osman (2003) writes that the developmental model of RPL poses more challenges than the credit exchange model, because credit is not awarded for merely having had experiences.

Ord (2009) states that experience is neither the stored up products of the past nor the immediacy of the experienced present, but rather the understanding and demonstrating of what these experiences mean to candidates. It is the purposeful

engagement of the individual with the environment (Suopis, 2009; Ord, 2009). For Ord, when people experience something they act upon it, then the experience does something back to them in return. Therefore, the experience on its own does not warrant recognition but the learning that comes from it. For instance, a librarian cannot be warranted credit for working in the library, but giving talks or writing articles about working in the library can warrant him or her credit towards the purpose of assessment.

The model is called ‘developmental’ because it deals with assistance of candidates in terms of portfolio and skills identification and development at higher institutions of learning (Volbrecht, 2009), hence it is involved in the developmental stages of people’s growth. Volbrecht explains that the portfolio of evidence constitutes the main method through which learning is assessed in this model. Candidates are required to provide portfolios of evidence describing what prior learning they have previously possessed and how these experiences helped them learn (Breier, 2005). The portfolios become the curriculum through which their learning is assessed (Michelson et al., 2004). Simosko et al. (1988) comment that the development of a portfolio is beneficial to candidates, not only because the model offers assistance to candidates in extracting the required kinds of knowledge but also because it offers opportunities for candidates to understand the magnitude of learning required by higher education. Zink and Dyson (2009), concurring with the idea, write that the filtering of experiences is an individual process which aims at constructing new understanding (perhaps with assistance of an educator). They believe that reflection

on experiential learning gives a reason to take control of experience, transforming it into recognisable knowledge, and so it is eventually educative.

Given the characteristics described above, this model fits well with critical theory and emancipation interest, as it encourages reflection and creation of knowledge. The idea of the model conforms to emancipation by allowing candidates to develop a portfolio and to understand how much of what they know can assist them with their academic studies. The model has the potential to educate learners to know and have the ability to take the lead in conducting their own assessment. This process has the ability to develop not only their critical thinking but also the ability to act for themselves.

In comparing the developmental and credit exchange models, Harris (1999) states that they are similar in that they both generate credit awards for candidates, albeit they have no critical epistemological or pedagogical engagement. Neither challenges the disciplinary boundaries of knowledge that exists between them but both advance the interest of the sharp equivalences systems and actually use different styles of preserving the status quo. Harris explains that despite the developmental model's adherence to reflective exercises, it still requires matching of knowledge to predefined knowledge. Stenlund (2010), on the other hand, argues that its value is higher than the credit exchange model, given that it contributes immensely to both personal and professional development. Credit exchange only makes education efficient and attractive.

Stenlund (2010) indicates that not many programmes that have used RPL have moved towards conceptualising the relationship between academic or other forms of knowledge, but rather academic knowledge becomes dominant and demands correlation between knowledge forms. The current developmental model presents implications for Namibian workers, but despite the candidates being made to reflect on their prior learning the matching of what they know to fit academic content is of serious concern to this researcher. This concern necessitated the use of critical theory to question the legitimacy of matching prior learning and the interpretive theory to find out from research participants what and how NIHL assesses prior learning of candidates accessing through MAE.

### ***Transformational (Radical) Model***

The transformational model is associated with social movements, such as trade unions or feminists groups and critical emancipatory discourse, which views education as a means to transform the individual and society (Breier, 2005:56). In this model, RPL is perceived as knowledge in its own right within its context of practice (Harris, 1999; Osman, 2003). It adheres to the notion that knowledge is valuable in itself and can be accepted even if not aligned to academic merit. Breier also indicates that candidates entering higher education through this model enter not because their competencies meet the institutions' prescriptions but because they recognise the candidate's learning and competencies in their own right.

The transformation model is often referred to as the ‘radical model’ and/or ‘Trojan-horse model’ (Harris, 1999). Although it embraces diversity of knowledge production, Harris (1999) and Volbrecht (2009) claim that it is no less trapped in a modernist frame and the epistemological understandings of knowledge in this tradition are no different from credit exchange or developmental models of RPL. The radical (transitional) model, like others, tends to yield to the traditional ways of fitting prior learning into academic knowledge (Harris, 1999; Volbrecht, 2009). None of the researchers in the literature seems to have explicitly pointed out how differently they can assess experiential learning from aligning it to academic content. This model did not spell out exactly how recognition of knowledge in its own right should be conducted to warrant an individual a place in higher education. Some critics of this model feel that it is too subjective to challenge the dominant discourse of the academy. Stenlund (2010) doubts the capability and competence of most academic institutions to assess this invisible knowledge, but the question is whether experiential knowledge can exist on its own without being aligned to academic knowledge.

Kalz, Bruggen, Giesberg, Waterink, Eshuis and Cooper (2008) cautioned that since the process of assessment constitutes an intervention with carefully designed activities it should be clear and unambiguous. These researchers called for clear interpretation of evidence of learning and supportive mechanism for candidates, which should include training candidates in writing narratives or essays through which they express their learning claims. The transformative models, as with others discussed, present a problem in the Namibian context. That prior learning is aligned

to academic content is a limitation to widening access because, as discussed above, only those whose learning fits formal knowledge would benefit from these models. Namibian workers will benefit from a situation in which candidates are allowed to present evidence of what they have acquired from their working experiences, and such knowledge is assessed, based on its validity rather than on the extent to which such knowledge fits the academic content. The idea should not advance the site of learning or how and when it took place, but rather what has been learnt from such education.

A need exists to suggest ways of assessing and accrediting experiential learning in ways different from matching it to the subject's learning outcomes. Various options need to be explored to examine possibilities that can be emulated to fit candidates' learning to required criteria. The equivalent system demands that knowledge be valued for its credibility and not based on the site of knowledge production. The RPL is practiced in many different ways and good systems worth emulating have emerged from literature. This study aims to learn from the literature as well as from respondents (who will take part in the study) to draw up possibilities of a framework.

The following are examples presenting different assessment models using further and higher education, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC, 2010) and the Athabasca University (AU, n.d.).

### 2.3.3 Models of RPL Procedures in Higher Education

The ultimate success of the implementation of RPL in an institution is the availability of an institutional policy (Michelson et al., 2004; Stenlund, 2010). Stenlund stresses that institutional policy will outline the mandate of the practice, and define and demarcate roles to be performed by staff members. Most researchers who have written about RPL (Harris, 2000; Michelson et al., 2004; Osman, 2003; Stenlund, 2010) demand that it be viewed with rigour and the same degree of confidence and quality assurance procedures as any other traditional assessment. The assessors involved should be trained, and candidates receive the necessary guidance so that no doubts are invested in the RPL procedures (Stenlund, 2010). Various studies, as described by Stenlund, have suggested the investment in both time and money as well as a change in the institutional organisational culture. As explained, various countries have invested time and money to assist the lifelong learners with the process of assessment.

The following are two examples of the processes of assessing experiential learning for access into higher education.

#### **Example A: Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in Ireland**

The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) is one of the RPL providers and also one of the national qualification authorities in Ireland, presiding over the implementation and monitoring practices of RPL. In 1999, the

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act set out that learners could seek credit awards on the basis of RPL and introduced the concept of a right for an individual to apply for RPL directly from FETAC and from Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC). All providers who register with FETAC to access their awards are required to offer RPL for access, and/or for credit awards, and are required to have institutional RPL policies in place. Despite the RPL strategy seeming to be widely acceptable to the council, the FETAC (2010) outlined that it was largely restricted to access in certain disciplines of learning, such as Nursing, Adult Education and Social Care, for persons who aspired to access higher education programme.

The following is the example of an assessing process of a level 6 RPL practiced at FETAC (2010). The assessment conducted in Example A can be used for access and/or credit award purposes. The procedures from point 5 straight to 8b and from 8b to 9 shows the request for credit awards, albeit the concern in this study is access.

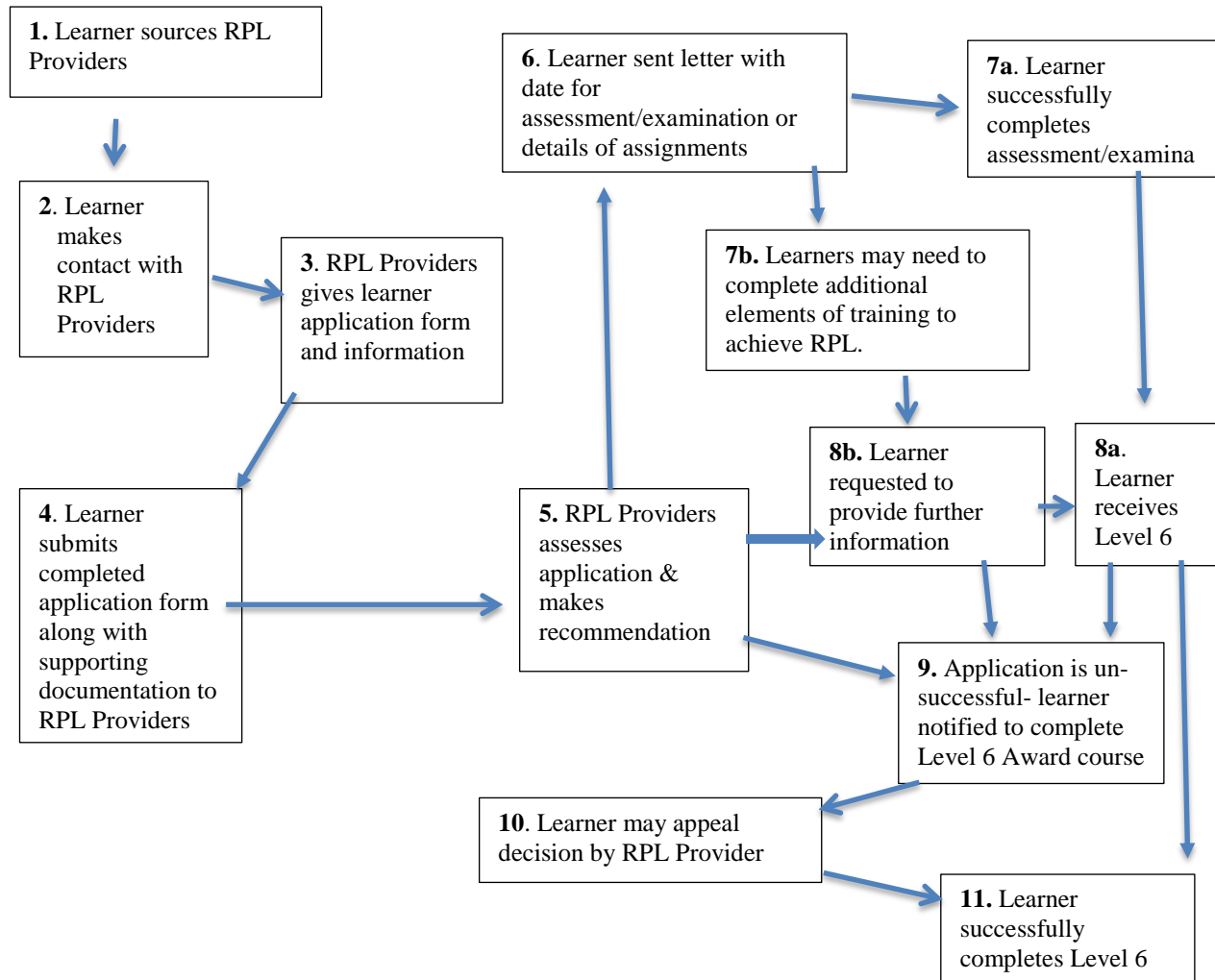
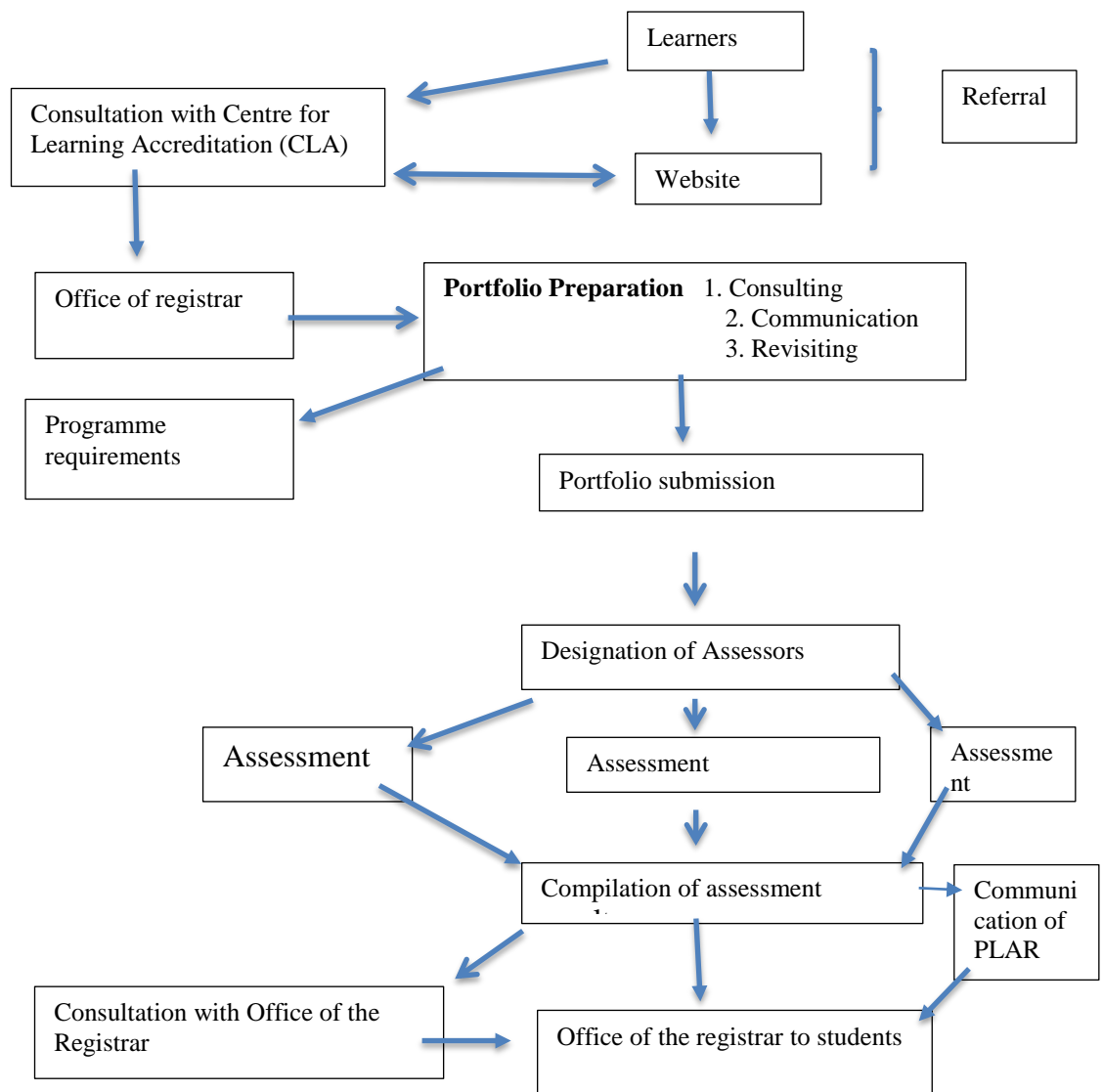


Figure 2.1: *Example A: RPL Assessment Procedures adapted from Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC, 2010) Ireland: Level 6.*

**Example B: At the Athabasca University in Canada**

Athabasca University (AU) is one of the Open Universities in Canadian, which through its Centre for Learning Accreditation administers the activities of Prior

Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). This requires candidates to submit portfolio assessment for access to degree, diploma, post-diploma or certificate programmes. The full overview of the process is presented in Figure 2.2 (below). The PLAR at AU provides for students to work with a mentor who assists them throughout the portfolio preparation process. The materials are assessed by subject experts, including academics administering the programme for which credit is sought. The assessors use predefined criteria, such as marking guides, to evaluate the portfolios. It was explained that the cost of assessing RPL was less than the cost of a conventional course, with the PLAR fee separate from the general application fee. Challenge-for-credit (2.5.1.2) is also available and is handled through the office of the Registrar.



**Figure 2.2: Example B was adapted from the AU PLAR Process Flowchart: Assessment Procedures adapted from Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC, 2010).**

In the two examples provided above, RPL is presented as a means of assessment for the purpose of accessing institutions of higher learning. Despite some diversity in the process, candidates at both universities sought the services of RPL by approaching

them for information. The two universities have centres which disseminate RPL information to community members. At FETAC, the students complete application forms from the centre, whereas the situation differs at the Athabasca University, where after consultation with the centre they are mentored by the Centre for Learning Accreditation (CLA) on how to develop a portfolio. A committee of assessors is compiled, each of which assesses and submits the results for communication to the office of the registrar either for credit awards or access purposes, before informing the students.

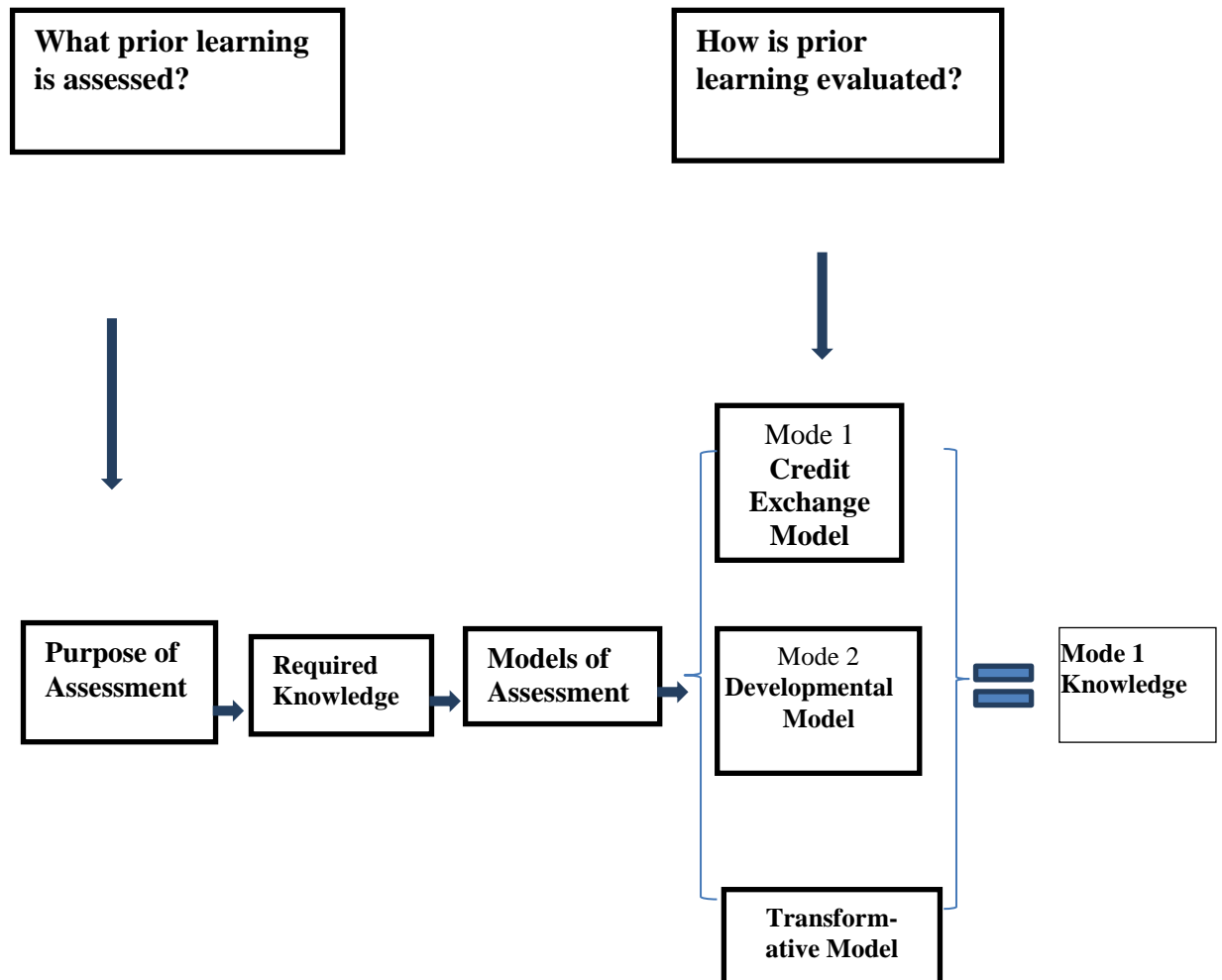
From the perspectives of the models of RPL discussed above (section 2.2.4), the two assessment approaches in the examples above represented the credit exchange and developmental models of RPL. The FETAC uses tests and examination as the assessment tools, implying that the value of RPL is exchanged with academic knowledge. At the AU, the institution employs the development of portfolio of evidence as a tool of assessment, which demands that experiential learning be identified and reported by candidates themselves. It requires reflection and an active input from the candidates in the process. Harris (1999) and Volbrecht (2009) allege that the two models have not presented alternatives to the dominant approaches of assessing experiential learning, but rather have maintained the status quo through different methods of assessment. In their contribution to portfolio development and the assessment of prior learning (cracking the code) Peters, Pokorny and Johnson (in Michelson, Mandell & Contributors, 2004) state that the assessment of prior experiential learning was most successfully introduced when it was linked to subjects with clearly professional focus and where there was congruence between the

professional experience and the candidate's course of study. However, in cases in which candidates have learning outside the professional subjects that needed to be assessed, the assessment of prior experiential learning must be conducted.

Having reviewed the theoretical, the concepts and the international models of RPL, the framework for this study is herewith presented.

#### **2.4 The Conceptual Framework of RPL derived from the Literature**

This study centres on the question of what knowledge is assessed in Namibian institutions of higher learning for entry through the mature age scheme. Emanating from the theoretical perspectives, concepts of terminologies, models of assessment and examples of RPL practices reviewed in this chapter, above, the researcher now presents the conceptual framework of assessing RPL as illustrated in the literature. This assessment framework advocates that knowledge acquired from experiential learning can be assessed and evaluated by aligning it to academic knowledge. The validity of such knowledge appears to be measured by the extent to which prior learning resembles formal knowledge. In the framework presented, the purpose of assessment defines the required knowledge, which also determines the model of assessment. This conceptual framework shows that models of assessment can give rise to various options of assessment, which appear to yield only Mode 1 knowledge. This frame has been presented by the literature of RPL.



**Figure 2.3: The Conceptual Framework for Assessing RPL in Higher Education derived from the literature of RPL**

This framework presents the implications of assessing experiential learning in higher education. In most of the practices presented in the literature of RPL, what is assessed is construed through the purpose of assessment, which controls the knowledge required and in turn the model of assessment. For instance, the literature indicates that in most practices of RPL in higher education the purpose of assessment

directs the procedures (Stenlund, 2010). Stenlund writes that when the purpose of assessment is access the knowledge required becomes the predictive knowledge required to envisage whether candidates have acquired the knowledge adequate for them to cope with academic demands once admitted. Since the purpose is to predict the knowledge required, the appropriate model of assessment is therefore employed to seek the predictive knowledge. This can be sought through three models (as explained), which according to Harris all lead to Mode 1 knowledge.

Another implication is that the prior learning assessed is often not explicitly defined. The literature refers to it as ‘prior learning’ without clearly indicating what exact knowledge is represented. This limitation confuses assessors about what knowledge they are supposed to assess, hence resort to academic knowledge with which they are familiar. Although the opportunity is created for diverse models of assessment that can be used to assess RPL, the process used in all the models discussed in the literature gives rise to only one learning form, Mode 1 knowledge. Harris (1999) has also indicated that the models (credit exchange, developmental, Trojan-horse) do not seem to challenge the disciplinary boundaries, but rather they appear to cement the matching of experiential knowledge against predefined academic knowledge.

This alignment of experiential with academic learning not only places experiential learning into Mode 1 knowledge, but also reinforces exclusion of candidates and division of knowledge in higher education. If work experience has been the requisite of eligibility to mature age entry assessment one would expect it to solicit learning derived from work experience, however, in the above framework whatever model of

assessment is used directs the assessment to Mode 1 knowledge. Many candidates face challenges to reflect on what they have previously learnt, given that they have neither the content of formal subjects nor the ability to transform their experiential learning into academic style and format as required by higher education. This requirement excludes the majority of candidates from accessing higher education through this framework.

The different components are discussed below.

*Credit Exchange Model (Mode 1 knowledge)*. In this option the aim of assessment is to prove that past achievements can be fitted into academic knowledge. The knowledge required through this mode is Mode 1 knowledge, produced by academic and scientific knowledge. It is formal and relies on individual cognitive abilities (Mankin, 2009) (see 2.3.3), based only on aspects that can fit the academic knowledge. Institutions define and determine which competences are to be tested, therefore candidates must fit what they know into the requirements of the institution (Salling-Olesen, 2007). This option promotes the use of standardised tests which are normally designed, administered, scored and interpreted in the same way, regardless of when, where and how such knowledge was acquired (Scholten, 2007). The validity of learning evidence submitted by a candidate is measured by the correct answers given, associated with those in the assessors' marking guides. The literature indicated that the more learning presented by the candidate resembles the content in the assessors' guides, the more marks are allocated to the candidate and the more he or she is perceived as being competent. Through this option many candidates can be

tested and evaluated within a short time since the instruments of assessment used are familiar. Assessors are accustomed to the procedure of assessing this form of learning, and are usually clear on what to do.

However, this option has several challenges. Firstly, it does not indicate the extent to which a candidate has mastered or understood the learning acquired, as passing the exam or test does not always guarantee mastering of knowledge in a specific domain. The option can therefore produce graduates who are not always qualified for the specific fields of study. Secondly, the option does not encourage reflective learning in which candidates analyse what they know against what is required in higher education (Reddy, 2004). Conversely, this option focuses on how much of the acquired learning resembles the academic knowledge. Thirdly, this option only benefits candidates whose competencies are close to formal learning and, as indicated above, candidates whose learning is outside academe (as are most Namibian workers) may not necessarily be considered under this option.

Since this option requires candidates to exhibit academic knowledge it may challenge the adult workers who have been out of education for a long time. Namibians who are likely to access through RPL may find articulation of the English Language in an academic format and standard extremely challenging, both in oral expression and vocabulary (see 1.2). Correspondingly, experiential learning can be difficult to assess through Mode 1 knowledge as candidates need proof of how their past achievements of learning equate with the current requirements. Candidates may have the

experiential learning but lack the evidence to prove it, making past achievements a challenge in this option.

*Developmental Model (Mode 2 knowledge).* The knowledge assessed through this option consists of Mode 2 knowledge, produced socially outside the academy and giving value to performance (Harris, 2000). It is developed from experience, context-specific and acquired through informal activities (see 2.3.3). This knowledge conforms to the developmental model of assessing RPL, which provides for the assistance of candidates in the identification and demonstration of what they have learnt from experience. The candidates use the criteria as a guide for their analysis of what they have learnt from experience (Michelson et al., 2004).

In her contribution to Michelson et al.'s (2004) portfolio development and the assessment of prior learning, Osman explained how students' support of it at the University of the Witwatersrand helped them to relate experiential learning to theories of education that grew out of students' own professional practices. Analysing critical incidents drawn from their classroom experiences, Osman's example gives flexibility to candidates who have not been part of the teaching practices, as they can also relate their experiential learning to theory that grew out of their work-related practices. Candidates themselves may not identify which theory relates to their experiential learning but they can analyse critical incidents that portray such theories.

In this option candidates are not expected to match their learning on their own, but are guided by mentors who are often lecturers in their institutions to identify learning

which they have acquired from experience and to submit the portfolios of evidence as proof of learning (section 2.5.1.2). A portfolio of evidence is a collection of learning materials compiled into a document by a candidate to support his or her qualifications in a given area of study (Challis, 1999). It is a supportive mechanism for mentors, and becomes the curriculum through which learning is evaluated. It orients candidates into discourse of formal education and into mega-cognitive competences required to succeed in higher education (Ralph, 2008). The role of the mentor in the portfolio exercise is to guide and direct the candidates in their effort to compile a portfolio, to distinguish between experience and learning and to ascertain that what is presented conforms to the institutional requirements (Michelson et al., 2004). Mentors do not record the learning evidence on behalf of candidates but direct them to present comprehensive evidence of learning.

Given that candidates are mentored in their process of portfolio development, Hill (2004, in Michelson et al., 2004) expressed the significance of diverse techniques in which portfolios can be presented, reasoning that they should not be presented entirely in the written format, but that opportunities must be created for those who cannot adequately express themselves in written or oral language to demonstrate their learning evidence.

Despite this model including a component of assisting candidates to identify and present learning achievements, Harris (1999) warned that, as with the credit exchange, it does not resist the matching of experiential learning against academic learning. In this model, candidates are required to demonstrate how their learning

from experience matches the learning outcomes of an existing module in an institution or to identify experiences relating to prescribed learning outcomes. They are still required to fit the evidence of learning (portfolios) to academic learning. From the analysis of the two modes, one can deduce that the difference between assessing RPL through Mode 1 and Mode 2 appears to be built upon the routes through which the two modes present their learning evidence. Whereas Mode 1 presents learning evidence from the perspectives of norm-referenced assessment, Mode 2 offers learning through portfolio of evidence, interviews, auditions and other criterion-referenced assessment approaches. However, the learning evidence from both modes must conform in scope and in depth to academic knowledge (Mode 1).

Since this model is assistance inclined, critics question the ownership of knowledge presented in the portfolio (Shalem, 2001), whether it belongs to the candidates who initially drafted the portfolio or to the mentor who modified the learning presented by altering it with inputs and clarifications. The question remains, in that the mentor conforms to an institution which has rules and policies, so whatever knowledge the mentor enhanced in the portfolio would not necessarily be her or his own work. In this case, the question of whose knowledge is left between the candidate, the mentor and the institution, it is not adequate for learning to present doubts. It should, rather, be clearly articulated and transparent so as to avoid any doubt in the process. This option therefore presents two main gaps in its process, firstly, in terms of defining whose knowledge is considered for assessment and evaluation; secondly, in its inability to detach itself from affirming its validity of learning with formal

knowledge. This mode, therefore, as with credit exchange, becomes inappropriate for Namibian workers.

*Transformational Model (Based on Merit).* This option involves learning being assessed by virtue of its worth and not because it fits into any of the modes of knowledge. It is underpinned by transformational (radical) knowledge, sometimes known as the ‘Trojan-horse model’ (Harris, 1999; Osman, 2003) of assessing RPL. It is also based on an understanding that knowledge is valuable in itself and can be accepted even if it is not aligned to academic merit (Harris, 1999). The literature has not explicitly clarified how this model is supposed to be implemented but it suggests that candidates who have accumulated wealth of learning, be it experiential or academic, can by virtue of possessing such knowledge be accepted into the institution if such learning meets the criteria of requirements. This model is no less trapped in a modernist frame, and the epistemological understanding of knowledge in this mode is no different from the credit exchange and developmental models of RPL. The traditional way of fitting knowledge into academic knowledge still appears in the process of aligning knowledge to criteria. Correspondingly, it would be difficult to justify learning without any forms of benchmarking to validate it.

In Namibia, the Namibia Qualifications Framework (NQF) has designed broad level descriptors which can be used as benchmarks in evaluating RPL. The evidence of learning can be aligned to the level descriptors instead of the subject outcomes which candidates are yet to study. For instance, if the learning exhibited is equivalent to NQF level three, it depends how high level three is pitched, becoming the level of

learning achieved. The framework presented above will be informed by inputs from the field and a suggested framework for assessing RPL for access to Namibian institutions of higher learning will be proposed.

The equal sign after the models in the framework represents the equivalency of knowledge which emerged from the assessment models and evaluated as Mode 1 knowledge. This means only Mode 1 knowledge is assessed, irrespective of various assessment models used.

## **2.5. The Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education**

The creation of flexible procedures for the assessment and evaluation of prior learning internationally generated new roles and responsibilities for higher education, particularly those institutions engaged in adult education (Omerzel & Trunk-Sirça, 2008). Higher education in all spheres of life, including the international perspectives, is being adapted to respond to a global shift in the socio-cultural and economic domains, which tends to have resulted in the effect of knowledge creation and pedagogy (Harris, 2000). Harris explains that the new relationship between the economy and education under the post-Fordist economic conditions has brought with it a demand for flexible multi-skilled workers, redirecting the understanding of knowledge and learning which gave rise to notions of expansion of higher education. Higher education systems have internationally been called upon to expand their admission perspectives to allow wider access to their learning programmes, bringing with them a challenge to the liberal humanism of the academy.

Traditional higher education systems are characterised by disciplinary and codified knowledge (Mode 1 knowledge), defined in these institutions by academic norms. In the same context, curriculum content in traditional higher education is insulated, closed and fixed, with students required to adapt themselves to these formal disciplinary norms (Harris, 2000, pp.31-32), potentially constraining the experiential and informal nature of learning in RPL. Although the legitimacy and significance of RPL as a strategy of assessing experiential learning is acknowledged in higher education systems of many countries, such as in the USA, UK and France, there are still major obstacles in the ways RPL is applied. The first obstacle, as identified by Cantwell and Scevak (2004), is the failure to identify the ontological limitation of experiential learning, which these researchers stressed as constraints that limit the implementation of RPL in higher education. According to the two researchers, the understanding of the ontological reality as perceived by institutions in terms of what counts as knowledge and who defines the validity of that knowledge, constitutes a problem for most higher education systems. These researchers allege that with these limitations the meta-cognitive knowledge that RPL candidates come with to higher education contexts becomes more of a trade than general formal learning. The implication, therefore, depicts a practice that provides limited opportunities for independent learning, which candidates would need once they were admitted to higher education.

Cantwell and Scevak (2004) were sceptical about the academic capability of RPL candidates, with doubts born out of their study into the quality of RPL workers who had enrolled in a teacher retraining package following the closure of a major industry

in Australia. The student workers underwent extensive industrial training and experiences during their working period, completing a questionnaire that related to learning, academic and social adjustment. The findings revealed that while RPL students reported a deep approach to learning and a positive learning profile, the open-ended responses revealed patterns of academic adjustment consistent with the restricted understanding of RPL candidates in relation to the nature of university learning (2004, p.132). Cantwell and Scevak interpreted the limitation of university learning of RPL students as being associated with a naïve conception of learning and knowing, arguing that RPL students were in some areas different from the traditional MAE candidates. The latter showed deeper and more complex learning, with a willingness to engage in active and adaptive self-regulation. The study found that the RPL students had shown less well-developed understanding of the complex information and were at a loss to conceptualise what learning there was, beyond the process involved in practical activity. The study concluded that the possibility of disjuncture exists between the understanding of the process of knowledge acquisition and the object of those processes. This limitation in understanding presented potential barriers to effective transition of RPL candidates to university study (Cantwell & Scevak, 2004: p.134).

Cantwell and Scevak found problematic the RPL candidates' less well-developed understanding and lack of accumulating complex information, but not necessarily their inability to cope with learning. The findings may have been influenced by the candidates' different learning backgrounds, and their being expected to manage

theory-related learning that fitted the teacher retraining programme. Given the chance and appropriate assistance the findings could be different.

In a study that used a sample from the University of Paisley in Scotland (Houston, Knox & Hammer, 2007), of students who entered without formal qualifications but with relevant work experience, and others who entered with normal entry requirements, it was found that the former did better on average than those who entered through the traditional route of accessing university from schools. In terms of Houston et al.'s findings, non-traditional entrants did not benefit from a relaxation of standards as they were able to enter higher learning through equivalent programmes. The findings of the two studies contrasted with each other, indicating two opposite findings. Nonetheless, both studies acknowledged that adults with experience had the aptitude for learning.

Another potential hindrance of RPL in higher education is the lack of learning outcomes, with most institutions not articulating their courses into them (Valk, 2009) and thus impeding the alignment of experiential to academic learning. Also, in matching the two forms of competencies, candidates are required to identify institutionally specific courses or standards that match their experiential learning (Michelson et al., 2004). In cases of comparison, Deller et al. (2011) warned that the unit standards by which formal learning is usually measured provides specific learning outcomes of subjects offered at the institution. Such learning differs from what is acquired through experience. In this case, most RPL candidates are challenged to fit what they know into the academic language.

Another obstacle identified is the fear of low entry requirements that alternative routes such as RPL may create, as these may adversely influence general performance of institutions of higher learning (Houston, et al., 2007). Academic lecturers' attitudes towards experiential learning may be that it is '*not invented here*' (Valk, 2009; Smith, 2011), hence not good enough. This attitude seriously inhibits factors for implementing RPL in higher education.

The general lack of conceptual understandings of the nature of experiential knowledge (Mode 2 knowledge) and how it can be assessed differently from the academic Mode 1 knowledge impinges on the way RPL is practiced in higher education system (Conrad, 2010). The distinction of knowledge would require specification of roles in which the traditional university no longer perceives itself as the creator and gatekeeper of it (Fenwick, 2006), but rather identifies itself as a knowledge recogniser. Traditional universities have been viewed as generators of academic knowledge and have been known to assure and protect that knowledge. The emergence of RPL as a distinct assessment device was aimed at challenging the role of traditional academic knowledge as gatekeeper; however, the literature did not present an alternative to the traditional assessment outcomes. Irrespective of the routes of assessment, the status of acquired knowledge remained in alignment with academic knowledge, thus, the new assessment device no longer appears to portray a dimension different from the traditional view of knowledge as envisaged by planners of RPL.

Pougert and Osborne (2004) write that a situated learning perspective concerning RPL knowledge should be used to understand how tacit knowledge could be recognised in relation to the teaching curriculum or professional competences. Whereas job competence is about a person's competence limited to a particular role in a particular company, professional competence refers to a repertoire of skills, knowledge and understanding that a person can apply in a range of contexts. Prior non-certificated learning is about assessing many types of learning that have been acquired non-formally in both job and professional knowledge. It is for this stance that universities and other institutions of higher learning should be used to study and examine knowledge differently acquired and to understand the value and nature of their diversity (Andersson & Hellberg, 2009).

It is unfortunate that in most higher education practices, assessing competence as seen from the financial perspective is allegedly non-viable. For Valk (2009), assessment of experiential learning becomes time-consuming and of less value, perceived as taking away time and effort from more important activities, such as academic research. He calls for national and institutional legislation on the assessment and evaluation of RPL and for training of assessors, as competence in dealing with it would encourage a more positive attitude. Trained staff could stimulate favourable conditions for RPL in higher education and, similarly, its availability in an institution could improve attitudes that people might have against the concept and expectations it evokes. It should be noted that the assessment of RPL as suggested is not advocated for mass entry to higher education, but rather the purpose is to assist those adults who are working and who have accumulated learning

from performing their work tasks to have a platform on which they can have their knowledge assessed and its value justified. It should be the results that emerge out of the assessment that indicate whether or not a candidate has acquired relevant and adequate learning to enable him or her to access higher education.

A study on African perspectives entitled “*Recognition of Experiential Learning: An international analysis*” (UNESCO, 2007, pp.6-7) showed that there were no pre-established models or methods of recognising experiential learning that could be applied to all cases as international guidelines. This was because the practices of recognition depend on institutional and individual objectives which differ significantly from country to country and in some cases from institution to institution. The following section reviews the status of RPL in institutions in one such country, higher education in Namibia

### **2.5.1 The RPL in Namibian Higher Education**

In Namibia, the public Higher Education system consists of the Universities of Namibia, the Polytechnic and the four colleges of education which have been merged with the University of Namibia (NCHE, 2010, p. 18). At present Namibian higher education institutions offer education at the level of certificate, diploma, undergraduate degrees, graduate and post graduate levels. Each of the higher education is pursuing different levels of capacity in skills and knowledge inculcation for their graduates (NCHE, 2010). The NCHE has the legal mandate to coordinate higher education provision in Namibia.

After independence in 1990 a Presidential Commission submitted a report on tertiary education in 1993, with recommendations that led to the establishment of the two institutions of higher learning. The Commission also recommended the establishment of the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE), which was subsequently established under the Act of Parliament, Act no.26 of 2003, with the concurrence of the NQA. It had a mandate to accredit programmes at higher education institutions and to facilitate access of students to them (NCHE, 2009)

It should be noted that the role of accreditation of the NCHE relates to that of the NQA, which has the legislative mandate to accreditation, assurance and quality of whether qualifications meet the national standards. Until the establishment of the NCHE, quality assurance systems in Namibian higher education have been unevenly spread between institutions. Such a situation created the need, hence the establishment of a council to control quality assurance in higher education. The recognition of prior work learning in higher education has been part of admission procedures in some institutions of higher learning which accommodate candidates on the basis of their work experience.

### **2.5.2 Admission Systems in Namibian Higher Education System**

This section examines admission systems in the higher education sector in Namibia, namely the University and Polytechnic.

### ***2.5.2.1 The University of Namibia (UNAM)***

Despite the University of Namibia (UNAM) being the only state-owned university in the country, it has some autonomy and by virtue of its position enjoys a prestigious status in the country. It is perceived by many Namibians as the site for knowledge production and the leading national institution for education in the country. It is therefore expected to respond to socio-cultural and economic demands and has a duty to maintain quality and remain credible both locally and internationally. It provides diverse academic programmes that are based mainly on theoretical training in specified fields.

Although the university enjoys some autonomy in terms of programme development and teaching, as with most institutions of higher learning, knowledge is defined by various discipline fields through diverse modules. These modules are usually organised hierarchically with precise exit learning outcomes. By virtue of its nature, the university tends to follow introjection pedagogy (Harris, 2000), with competence seen in terms of distinctive capacity and the lecturers acting as long-term mentors of academic development. Each faculty in the university, through departments, has revised its curriculum to include exit and learning outcomes that form benchmarks for curriculum assessment.

To facilitate inclusive tendencies in education and to accord lifelong learners and community educators a chance to grow and pursue their career development, the University has established a Department of Lifelong Learning and Community

Education that caters for adult and community education programmes. Congruently, according to the Education Training Sector Implementation Programme's (ETSIP, 2006) directives and social development agenda, UNAM has also committed itself to widening adult access through a Mature Age Entry (MAE) scheme. Recognition is given to adults who wish to seek admission to the institution to comply with MAE-specific conditions of 25 years old, successful completion of junior secondary education (ten years of schooling) and proof of at least five years' relevant work experiences relating to the proposed study programmes (UNAM, Prospectus, 2009, 2008, 2010, 2011). Applicants are required to write an MAE test, which consists of four papers: English proficiency, General Knowledge, Numerical Ability and Faculty Specific Subjects. The lecturers of subjects in the MAE tests are responsible for setting the question papers and marking the scripts, which are then forwarded to the office of the registrar who determines passes or failures. Depending on availability of space in various faculties and departments, successful candidates who pass the MAE tests are allowed, through the office of the registrar, to register for the courses for which they applied (UNAM, Information and Regulations, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Exemption from module(s) is accorded if a student has passed an examination conducted by any other recognised examination body in corresponding or similar module(s) on the same level not older than five years. Postgraduate candidates who do not possess the bachelor's degree but whose field experience and work accomplishments have been certified by the relevant faculty or department as equivalent to a Bachelor's degree, may, under special circumstances, also be considered for admission (UNAM, 2011).

### ***2.5.2.2 The Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN)***

The Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN) is the second highest institution of learning in the country and enrolled about 7,000 students ranging from undergraduates to postgraduates (PoN, Prospectus, 2010). The institution offers a variety of career-oriented courses extending from Engineering to Agriculture, Commercial to Technical subjects, and Applied Sciences (PoN, Prospectus, 2010). By virtue of its nature, the PoN follows the projection pedagogy (Harris, 2000) which deals highly with vocationally oriented courses. The understanding of knowledge at the PoN is embedded in performance, highly fixed in standards which are mostly defined and greatly influenced by the market.

Similar to UNAM, the PoN also provides adults with flexible entry requirements to access the institution through the MAE scheme. Adults who are 23 years old and who have worked for three years in fields not necessarily related to the one intended can apply for admission. They should also be in possession of a Grade 10 certificate, whilst the normal requirement of admission is the NSSC with specific requirements as stipulated by different schools in the Polytechnic. Selection for MAE is made by a written entrance test in English and Mathematics. The candidate must pass the PoN proficiency test in English at the level which enables them to enter the study programme for which they have applied (PoN, Prospectus, 2009).

The PoN Prospectus (2011) states that the institution subscribes to the principles of granting recognition for prior learning through a variety of means, such as

recognition of courses obtained from other institutions. Like UNAM, it recognises and awards credit for courses completed at other institutions. A maximum of 50% of exemption is granted, provided that an 80 percent overlap between the content of the two courses is attained. The Prospectus also stipulated that recognition of non-certified prior learning is provided to students who are already registered with the institution and seeking such provision. The PoN Prospectus (2011, p.5) indicates that a student registered at the Polytechnic may apply for recognition of competencies gained through experience for the purpose of gaining credit for a course that forms part of the curriculum of the programme for which the candidate is applying. A student seeking recognition of non-certified prior learning applies in writing to Head of Department for appraisal. The assessment would be conducted using the PoN assessment tools, which are equivalent in both standard and content to the normal formal assessment in the course.

#### ***2.5.1.3 The International University Of Management (IUM)***

The IUM Prospectus (2009-2012) states the mission of the institution as being to train dedicated knowledge workers who would provide leadership at national and international level. The IUM strives to cater for all the academic and professional needs of the present and future generations. The institution admits holders of the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC). A minimum of C symbol in the English Language is required, with a pass in Mathematics and a C symbol in three other subjects, totalling 25 points or more (IUM, Prospectus, 2009-2012). For another route through which candidates access IUM, eligibility through MAE, the

candidate should be 25 years of age and in possession of at least a Junior School Certificate (10 years of schooling) and a minimum of five years of experience in the world of work. The Prospectus (IUM, 2009-2012) highlights that Credit Transfer from outside institutions may be awarded up to 50% of total credits for any qualification conducted by IUM. The literature concerning these three institutions has indicated the NSSC and MAE as the main selection instruments to access higher learning in the country. This study seeks to investigate what is assessed in MAE and how such knowledge is evaluated.

#### ***2.5.1.4 Mature Age Entry as an admission strategy***

Castle and Attwood (2001) define mature age entry (MAE) as a matriculation exemption scheme, accompanied by appropriate work experience. In the Namibian context it is an alternative admission route for adults who lack the traditional entry qualifications for accessing institutions of higher learning. These adults are required to have gained work experience relevant to the field in which they applied to study (Houston et al., 2007). Apart from accommodating disadvantaged adult candidates, Mpofu (2006) writes that MAE schemes are designed to enable higher education to expand beyond its traditional target group of school leavers and serve the immediate needs of the workforce. Whereas various institutions ask for several years of work experience as a cut-off point to determine the definition of MAE, the literature indicates that institutional requirements vary between countries and institutions. For instance, the University of Namibia requires a Grade 10 certificate and five years of relevant work experience (UNAM, Prospectus, 2010). The Polytechnic of Namibia

needs Grade 10 and three years of experience, not necessarily relevant to that of work (PoN Prospectus, 2010). In spite of the extensive amount of work experience accumulated by candidates through their job performances, only those who have successfully completed Grade 10 can be assisted under the MAE scheme. These requirements omit many competent employed Namibians who could add value to productivity and the country's economic development. In spite of such diversity, the age requirement of 25 and the years of work experience requested by many institutions have internationally been used as criteria for eligibility to MAE schemes (Tones, Fraser, Elder & White, 2009).

In this study, the concept of an MAE scheme is associated with one that is complementary to the institution's normal entry requirements. It allows mostly youth and adults who have been employed and wish to re-enter formal education a chance to fulfil their ambitions, even though they do not possess the institution's entry qualification. Both MAE and RPL are processes that facilitate eligibility for access to higher education. In Berggren's (2007) view, eligibility differs from matriculation, in that the latter involves applying to and being accepted by an institution on the basis of meeting the entry requirements (Berggren, 2007). Eligibility, on the other hand, is a way of equalising access requirements to candidates' claimed knowledge and as a way of aiding those who did not have a school leaving certificate from upper secondary school but have reached a certain age and possessed work experience which both RPL and MAE share.

Nonetheless, eligibility to institutions through MAE and RPL follows significantly similar paths. Candidates for both are required to have spent a certain number of years in employment and RPL for higher education would also require some schooling (Castle & Attwood, 2001). Since NIHL requires work experience as a criterion for eligibility for the MAE test, this study is interested in determining what knowledge value is assessed in these institutions and so enable the recognition of knowledge and eventually access. The Namibia Qualifications Framework has introduced the level descriptors that higher education may use to equalise experiential learning with academic learning.

#### ***2.5.1.5 Levels Descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework***

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels descriptors express the relative size of each qualification (such as certificates or diplomas) in an effort to encourage consistency in expressing the content area or equivalent level of learning covered by any specified qualification (NQF, 2007). For instance, an NQF certificate represents a minimum of 40 NQF credits of the learner's effort, which must be at or above the level of certification. The 'learner's effort' here refers to the energy that he or she has contributed to studying a particular subject. A credit is a value allocated to benchmark assessment, with one credit being equivalent to ten hours of notional learning (NQF, 2007). The higher a candidate moves up the ladder the more credits he or she accumulates. A diploma qualification represents a minimum of 120 NQF credits of a learner's effort, higher than the basic certificate which accounts for 40. According to NQF levels (2007, p.16) the Namibian Senior Secondary Certificates

(NSSC) Group Award is an NQF Level three [3] qualification. It can be assumed then Grade 12 certificates are 40 credits or above, therefore the learning complexity vital to entering higher education in Namibia can be presumed to be at 40 or above credits. Therefore, assessing the non-certificated learning should aim at achieving an equivalent of 40 credits of the candidate's effort, which can emerge from any experiential or formal learning of the candidate.

The broad concession underlying this study is that adults have a tremendous amount of learning experiences which, if assessed, can gain academic recognition. This allocation of academic recognition comes with the assumption that knowledge, skills and competencies learnt in the workplace can be transferred and applied in an academic institution without many problems (Andersson & FeJes, 2010). As argued in this study, the NQF level descriptors are so general that they can benefit candidates in that they are sufficiently wide and open to flexibilities that they can be prone to various interpretations. Therefore, the challenge would be to understand how to distinguish between assessing candidates entering programmes with 22 points plus a 'D' symbol in English, as opposed to those entering with 25 points plus a 'C' symbol in English. The most significant aspect in assessing RPL in higher education is conceptualisation of what knowledge is required and the mode of assessing it.

## 2.6 Assessment, Evaluation and Accreditation of Recognition of Prior learning

**Table 2.1** (below) defines assessment, evaluation and accreditation of RPL, not for purposes of comparison but simply to clarify what each issue signifies in practice.

<b>Assessment (2.6.1)</b>	<b>Evaluation/Validation (2.6.2)</b>	<b>Accreditation by NQA (2.6.33)</b>
<p><b>Assessing of RPL means to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ identify criteria for assessment</li> <li>○ Define any outcome candidates need to demonstrate</li> <li>○ Candidates demonstrate through performance the appropriate abilities integrated with appropriate knowledge bases for the subject applied for.</li> <li>○ Judge how evidence of learning from experience matches academic subject.</li> <li>○ Align or match the submitted learning to assessment criteria.</li> <li>○ Determine the level of achievements</li> </ul> <p>(Harris et al., 2000; Donoghue et al., 2002; Michelson et al., 2004; Shalem &amp; Steinberg, 2006; Conrad, 2008; Klein-Collin &amp; Hein, 2009; Suopis, 2009; Andersson &amp; Fejes, 2010)</p>	<p><b>Evaluation of RPL is to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine what counts as knowledge and how it is expressed.</li> <li>○ Check evidence of learning by checking reference letters from employers or evidence of learning. Ascertaining evidences by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ determining the nature of acceptable knowledge</li> <li>○ determining what counts as knowledge.</li> <li>○ determining Whether or not enough evidence of learning is submitted or exhibited.</li> <li>○ ensuring that evidence submitted shows academic credibility</li> <li>○ evaluating learning by;</li> <li>○ verifying levels of learning</li> <li>○ allocation of credit and recognition.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>(Simosko et al., 1988; Wheelahan et al., 2003; Conrad, 2008; Klein-Collin &amp; Hein, 2009)</p>	<p><b>Accreditation of RPL is to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ascertain that assessors who are assessing have the abilities to assess prior non-certificated learning.</li> <li>○ Ascertain that the assessment centre has the necessary facilities and equipment and systems in place to assess PncL.</li> <li>○ Ascertain the availability of filing system and the administration process that recognises PncL.</li> <li>○ Ascertain quality of assessment process and to verify that assessors have appropriate qualification of assessors.</li> <li>○ Verify the information submitted by providers and monitor progress of provisions.</li> </ul> <p>(NQA, 2009; Namibian RPL draft policy, 2010) Wheelahan et al., 2006; Kizito, 2006;</p>

### **2.5.1 Assessment Process of Prior Non-Certificated Learning**

Among various steps that are often taken to conduct the assessment of non-certificated learning, researchers (Barrington, 2005; Pires, 2008; Suopis, 2009; TRU, 2009) have identified methods through which non-certificated learning is identified and extracted from experience before it can be assessed. These steps follow the process of description and/or demonstration of learning, which once identified, demonstrated or described, is assessed. The assessment of RPL can be carried out through tests, examinations, demonstrations, auditions and/or through compilation of portfolios of evidence. Different models use different assessment methods, but the credit exchange model is accustomed to testing and examination tools of assessment, whereas the developmental model conforms to demonstrations, auditions and portfolio developments. Harris (2000) emphasises that, irrespective of the methods of assessment used, assessors tend to maintain matching of experiential learning against academic knowledge to authenticate the learning achieved. Assessment accounts for *what* and *how* knowledge is identified and equated to academic credibility (Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (DRPL), 2011).

#### ***2.5.1.1 Identification of non-certified Learning***

The identification of non-certificated learning takes place when a candidate becomes aware of the provision of RPL services and reflects on what he or she knows in relation to required knowledge. The identification and selection of learning constitute a type of scaffolding (Conrad, 2008) upon which candidates build their learning

experiences. As explained by Conrad, candidates at this stage map both their histories and their futures in a form of strategising and formulating the answers to their learning past experiences. They identify and list academic competencies and skills they already possess through experiences, reflecting and describing such knowledge, competencies or skills that fit the assessment requirements (Shalem & Steinberg, 2006; Conrad, 2008; Klein-Collin & Hein, 2009).

Identification of learning can be conducted personally by the candidate or the candidate can seek the assistance of the tutor or supervisor (DRPL, 2011). Depending on the host institution, forms of identification of learning differ. Most institutions require candidates to describe their experiences through the use of portfolio development and submit these documents as proof of evidence of knowledge gained. Michelson et al. (2004) offer varieties of implementation models outlining how experiential learning can be identified from experience for assessment purposes. In the majority of models presented, Michelson et al. indicated that candidates can identify the already possessed skills and in the process of identification become aware of other competencies they need to develop (Michelson, 2004).

Other forms of identification of learning are demonstration of knowledge claimed. The candidate may be asked to demonstrate through auditions or interviews the competences, skills and knowledge which they claim to possess. The demonstration of such knowledge, skills or competence is required to prove the appropriate depth of knowledge possessed so as to substantiate the scope and level of learning. Other

methods of identifying knowledge from experience involve writing personal learning statements from evidence of learning that an applicant claims to have acquired (Michelson et al., 2004; Barrington, 2005; Conrad, 2008). The role of the candidate at the identification stage is to identify, extract and exhibit the claimed knowledge to convince the assessors that the learning has indeed taken place.

At the University Without Walls (WWW) in the USA, relevant learning from experience is extracted through the identification of six areas of competences determined by the intended course of study (Suopis, 2009). A course in Management, for example, may use areas of competences such as customer services, used by candidates to construct six to ten pages about each experience gained through work or from experience about the said topics. At the London Metropolitan University (Michelson et al., 2004), candidates are required either to demonstrate how their learning from experience matches the learning outcomes of an existing module for which they apply, or to articulate a series of learning outcomes that match their experiential learning and that relate to the subject matter of the subject applied for. At this identification stage, candidates are not expected to learn anything new as the focus is on the exhibition of learning they already possess and which they claim to have previously attained (Harris, 1999).

The process of identification and extracting learning from experience is seen as the most crucial stage in the RPL processes. Steven, Gerber and Hendra (2010) stress the impact that identification of knowledge can have on students in terms of transformation and facilitation of a new sense of confidence and ability. This

transformation can inspire them to make changes inside and outside the self. However, in spite of the international advocacy of candidates' involvement in the identification of learning, some literature (Joosten-ten Brinke et al., 2009; Conrad, 2010) questions the capability of candidates to self-assess and to deliver expected learning outcomes. As argued by Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2009), it is difficult for students to give the required (by level and standards) descriptions of their former learning experiences based on memories. The self-assessment becomes difficult for them to realise the extent of what they know and whether or not they attained the language skills to articulate it (Salling-Olesen, 2007). Joosten-ten Brinke et al. argue also that the subjective nature of experiential learning makes self-assessment extremely difficult for candidates to judge whether their experiences involves learning at all and the scope of the learning attained.

The understanding from the literature illustrates a situation in which researchers of RPL are seriously arguing against the self-assessment of candidates in RPL. An example was presented from the Alberta College of Pharmacy in the USA, of a checklist that was developed and completed, as an annual rating of members' level of knowledge and skill in a professional development learning log. A number of problems were identified concerning the self-assessment exercise, with administrators encountering difficulties in relying upon members' self-assessment results, which were supposed to ensure pharmacists' competences and protection of public safety. The outcomes of the self-assessment exercise reveal that little about the depth of thought or the accuracy of judgment was exercised by members (Fenwick, 2009). Although this self-assessment was in the context of pharmacists it

created an argument in relation to the quality of self-assessment of candidates at the identification stage. Generally, whereas some researches condone reliability in candidates' self-assessment, other research findings reveal that there was little or no relationship between actual performance and self-rated performance (Joosten-ten Brinke et al., 2009). Therefore, self-assessment used in the identification of knowledge is prone to various influences, such as language ability and factors that are common to adult learning.

#### ***2.5.1.2 Methods of Assessing RPL***

Upon the identification of learning, the next step that comes into effect is the assessment process, within which the determination of appropriate methods or presentations for assessment is undertaken, depending on the model of assessment chosen. If the model follows the credit exchange model, candidates are required to display their learning in a format designed and deemed appropriate by the receiving institution (Conrad, 2008). If the model of assessment follows the humanistic perspective a developmental model is used in which candidates are required to develop a portfolio of evidence. A variety of assessment methods have been described to assess RPL, discussed in turn below.

#### ***Challenge examinations***

Challenge examinations (conforming to credit exchange model), also known as 'challenge-for-credit', are tests or projects based on the learning outcomes of a specific course, which in most cases have been designed by lecturers who teach the

specific subject (Conrad, 2008). They are designed to assess general disciplinary knowledge and skill in order to earn credit (Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) Manitoba Manual, 2006). A candidate who believes that he or she has prior learning outcomes equivalent to a particular course or module is provided with a course outline and allowed access to a test so as to prepare him or her for the challenge examination (Manitoba, 2006; Conrad, 2008). This type of assessment is referred to as a 'challenge' because candidates try to meet the challenging conditions that have been pre-established for the course by the host institution (Conrad, 2008). According to Conrad, candidates who apply to have their prior non-certificated learning recognised in this fashion are obliged to tailor their knowledge to resemble that of the host institution. Universities, for instance, are known to place emphasis on written tests, which are mostly institution-based and are used not only to measure individual candidates' learning achievements but also to test their general capacity to study in higher education (Andersson, Fejes, & Ee-Ahn, 2004; Pougert & Osborne, 2004).

A study by Alquraan (2012) on the methods of assessing students' learning in education in Jordanian Colleges found that a traditional paper and pencil test was the most common method used by teachers in higher education. This study tends to affirm the controlling nature that formal education has over other forms of assessment. Harris and Saddington (1995) express the view that whereas these tests and examinations have been accepted by higher education as valid and reliable, and closely resemble traditional assessment in formal education, they are subject to cultural and linguistic bias. The two researchers argue that the reliability of these

assessments is difficult to ensure, given that their setup may differ even within the same institution (Smith, 2004). The distinct setup in terms of content, format, standards, conditions and administration defeats the purpose they were created to serve. The researcher concurs with Harris and Saddington's claim that these tests neither differ nor test the level of achievement of prior experiential learning attained by an individual candidate. They concentrate on examining the extent of equivalency and ascertaining how much of the experiential learning equates to the formal unit standards for comparisons. The assessment of knowledge derived through the challenge examination and tests is based on performance and measured as a total score marks for the learning attempted (Houston et al., 2007). Another method of assessment is the portfolio of evidence.

### ***Portfolio of evidence of learning***

A portfolio is a collection of materials compiled into a document by a candidate or student to exhibit the evidence of learning and achievement that he or she claims to possess in a given area of study (Challis, 1999). It is a supportive mechanism for mentors to assist candidates to access a programme or advance standing in an existing curriculum. The focus is to orient candidates into a discourse of formal education and to reinforce the mega-cognitive competences required to succeed in higher education (Ralphs, 2008). Candidates identify and/or describe their learning in portfolio documentation and submit these as proof of learning. Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2010) described portfolio assessment as a set of complex tasks that are descriptive, context-based and personal, and that require many interpretations. Compilation of a portfolio requires candidates to assess, identify and present the

evidence of their prior learning (Michelson et al., 2004; Conrad, 2009), which can be presented in the form of a curriculum vitae, a description of evidence, or in arguments for the use of evidence in relation to the attainment of the required learning (Joosten-ten Brinke et al., 2010). Some institutions offer portfolio development courses or workshops to assist candidates compile the portfolios, whilst others provide self-instructional materials such as guides, for candidates to follow the procedures of compiling one. Other institutions provide counselling, mentors or advisors to provide guidance and support to students as they begin the compilation process (Simosko & Associates, 1988).

The portfolio also includes a written statement, described by Conrad (2009) as the heart of the knowledge construction. According to Conrad, this learning statement forms the body of the demonstrated evidence of the learning that a candidate claims to have acquired. The documentation must support the claims of learning as in the statements of learning and other evidence that indicates the competence of the candidate (Simosko et al., 1988). Conrad described the statement of learning as the most challenging exercise in the development of a portfolio. It demands the deconstruction of the candidate's own learning (transference of experiential learning into academic knowledge) and the breaking up of learning into components of constituent parts. This exercise proves most problematic for candidates (Conrad, 2009). Although they may have been involved in various activities in which they obtained knowledge, the literature finds that most lack ways of organising and articulating knowledge to meet the academic expectations (Michelson et al., 2004).

Some of the challenges highlighted include limited language skills for students to articulate what they know (Smith, 2011).

There are different types of portfolios used to present learning (TRU, 2009). The *dossier* portfolio is used to collect performance proof for the purpose of entry to a profession or programme. The *training* portfolio focuses on product or competencies built from the time the students participated in the learning programme. The *reflective* portfolio gathers evidence of specific competence requirements, consisting of best practices in combination with self-appraisal. Another type is the *personal development* portfolio, which is documentation of the professional growth of an individual over a longer time. All the different types of portfolio are used in documenting past achievements of learning, even though their purposes differ. For the perspective of this study, the dossier type appears to fit well within the advocates of this study, since it consists of a collection of evidence of performance required to convince assessors that the candidate has achieved the equivalent learning needed for entry to a specific programme. The type of a portfolio is not the concern of this study, but the ideal stance is the presentation of learning in any form with which candidates feel comfortable in exhibiting their learning.

Learning in a portfolio can be presented in oral or written form, or with any other method that best illustrates the acquired learning. At the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Ontario in North America, a contributor in Michelson et al. (2004) explained that it was possible to present an oral explanation of a portfolio to the panel of assessors. Some candidates at FNTI demonstrated their learning

evidence through a workshop, with one videotaping his entire portfolio, including the participation of his family and friends with complete explanations of what he had learnt from the experiences that he described. At the Open University of the Netherlands, candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge by creating an argument in relation to the attainment of required knowledge. In most cases it is the concerned faculty in an institution that determines the nature of acceptable evidence to verify the level of learning as expressed in the learning outcome statement (Simosko et al., 1988). At Alverno College in Milwaukee, candidates are required to describe and reflect (narrative descriptions) upon their experiences in six categories, whilst at London Metropolitan University candidates are expected to write a reflective résumé and a series of learning outcomes that are submitted in writing or in interview form. The purpose of writing is to assist candidates in practicing autobiography writing (Michelson et al., 2004).

In a situation in which a portfolio development course is employed to identify the significance of assessing learning, a teacher, mentor, counsellor or RPL officer is often assigned to train candidates in how to develop portfolios. The training for the portfolio development course helps candidates to identify relevant learning from their experiences. At Athabasca University, for instance, coaching and mentoring of learners is provided at all stages of portfolio development (Conrad, 2008). The support of development includes a study on how to develop critical thinking, writing and research skills needed in constructing a portfolio. The university gives guidelines, templates, examples and instructions to candidates to assist them in ‘deconstructing their learning and breaking it into its constituency parts’ (Conrad,

2008. 145). Apart from the assistance given by the RPL officer, the candidates must have the ability to draw a broader and deeper connection with other options of learning (Suopis, 2009).

That tutors guide candidates to identify the relevant knowledge acquired and to assist them in how such knowledge should be presented in the portfolio as evidence of learning, various researchers (Peters, 2005; Salling-Olesen, 2007; Joosten-ten Brinke et al., 2009; Popova-Gonci, 2009; Conrad, 2010) argue against the assessor's approach to portfolio compilation. Popova-Gonci writes that during the identification of learning, especially where support is provided by tutors through comments and feedback, it is the tutor, not the students, who often identify specific learning components that may further be considered as RPL credits (Popova-Gonci, 2009, p.43). Students or candidates then submit to qualified subject matter experts who review the students' materials and interview them to discuss further their learning and to address any learning components that were either omitted or not clearly discussed in the student's written request for credit. Therefore, critiques question the ownership of knowledge in portfolios (Popova-Gonci, 2009).

In the process of supporting students the researchers argue that it is the evaluators who inadvertently become the primary translators of the students' prior experiential learning into academic knowledge. The assessors actually identify and address learning components that will be relevant to a candidate's future academic learning development. Since this is done by the assessors themselves it disadvantages candidates as they miss out on the opportunity to be fully involved in the learning-

orientation practices of the assessment process (Conrad, 2008). While the portfolio is a recognised approach to triangulate learners' demonstration of knowledge and to encourage candidates to apply their organising and prioritising cognitive skills, two cautions also take precedence (Conrad, 2008).

As highlighted by Conrad, not all learners avail themselves of the pedagogical possibilities offered by the portfolio method. Secondly, the portfolio approach is necessarily guided by sets of the host institution's criteria and outcomes. Conrad further argues that these criteria and outcomes serve as guidelines and structuring devices rather than as hard-and-fast targets. The approach tends to focus on candidates who are already able to organise their own learning rather than stipulating for them what they must know if they are to be successful in their application (Conrad, 2008). Ralph (2008) argues that candidates are made to reinforce the rationalised forms of knowledge rather than engage in the boundaries between different cultures of these forms of knowledge.

In the assessment of a portfolio, the claim of learning is not only of achievement but also of what and how it is arrived at, placing great emphasis on reflection (Challis, 1999). Challis states that the portfolio has the potential to provide a means for the synthesis of adult learning and reflective practice. Therefore, the reflective process becomes significant in the assessment of portfolios. In addition, Challis argues that through the reflection process, retrospective reflection and analysis of past learning are synthesised into learning that influences future changes in a person. A Candidate would realise what he or she knows and what still needs to be studied. Although

Conrad (2010) writes that the assessment of portfolio generates deeper controversy on issues around power and who controls knowledge in the portfolio, his questions centre on who controls knowledge in RPL. Other questions raised are whether candidates with non-university learning can be expected to conform to the language of the university and to be accorded fair recognition of their knowledge and what validates the alignment of the two forms of learning.

### ***Matching or Alignment of Learning***

Researchers (Gallacher & Feutrie, 2003; Shalem & Steinberg, 2006; Klein-Collin & Hein, 2009; TRU, 2009; Popova-Gonci, 2009) indicate course matching as the most common assessment strategies used in institutions that are practicing the assessment of RPL. According to the abovementioned researchers, matching of experiential knowledge against subject-content refers to alignment of learning acquired from experience against learning outcomes of subject modules. The assessment is considered creditworthy if the learning assessed provides evidence of that similar to the subject knowledge (theory and practice) (Suopis, 2009). This, according to Suopis, is because credit is not awarded for accumulated experience but rather for understanding and demonstrating what it means to have acquired such knowledge. In course matching, candidates do demonstrate how their learning from experience equates learning outcomes of existing modules (Michelson et al., 2004, p.164).

Course matching is essential, particularly in formal learning, hence it assists in educating academics since conventional understanding and practices in higher education do not incorporate how non-certificated or experiential knowledge can be

equated to formal knowledge (Shalem & Steinberg, 2006). According to Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2009), universities and other institutions of higher education in general have for a long time focused on knowledge construction rather than on competence development, therefore the value of non-certified knowledge was not recognised. In the name of lifelong learning it should not matter *how* something was learnt but rather *what* is learnt. Again, making reference to Harris (2006), Joosten-ten Brinke et al. argue that similarities exist between experiential and academic learning, and that possible differences between the two can be readily overcome. To fulfil the authenticity of assessing RPL, candidates are assessed on the extent to which they fulfil certain tasks in practice, related to higher educational programmes of choice. This means candidates may receive credit points if their learning matches the learning outcomes of the requirements (entry or exemption) to the course applied for. Matching course outlines or learning outcome follows that for every course objective that is listed in the course description a candidate needs to exhibit how his or her learning has met it.

As perceived by Wheelahan et al., assessors should not focus too much on what knowledge is important but they should understand how particular knowledge came to be validated as important. Cantwell and Scevak (2004) suggest some form of preparatory programmes to support and ensure that these students are able to develop the skills and dispositions essential for success at university study level. In spite of suggestions for preparatory programmes for assessing RPL, Kizito (2006) writes that there are no standards available for conducting assessment of RPL in many institutions. Each institution inspiring to practice RPL should do so in accordance

with the purposes and availability of resources in the institution. It is worth noting that institutional assessment is greatly entrusted only in the hands of the recipient institutions to decide what counts as knowledge.

For Popova-Gonci (2009), whereas course matching may assure some quality control, such an approach has the potential to undermine one of the core values of RPL practices. Consistent with this view, the researcher of this study feels that course matching has the potential to limit candidates to critically engage with their own knowledge claims. In the same perspective, Popova-Gonci stresses that for RPL to act as a bridge between non-traditional and traditional learning, students need to successfully translate experience learning achieved through non-academic sources into specific learning outcomes and be able to express these in academic terminology. In the understanding of this study, ability to translate non-academic language into academic language would require students to have acquired spoken and written communication skills, critical thinking skills, and to have mastered basic academic terminologies related to their area of study in which they are pursuing recognition. Researchers (Pougert & Osborne, 2004; Andersson & Fejes, 2010) have expressed rejection of the alignment of experiential learning to subjects' learning outcomes, arguing that it not only limits knowledge but also dilutes the kind of knowledge being sought.

Critics (Popova-Gonci, 2009) argue that adults who have not had recent formal experience at the time of applying prior non-certificated learning may find it difficult not only to translate experiential learning to academia but also to match such learning

when measuring the level at which it fits the academic learning outcomes. The similar sentiment is shared by Joosten-ten Brinke et al., (2009), who added that matching non-certificated learning against objectives or set standards of institutions may limit the extent of prior learning which can be claimed, particularly by candidates who are unable to express themselves on what they have learnt. However, Popova-Gonci (2009) argues that if prior learning were to assume the role of mediator or bridge between work experiential learning and academic learning it should be imparted early in one's academic career. As such, it would not become a great challenge to candidates as is currently the case. Wheelahan et al. (2006) comment that where a clear framework for standards is absent, a possibility of subjective interpretations of how knowledge can be fitted together is likely to occur. Anderson and Fejes (2010) advise that RPL be seen as an integrated aspect of a learning process in which the focus is on the knowledge and competences the person has in the specific work context. Given the methods of assessing RPL, the following topic presents the literature reviews concerning the evaluation practices of RPL.

## **2.6 Evaluation of Prior Learning**

Evaluation was defined above (section 1.9.7) as a means of validating the results of assessment in order to earn credits. They are ways of determining the effectiveness of the judgments and achievement (Gboku & Lekoko, 2007) of the evidence submitted. In an evaluation process, evidence of learning is validated to ascertain the authenticity of the learning claimed. Evaluation is about judging, justifying the

evidence submitted, deciding and making recommendations about a decision (Gboku & Lekoko, 2007).

In the experience of the University of South Africa (UNISA), evaluation is about evidence gathering, after which it is sent to the concerned department and placed in the student's file. Records of all the awarding of credits are then entered on the UNISA student database, and RPL candidates' academic transcripts are treated similarly to the normal transactions of credits in the institutions. For those who went through the portfolio process the module code for which the applicant has gained credit is displayed on the candidate's transcript (Kizito, 2006:131).

A panel of assessors is constituted according to an individual institution. Smith (2004) advises that a panel of evaluators should have representatives from stakeholders such as industries, since the industrial representatives would have more insight into work-related matters. In France, the assessment and evaluation of RPL is left in the hands of individual institutions to constitute appropriate committees and representatives from industries (Pougert & Osborne, 2004). Unsuccessful applicants may require the availability of an appeal process in the institution.

Organisations have to make modifications to existing practices to keep clear accounts and records of each of the RPL assessments, with evaluation and accreditation of the appeal system. There should be no distinction between the academic treatment of RPL and traditional students. Prior learning does not need to be treated differently from the existing system. Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2009) advise that the assessment

and evaluation of RPL should be fully embedded within the quality assurance procedures of an institution.

Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2009) argue that the role of the assessors in assessing evidence of RPL is also underexposed. They interviewed 10 assessors to investigate how they reached their final decision in the assessment of RPL, to solicit what deciding factors were employed and how they used the rating criteria in their role as assessors. They wanted to find out about the reliability and validity in practices of assessing RPL, given that it is subjective and reliability extremely difficult to ascertain. Inquiries from assessors as to factors they used to rate candidates' learning led to various answers being given, such as the use of evidence of learning as the determinant factors of achieving learning outcomes. Some assessors indicated that they rated the combination of criteria and evidence of learning as presented in the portfolio. Although the study was characterised by too small a number of assessors to deliver reliable and informative quantitative information, the findings revealed that assessors interpreted the rating differently, implying diversity in ascertaining answers from the portfolios. Even though some assessors used rating forms and criteria, Joosten-ten Brinke et al. indicated that they should not use them appropriately, therefore recommending a marking rubric, saying that assessors should discuss their grading standards before marking and have consistent views over what class of degree the marks represent.

Another study, by Van Der Schaaf and Stokking (2008), showed that assessors were capable of articulating the reasons behind their judgments. Although there were

factors that influenced the decision-making process, it was suggested that assessors communicate the interpretation of the criteria used with the co-assessors and also with candidates. This recommendation was consistent with that of Joosten-ten Brinke, who suggested similar aspects of discussion among assessors. The literature on portfolios indicates that the judgment is influenced by events of overlap between job and curriculum, such as the description of experience being rendered in terms of the learning objectives (Van Der Schaaf & Stokking, 2008),

In light of the above discussions, the evaluation of assessing RPL should have a clearly defined link between those learning experiences and the learning outcomes of the unit course in which the candidate is seeking credit. The requirement to match learning maintains bias towards formal education (Pitman, 2009). Assessors should judge knowledge based on standards or a rubric, as suggested in the literature. However, such rubrics or criteria should be understood by everyone using them. The following section outlines some prominent principles of assessing RPL which exemplify some good assessment practices in the literature.

## **2.7 Principles of assessing Recognition of Prior Learning**

The establishment of the assessment mechanisms and the means of assessing learning from experience have been identified and perceived as good principles of assessing RPL. The onus lies with the individual institution to protect and ensure the integrity and quality of its assessment process. Countries such as Canada, Australia and South Africa have discussed principles guiding the assessment of RPL. The

following are international principles of assessing RPL, of which some have been used by the Canadian Association for RPL (2006). Principles of assessing RPL are significant in enhancing consistency and reliability of assessment and evaluation results in processes of transferability of assessment results.

**Transparency:** According to the Canadian Association for RPL (2006), activities leading to transparency include standards for assessing prior learning and a clear definition and purpose for doing so. The idea should not be about acceptance of standards because they resemble academic learning outcomes, but because of the recognition that valued knowledge has been attained, irrespective of where and how.

**Values:** Wheelahan et al. (2006) define values in RPL as the institutional willingness and ability to promote a barrier-free and bias-free environment for services to students. To adhere to this principle, the Canadians have suggested the establishment of Client Centre Services to respond to client needs and concerns in a peaceful bias-free and timely manner (Canadian Association of RPL, 2006). The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 2004) rightly puts it that bias may inhibit the assessors from finding alternative forms of evidence that may not be presented in the traditional format. Therefore, a bias-free environment is advocated for the assessment and evaluation of RPL.

**Fairness:** The Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (CGIRPL, 2004) stress fairness in areas related to quality of opportunities, and state that there should be clarity of terms used in assessment.

Fairness is particularly important in that tutors do not discriminate against learners on the basis of their inability to express prior learning in the required academic language.

**Quality Assurance:** The literature indicates quality assurance as one of the principles of good practices in assessing RPL. It requires the establishment of standards for different components of RPL, such as those for identification of learning, assessment, evaluation and for any other components of RPL (Joosten-Ten Brinke et al., 2009). The UK system of assessing RPL involves description of every element in each function, prescribing performance criteria and the range of conditions for successful performance (Salling-Olesen, 2007). As described by Salling-Olesen, the assessment is built upon four basic assumptions for assessing knowledge: (i) a near-perfect match between national standards and competence at work; (ii) training and assessment both occur at the workplace; (iii) achievement of high validity of assessment; (iv) competencies gained are transferable (Salling-Olesen, 2007).

Quality assurance demands the development of clear guidelines for all RPL services (Canadian Association for RPL, 2006), including the training of RPL personnel on assessing, interpreting and following guidelines. The training for assessors is of vital importance, as they are the ones who need to understand most of what constitutes valid knowledge and ways of identifying and verifying knowledge dimensions that are similar but not the same as academic knowledge. Osman (2006) comments that RPL practitioners should avoid assimilating RPL knowledge into existing academic

cultures, but rather form new scholarships about knowing through experience and knowing through action. Harvey and Slaughter (2007) stress the importance of assuring that the learning assessed can be both quantified and qualified. It should be evaluated so that the quality of the final higher education credit gained can be assured in terms of academic credibility and the personal achievement of the student. The Draft National Policy on RPL in Namibia (2010) has also stated that RPL processes that relate to learners' support, recognition, and mapping against NQF levels should be fully intergraded with organisational quality assurance systems. This is to enhance consistency and reliability in processes and procedures.

**Authenticity:** The principles of the Australian Qualification Framework (2007) state that the Assessment methods for RPL should accommodate the literacy levels and educational backgrounds of students. Institutions should also indicate the level of English proficiency they require from RPL candidates to access higher and tertiary education. The RPL policy at the University of Fort Hare (2005) requires applicants to demonstrate the learning outcomes that they are claiming. Harris (2006) warns against assessors who prefer evidence of learning to resemble conventional academic texts, and advises that the focus be about the learning acquired through work experiences, not necessarily the candidates' abilities to articulate in a required language and style. Assessors should ascertain that learning being claimed is adequate and authentic (Harris, 2006).

**Transferability:** The Canadian Association for RPL (2006), South African Qualification Authority (2004), Australian Qualification Framework (2005), and

University of Fort Hare, (2005) recommend that institutions accept and recognise each other's RPL outcomes. However, Smith (2004) stresses that for institutions to accept each other's RPL outcomes there should be clear and transparent guidelines available that can be accessed by other stakeholders. In this way doubts about the RPL outcome from other institutions will be eliminated.

## **2.8 Issues in RPL**

The literature identified various issues that require clarification by institutions aspiring to implement RPL. These involve English language proficiency, validity and acceptability of RPL knowledge, financial aspects in RPL and challenges surrounding RPL (Andersson et al., 2004; Kizito, 2006; Salling-Olesen, 2007; Volbrecht, 2009). They should be considered and systems put in place to deal with them, so as to avoid derailing the chances of RPL implementation in higher education.

### **2.8.1. English Language Proficiency**

English as a language of tuition may become one of the obstacles hindering the implementation of RPL in most institutions of higher learning in developing nations. Salling-Olesen (2007) highlights that most of the potential candidates who wish to apply for RPL may not be able to communicate their competences or expertise in English. This problem points towards a lack of language proficiency, compounded by vocabulary in specific subject matter as well as in the development of a portfolio

of evidence in which the language of tuition is English. Andersson et al. (2004) pose several questions regarding the use of English or any official language different from the learners' common language in RPL. These researchers wish to know whether English as a language should become one of the criteria in the assessment of prior learning. In Namibia, for instance, English is one of the criteria for accessing higher education, so the possibility of its assessment as a criterion in RPL seems obvious.

Nevertheless, Salling-Olesen (2007) expresses that as much as it is essential for RPL candidates to be proficient in English for general communication, the language should not be randomly used as one of the exclusion criteria to deny entry to higher education. Taking into consideration English Language as the official language of the nation, candidates must be able to read and write English if they are to cope with academic tuition. Institutions should clarify whether English would be used as a criterion for assessment as additional to content of assessment and whether or not it would specify the level that determines entry to an institution. In most cases, those with low proficiencies are usually the disadvantaged ones, whom RPL was intended to assist (Volbrecht, 2009). If criteria for English were pitched at the maximum those who need the most assistance would be left out and remain disadvantaged. Institutions should devise mechanisms to assist these candidates.

### **2.8.2 Credibility and Acceptability of RPL Knowledge**

The question of credibility and acceptability of prior learning and knowledge dominates the literature of RPL. Andersson (2006) argues that to claim the credibility

of procedure of findings, one has to know the intentions of assessment. Questions posed are: What is the focus of assessment? Is it about selecting candidates or evaluating content? How well can the assessment predict success of this candidate in the future studies at the institution? Is the assessment intended for transformation? What is the result of assessment used for? What is really been assessed? Is the assessment targeting RPL in the credit exchange tradition or is it in the developmental nature? Andersson clarified that the need to make the assessment of competencies of a candidate comparable to content learning outcomes calls for reliable and standardised methods of assessment. What methods does Namibian higher education employ to adhere to reliability in assessing RPL?

Researchers (Dyson & Keating, 2005; Wihak, 2006) report some degree of resistance in higher education towards RPL, with many questions as to whether prior learning has the calibre of formal education and whether contextualised forms of knowledge can match up to the general form of knowledge. Whether situational knowledge can be indeed transferred from its own context to the other, most institutions of higher learning do not accept the idea that one could learn from experience and develop the skills, knowledge and attitude at the same depth as knowledge acquired in the classroom. According to Dyson and Keating, academics hang on to the old idea of 'ownership of knowledge' and their sole right to disseminate it.

Some academics feel that RPL candidates lack something that other graduates have and that qualifications gained through RPL lack legitimacy (Wheelahan, 2003). Given this view, the researcher questions why RPL candidates should lack something

that other graduates have if the assessment of eligibility is made by institutions themselves. Do institutions doubt their own quality assurance policies and the capabilities of their own assessors? Why would they doubt knowledge that they themselves assisted to judge and ascertain? Smith (2004) writes that the lack of information about what RPL entails remains the stumbling block towards overcoming resistance of RPL in higher education.

### **2.8.3 Financing Recognition of Prior Learning**

The South African Criteria Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL (SAQA, 2004) assert that funding in the education and training sector determines the rate at which implementation of new programmes takes place. This seems to be true for many educational programmes in Namibia as well. The SAQA comments that modalities are in place in South Africa to have government funding and subsidising foundation certificates and academic development programmes. SAQA advised also that institutions should make sure that the fee for assessing RPL is not equated to credit sought and that fees should not be higher than those for a formal course of study. In Namibia, the government allocates financial assistance to students mostly enrolled in undergraduate degree courses. However, no funding is allocated to undergraduate certificates and diplomas offered at university level. Possibilities for the sake of affirmative action can always be explored.

The NQF (2007) stipulates four crucial strategies relating to institutional funding of RPL. The first is that RPL should attract candidates from industries to achieve economies of scale. Secondly, those RPL candidates should be charged a fee that is

not higher than fees for a module. Thirdly, those RPL activities in an institution should be incorporated into the institutional workload to avoid extra payment. Fourthly, strategy should be created to fund specific RPL subjects or modules that would be designed to assist students aspiring to follow the RPL route.

The researcher suggests that objectivity should apply in funding RPL activities to eliminate partiality. It is also in the interest of Namibia that organisations and industries in the country pay fees for employees to have their prior learning assessed for the purpose of accessing higher education.

#### **2.8.4 Challenges**

There are challenges that have been identified internationally concerning RPL and its implementation, grouped by Kizito (2006) into three categories, namely: institutional, academic, and learners' needs. Each of these challenges is discussed below:

##### ***2.8.4.1 Institutional challenges***

Although Kizito (2006) was referring to RPL challenges in the South African contexts, many could be applicable to Namibia. The first institutional challenge identified was the *labour intensive* nature of RPL. Kizito writes of insufficient structures (not adequate staff members) to deal with the admission and the preparation of candidates to apply for RPL, arguing that the rate at which support and

feedback are given to candidates was very slow, creating a demotivating factor for candidates to apply for this service. The RPL should not be viewed as an additional burden to duties and responsibilities of staff members, but rather as a supportive strategy for fellow citizens who require assistance to realise their learning potentials. Rigidity of inflexible systems and structures, lack of commitment and understanding of RPL, and lack of resources (physical, human, financial) result in adequacy of RPL provision (Smith, 2011).

The second institutional challenge is the nature of academic involvement in RPL (Kizito, 2006; Smith, 2011). Writing from experience, Kizito expressed low involvement of departments, and explained that for those involved the time spent on evaluating and processing RPL applications was usually not properly negotiated in relation to remuneration. The idea is that RPL should be carried out in the manner that does not upset current academic positions and conceptualisations, otherwise the entire purpose of RPL will be defeated (Kizito, 2006; Volbrecht, 2009). If RPL is conducted as an add-on activity to normal loads of academics, institutions should find ways to compensate staff members who would be involved in the extra load of RPL.

Another institutional challenge is the availability of support mechanisms rendered to adult learners enrolling in the institution. The quality mechanism involves the recognition of the way adults learn and identification of prevention measures for barriers that hinder adult learning. These mechanisms can be included in instructional teaching methods. Psychological help at institutions should also be

available to deal with adult learners' anxieties and fear of failing. An effective appeal should be established and encouraged in institutions (Harris, 2000; Michelson et al., 2004).

Smith (2011), in her submission to SAQA National Conference on RPL, described the UNISA experience of RPL for the previous ten years of practice, indicating problems with placement of the RPL department. The RPL staff members were said to be placed under managers who had no experience in (or understanding of) RPL, and the possibility is that RPL staff may be expected to perform administration functions and consequently lose credibility with the academic side of RPL. Through such activities a system can limit the potential of RPL in an institution.

#### ***2.8.4.2 Academic challenges***

The problem in many institutions is not only the lack of set structures, units or departments that spearhead RPL in terms of where RPL activities are taking place and where the assessment criteria can be developed, but also the professional competencies to develop the required supportive materials and to assist students to align their knowledge to academics. Since RPL is contextualised it appears to present epistemological difficulties (Osman, 2003). Discussing the pedagogical challenges that academics in higher education tend to perceive in RPL, Osman (2003) identifies insecurities of staff members whose traditional role has been that of a teacher, appearing to perceive the assessment of RPL as different from the traditional assessment in terms of procedures and time management.

Armsby (2012) highlights two factors that can impinge on academia, such as lack of enthusiasm concerning the assessment as well as challenges of assessing non-certificated learning. A challenge of assessing RPL is that it presents a form of knowledge foreign to that explicit to Mode 1 knowledge as accustomed to in formal education. Armsby explains that assessors need to understand the knowledge they are assessing through RPL, its diversity, value and validity in relation to academic knowledge. Inability to identify these may impede the quality of the assessment process.

Smith (2011), in her submission to the SAQA National Conference, presented recommendations made by respondents in a study she had conducted, one of which called for RPL to be factored into induction programmes for new staff members. The idea was to motivate staff members in higher education to become involved in RPL practices with interest and understanding of the process. Smith's study found that the perceived reluctance on the part of academic staff members to become involved in the RPL practices was mainly caused by lack of understanding of the RPL process, it being perceived as an add-on to already over-burdened academic staff, and limited knowledge of what the process entails appear to create a blockage rather than an opportunity.

Smith (2004, 2011) contends that lack of information about RPL is one of the reasons for reluctance to accept it in institutions, whilst for Pitman (2009), the absence of policies in many institutions of higher learning contributes to lack of

understanding of what it entails. Policies on RPL are needed to direct implementations at institutions.

#### ***2.8.4.3 Learners' Needs***

Kizito (2006) highlights some misleading assumptions usually entertained by some adult learners. It is wrong to believe that all adults are experiential learners and that any form of their prior learning will have some potential for being recognised and awarded value in relation to access or qualifications. Peters (2006) clearly indicates that it is not the amount of experiences that matters but the learning derived from such experience. It is also practically impossible to think that all non-accredited learning is recognisable, because only that which is directly related to the specific field of study needs to be assessed and recognised. Therefore, the initial screening of candidates becomes crucial to curb disappointment to those adults with unrealistic expectations of their academic worth (Smith, 2011). There is a mismatch between what RPL candidates know and what they can do (Kizito, 2006). In most cases graduates from higher education institutions have the theoretical knowledge but not necessarily the practice, and are unable to function when employed in industries. In some cases, employers complain because they need employees who are able to apply skills rather than knowing about them. In most cases, employers take the responsibility to teach their employees how to do certain things. The question arises as to why is it so difficult for education to train those people who are coming from employment with limited theoretical knowledge and initiate them into academic culture?

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter has presented a review of the literature, focussing on views and perceptions regarding the assessment, evaluation and accreditation of experiential learning. It has been argued in this chapter that the assessment and evaluation has been very slow in most institutions of higher learning because they have not accorded RPL the attention it deserves. Similarly, Salling- Olesen (2007) and Volbrecht (2009) assert that assessment has been aligned more to what institutions perceive as learning than the actual learning attained by candidates. The literature found also that there is scepticism on the part of knowledge production but not on the knowledge itself. This stance depicts the acknowledgement of the strategy is worth pursuing. The theories and conceptual framework correlate well with the context in which this study is framed. The following chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology employed.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the approach and design of the research procedures used to collect and analyse data, the pilot study, ethical considerations and issues of validity and reliability.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study utilised the qualitative approaches through the case study design to address the purpose of the study. Coles and McGrath (2010) believe that to uncover meaning from respondents requires methods of data collection that facilitate personal contact with respondents. The assumption of the researcher implies that knowledge resides in the views of people being studied, since they lived the experiences and realities of the situations. The qualitative approaches provide opportunities for the contact between the researcher and the researched, therefore, the role of the qualitative researcher is to get to the research participants to receive that knowledge.

#### **3.2.1 The use of the qualitative approaches in this study**

In qualitative approaches, reality is socially and democratically constructed (Kelly, 2006). The term 'social' connotes democratic views that are sought from people to provide the truth being searched. Qualitative research is a type of research in which

the researcher relies on the views of participants (Creswell, 2008). In this study the views and experiences of the participants were required to help the researcher understand what knowledge is assessed through Mature Age Entry (MAE), how such knowledge is evaluated and how work experiential learning is accredited by the NQA. The literature (Wellman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005; Kelly, 2006; Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006; Creswell, 2009 & Merriam, 2009) outlines several characteristics associated with the qualitative approach. The following characteristics of the qualitative approaches were used in this study.

- (a) The researcher developed instruments for data collection and delivered the instruments personally to research participants for the purpose of interviewing them.
- (b) The data was collected at the sites in which assessors, administrators and accreditors worked. The purpose of carrying out the research at the sites of participants was to talk directly to the research participants and to observe their contexts with the aim of understanding the contextual environment in which they performed their duties.
- (c) The researcher was the key instrument in data collection, recording and interpreting. Wellman et al. (2005) raised concern about the double roles that qualitative researchers play, arguing that such double roles have the potential to lead to bias in data collection. In this study, this concern was objectively addressed. The researcher gathered information through a tape recorder and transcribed it, sending the transcriptions to the interviewees for their

verification and as a way of eliminating any possibility of bias and distortion of information.

- (d) The researcher drew related issues and categories as they emerged from data through the process of inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative approaches are consistent with the two theoretical perspectives (critical and interpretive theories) employed in this study. The qualitative and the two theories hold the views that reality is socially constructed (Cohen et al., 2010). Critical theory provided the researcher an opportunity to question ways in which admission practices in Namibian institutions of higher learning are conducted. The researcher used critical theory to question the participants about the legitimacy of the assessment practices conducted by institutions of higher learning. The researcher questioned whether such services emancipated candidates through the provision of equality and democratic participation in the assessment process of their prior experiential learning. The researcher understands also that explanations that lead to finding solutions do not emerge from general statements and systematic verification of reality but through conversing with the people who lived the experience. The researcher therefore used interpretive theory to understand and interpret the views held by participants concerning the assessment and evaluation of work experiential learning and the admission practices within respective institutional cases.

### **3.2.2 The method used in this study**

The study used the institutional case studies methods to draw participants from diverse backgrounds, bringing with them assorted views and concepts that strengthened the research (Welman et al, 2005). A case study is a procedure of inquiry that investigates and yields in-depth description of a bounded process (Cohen et al., 2010). In this study the case is bounded within specific institutions of higher learning (UNAM and PoN) and accreditation (NQA). The case study focuses on issues placed in the case itself (De Vos et al., 2005), one of its strengths being its multiple data gathering techniques in studying a phenomenon (Chilisa & Preece, 2005) and the provision of comparisons of different institutional data. The idea in this study was to benefit from different views within and across institutions. From the perspectives of Cohen et al., the case study method recognises contexts as a powerful determinant ground through which causes and effects emerge. In this study, the use of institutional samples of those who lived the experience represented a powerful determinant ground of data generation. The understanding is that social contexts are examined from multiple points of views, hence each institutional case brought with it powerful ways of performance, which explains the reasons for individual practice. Therefore, case studies are essential to explore and explain unfolding happenings in the unique ways of institutions.

The qualitative methodology supported by critical and interpretive theories allows a method that consults participants and permits interpretation of data by participants and the comparisons of conditions within specific institutions to be made.

Interpretive theory provides critical interpretive explanations which may assist the researcher in suggesting an alternative assessment strategy for access to higher education.

### **3.3 Population of the Study**

A population of a study refers to specific group of individuals who have the same characteristics required to be studied (Strydom, 2005; Creswell, 2008). The target population of this study comprised 2,029 lecturers and admission officials in Namibian institutions of higher learning (UNAM and PoN). Included in the study were also 30 officials working in the NQA offices. The total population of this study consists of 2,052.

### **3.4 Sample of the Study**

Purposive sampling was used to identify 17 lecturers (referred to in this study as assessors), three admission officials (referred to as administrators) and four officials from the NQA (referred to as accreditors). Participants were identified by virtue of their professional roles. They were perceived to possess in-depth knowledge about assessment through the MAE route, and officials involved in facilitating the accreditation of learning acquired through work experiences. In qualitative approaches emphasis is placed on gathering in-depth information, irrespective of the number of respondents (Cohen et al., 2010), therefore, a total of 24 respondents were selected.

Purposive strategy provides the researcher with an opportunity to select information-rich cases that can yield in-depth understanding and illuminate the question under study (Patton, 2002). The criteria used for selecting the sample constituted the setting and marking of learning through MAE test scripts and marking learning evidence in portfolios as evidence of learning as well as facilitating the accreditation of experiential learning. The table below depicts the sample, criteria and rationale for choosing the sample of this study.

**Table 3.1: Criteria and rationale for choosing the sample of the study**

<b>Sample and criteria</b>	<b>Rationale of the sample</b>
Assessors [10], These were ten academic lecturers from both institutions who set and mark MAE tests scripts.	Lecturers possess first-hand information on the experience of assessing work experiential learning. Getting information from them would facilitate understanding of what and how knowledge was assessed and evaluated to predict the suitability of candidates to warrant eligibility of a student into higher education.
Assessors [7]: These were academics who assess and evaluate portfolios of prior non-certificated learning at PoN.	These assessors have lived the experience of assessing prior non-certificated learning, for exemption purposes. They have information about how experiential learning is equated against the pre-defined course content to warrant exemption.
Administrators [3]: officials who are responsible for admission procedures in their respective institutions.	They are admission officials at UNAM and PoN. They have information about the practices of MAE and where the possibilities of change in MAE lie.
Accreditors [4]: people who administer and facilitate the accreditation of non-certificated	Accreditors assure that institutions or individual persons met the requirements for accreditation hence may be awarded the accreditation certificate.

learning at NQA.	The accreditors have the information on the procedures used to ascertain the qualification of the providers.
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Only those people who met the criteria stipulated were sampled. Some potential participants who met the criteria but indicated their unavailability to participate in the study were excluded from this sample. Gender was not a consideration as the selection was entirely according to positions and roles that specific academics and officials played within institutions.

### **3.5 Research Instruments**

In order to collect informative data based on institutional cases, two research instruments (interview and institutional documents guides) were used, as presented below.

#### **3.5.1 The Interview Guides**

The assumption held by the researcher implies that knowledge is constructed by participants themselves; therefore the researcher developed interview guides to use in data collection.

Three separate interview guides were developed for the assessors, administrators and accreditors (Appendices A, B and C respectively). All three consisted of semi-structured pre-determined questions aimed at maintaining consistency and to allow

comparisons of the different cases. The interview guide for the assessors consisted of seven questions which required respondents to define the concept of RPL, explain what knowledge they assess, describe the content assessed and methods of assessment, and explain quality assurance of assessment tools and how work experiential learning was evaluated, and gauge alignment with academic learning. The administrators' interview guide comprised four questions on administrators' perceptions of RPL, views regarding the implementation of RPL at their respective institutions, whether they were interested in implementing RPL for access, and the assistance that they might need from NQA concerning RPL. The interview guide for NQA accreditors entailed five questions which explored their definitions of accreditation, how they conducted accreditation, description of the criteria they used to accredit experiential learning as well as the monitoring mechanisms, and the assistance that NQA would offer to RPL providers for effective implementation of RPL.

The content of the research instruments were influenced by the literature reviewed and other empirical studies on RPL. It is these factors that served as a guiding framework for measuring the critical aspects of inclusion in the interview and document guides.

### **3.5.2 Document Review Guide**

In this study, document review has been used in two significant roles, to review practices and as data sources (Coles & McGrath, 2010). The researcher felt that

specific documents had appropriate information needed to answer the research questions therefore, purposive sampling strategy was used to sample the institutional documents, consistent with the view of Cohen et al. (2010, p.477) that the rule for sampling people can equally apply to documents. It was significant to contextualise the assessment of experiential learning and the admission process through MAE in the sampled institutions and to clarify contradictions of evidence collected from interviewees in different institutions (Chillisa & Preece, 2005).

The documents that were reviewed and used as data sources included the following:

- (a) Prospectus for Undergraduate Studies (2011) - PoN.
- (b) The General Information and Regulations (2011), UNAM.
- (c) Mature age entry test question papers (2010, 2011).
- (d) Implementation of Rule AC 5.3.3 – Recognition of non-certified prior learning (2002), Polytechnic of Namibia.
- (e) The Namibia Qualification Authority (2007).
- (f) Third- and five-year Strategic Plan 2006-2010, University of Namibia.
- (g) NQA, Draft National Policy on Recognition of Prior learning (2010).
- (h) NQA, Draft National Policy Guidelines for Implementation of RPL (2010).
- (i) The UNAM and PoN 2010 and 2011 MAE test question papers.

The researcher was unable to attach a sample of a portfolio of evidence to the appendix of this study as PoN did not keep records of portfolios after assessment, and all documents were returned to students.

### **3.5.3 The pilot study**

The pilot study was conducted at the International University of Management (IUM), to test its appropriateness, check for ambiguity, validate the argument and improve clarity of the questions (Patton, 2002). The IUM has experience of setting and marking MAE tests and prior learning (the IUM Business School Information booklet, 2010). The researcher felt that assessors in IUM were involved in similar activities, such as the assessors who would be sampled for the main study, hence, such an institution was appropriate for testing this study's instruments.

The respondents who participated in the pilot study were purposively sampled: four lecturers (referred to as 'assessors') who set and marked MAE test scripts through MAE, and one administrator who was working in the registrar's office. There was only one instrument, which comprised 13 questions and was divided into three sections. Section one contained six questions targeting assessors who were asked to define the concept of RPL, explain the importance of MAE, explain what they assessed in MAE and describe the methods of assessment. Respondents were asked to explain the quality used in assessment and how work experiential learning was evaluated and aligned with academic learning. Section two contained four questions, directed to the administrator who was required to define RPL, its implementations for the institution, state whether their institution was interested in implementing it for access, and outline the assistance that their institution would need from NQA concerning RPL. Section three included three questions for NQA accreditors, which asked respondents to define accreditation, how they conducted it, and outline

mechanisms they used to monitor the accredited institutions. The researcher also conducted a pilot study at the Directorate of Vocational Training Education (VTE) in the Ministry of Education, which is the body mandated by the Ministry of Education to accredit the quality and maintenance of learning in Vocation Training institutions. This directorate ensures quality of training and content of vocational education, which resembles the NQA in higher education.

At the time of piloting, the researcher did not ask for the MAE question papers as their inclusion was not seen as vital, however, through responses, the researcher realised the significance of the review of the question papers, and a number of lessons were learnt through the pilot study, as explained in the next subsection.

#### ***3.5.3.1 Lessons learnt from the pilot study***

Through the pilot study, the researcher realised that question two of the draft interview guide '*In which way do you think Mature Age Entry scheme is important?*' was found inadequate, it did not solicit appropriate information to answer the research questions, and therefore it was removed from the assessors' question guide. The researcher felt also that it would be appropriate if three different interview guides were developed for the three units of analysis. This would not only help shorten the length of the interview guide but would also solicit appropriate views from each category of participants and institution. The data from the pilot study revealed that it would add value to the research if MAE question papers and scripts were analysed to

ascertain what knowledge was being assessed in MAE. The MAE question papers became part of the data sources.

### ***3.5.3.2 Refinement of the pilot research instruments***

Instead of the original interview guide consisting of 13 questions, three different instruments were developed according to units of analysis. As a result, redundant questions were removed, confusing questions rephrased and three separate interview guides developed for the main study.

## **3.6 Data Collection Procedures**

The first step in the data collection procedures of the main study was to obtain permission to enter the relevant institutions (UNAM, PoN, NQA). The data collection plan started with emails to their Human Resource Development Directors and to offices of Registrars. The emails sought permission to interview sampled staff members, followed by a personal visit by the researcher. The visit was used to explain the purpose of the research, with permission granted by all institutions to approach specified staff members. Upon receipt of the official confirmation granting the researcher permission to interview the identified staff members at the three identified institutions, a letter of consent was developed by the researcher and was emailed to all the respondents. The letter informed respondents about the intention and purpose of the research, the state of confidentiality, freedom to participate in the study, and to inform them that they were free to agree or decline to sign the consent

letter. Respondents were informed also in the letter that a tape recorder would be used during the interview sessions. The reason for this was explained, as being to preserve information for data analysis as well as to help the researcher to concentrate on the interview. Upon receipt of consent from most respondents the researcher then organised with individual respondents the date and time of interviews. Despite the PoN Prospectus (2010) making provision for all courses in the institution to recognise competencies gained through prior non-certificated learning, some of the staff members at PoN declined to participate in this research, giving the reason that they had not previously assessed learning through either MAE or RPL provisions.

A one-to-one interview strategy was used, in which the researcher asked an interviewee questions based on the interview guide. Although the purpose of the research was included in the informed consent letter that had been e-mailed to respondents the researcher felt that to make the interviewees feel comfortable and to facilitate freedom of expression an introduction was necessary, with further explanation of the purpose of the research. The researcher repeated issues concerning confidentiality, freedom of answering the questions and the use of the tape recorder. Interviewees were asked where the tape recorder might be placed so as to avoid anxiety during the interview. No interviewees had any problem with the tape recording. They were handed a copy of the interview guide so that they could read the questions. As De Vos et al. (2005) noted, this gives respondents a chance to choose which particular questions to answer.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

The content analysis strategy was used in this study to analyse the data, defined by Cohen, et al. (2010 p.475) as “a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the content of written data.” According to Cohen et al., it can be undertaken with any written materials. The sources of data for this study included interview transcriptions and institutional documents therefore, the content analysis was appropriate for the transcribed data. The data was analysed by hand, as the researcher felt that since there were only 24 interviews transcripts it would be manageable and provide an opportunity to become closer and more familiar with it (Dowling & Brown, 2010). Analysis of data followed the basic steps of content analysis strategy, as described below.

#### **3.7.1 Transcription of data**

Upon completion of the field interviews the researcher transcribed and converted the tape recorded interviews into written text, over approximately four hours per 40-minute interview script.

#### **3.7.2 Organisation of data**

The transcribed data was organised by groups, in which all responses from assessors, administrators and accreditors were clustered. These groups were further stratified into institutions so that responses from UNAM assessors and administrators were

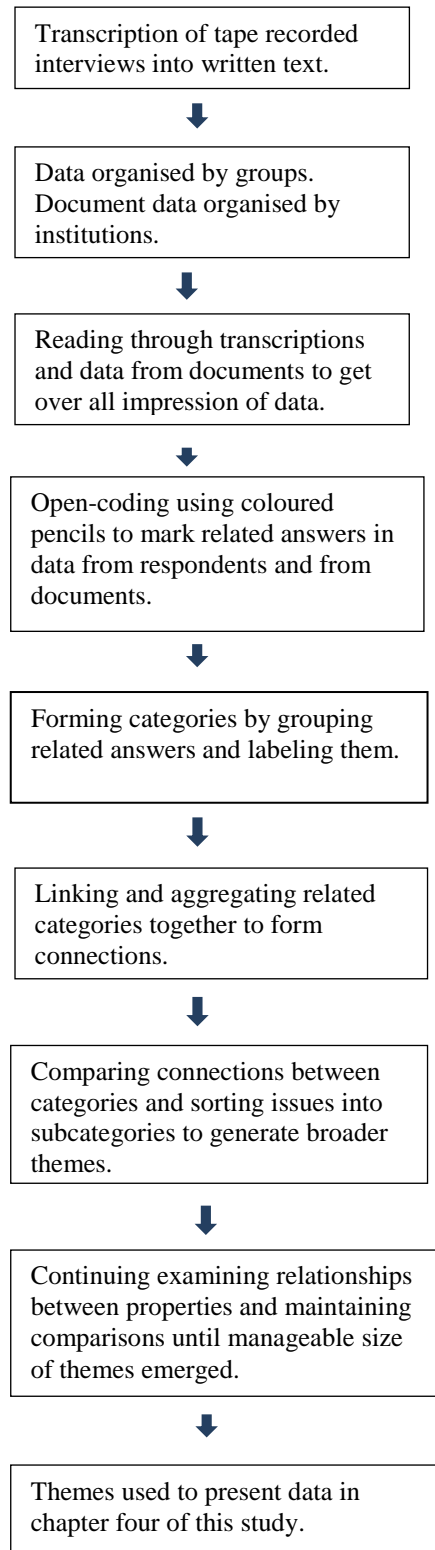
separately organised from PoN assessors and administrators. The researcher grouped answers that were relevant to a particular topic (derived from the interview guides). The data from documents was organised according to institution (from UNAM, PoN and NQA).

### 3.7.3 Coding and analysing data

After the organisation of data the coding process started. The researcher read over the transcribed data and through documents to become familiar with it and to ascertain whether or not there was additional data needed for collection, a process referred to by Dowling and Brown (2010) as ‘memoing’. After this the researcher began with open coding, using different coloured pencils to mark related answers in the data (from both interview transcriptions and documents). At this stage, categories were generated through the process of grouping related answers and labelling them. For instance, related answers about *how work experiential learning was assessed* were grouped together and the name ‘*assessment methods*’ was allocated. Some names were thematic (De Vos et al., 2005), allocated by the researcher from own perspectives in relation to related concepts in the data. Other names were in vivo codes (Creswell, 2008), the exact words or phrases used by respondents. In this case many respondents used the word *required abilities* to answer the question that solicited what was assessed in MAE test. The researcher labelled that category of related answers of *what was assessed in MAE* with that in vivo code (*required abilities*).

Since one of the strengths of content analysis is code reduction, the researcher began the process of reducing categories to manageable size by linking and aggregating related categories. For instance, issues that linked to assessment, such as *methods*, *content*, *processes*, and *policies*, were grouped together under *assessment* as the main idea. The main ideas identified were compared within and across groups of units of analysis. This means the similarities and differences as emerged from UNAM assessors' data were again compared with similarities and differences from PoN assessors' data and with document data. These differences and similarities were again sorted into subcategories. Connections between categories and relationship to other categories were also examined. At this stage broader themes were generated.

After subsuming minor categories within major related issues to generate broader themes, the researcher continued with the process of examining relationships between properties across ranges of other properties and links between them. The researcher maintained the process of comparison to scale down broader themes until a manageable number emerged. These were used for present data in chapter four of this study. The following diagram illustrates nine steps of analysing data employed in this study.



**Figure 3.1: Steps used in this study to analyse data**

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Consistent with the theoretical theories used in this study the researcher embraced the interpretive viewpoint that the process of one human studying another is not like the process of one human studying a potato (Dekker, 1998). Working with people therefore demands involvement between the researcher and the researched. Patton (1999) also stressed that ethical considerations are essential in qualitative research because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal. The following are ethical considerations that the researcher took into account during the data collection procedures.

#### **Informed consent**

All participants consented willingly to participate and to have the interview sessions tape recorded. All were made fully aware of the purpose of the research and were informed that their privacy would be protected. The respondents were informed of the processes applied to the information gathered from the interviews, and all were sufficiently mature to make informed decisions as to whether or not to participate in the study.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Dowling and Brown (2010) define confidentiality as the protection of privacy of individuals, recommending that information provided by respondents be handled and reported in such a way that they cannot be associated with it personally. In this study, such a demand created the greatest challenge in that the number of Namibian institutions of higher education was so small that even if the institutions sampled were allocated pseudonyms it would still be difficult for any reader with knowledge of them not to guess or suspect the source of information. To protect anonymity the researcher stressed the units of analysis (UNAM and PoN) as sources of information rather than making reference to individual people.

### **Language in data reporting**

Creswell (2009) advised that language used in reporting should not be biased against gender or discriminate against students. Instead of labelling them as ‘non-traditional’ they are here referred to as ‘candidates’, with specification of gender is referred to.

## **3.9 Trustworthiness and Reliability**

Gall et al. (2007) write that trustworthiness requires instruments used to collect data to meet the standards of reliability of data collection to enhance the possibility of acceptance. This section discusses measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and reliability as employed in this study.

### ***Reliability***

The suitability of the term ‘reliability’ is contested in qualitative research, with some researchers preferring to replace it with ‘credibility’ or ‘trustworthiness’ (Cohen et al., 2010). Reliability demands that the interviewees understand the interview questions in the same way. In this study, the concern of reliability was addressed through a pilot study and by using standardised interview guides.

### ***Validity***

Qualitative validity requires that the researcher check for the accuracy of findings by employing appropriate procedures (Creswell, 2009). In this study validity was maintained through the employment of triangulation, member check, peer review and external audit.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation, as one of the ways to ensure validity in this study, involves the employment of varying methods to generate findings (Gall et al., 2007). A combination of interview transcriptions and document analysis, including MAE question papers, as well as the use of multiple theories, allowed for cross-checking of the findings, given that each type of data source was employed (interview and document analysis), and so bringing with it some strength and weaknesses to increase validity (Cohen et al., 2010). Equally, the methods of collecting data and soliciting views from assessors and administrators with different institutional backgrounds and the researcher’s’ critical reflection on potential biases provided a

form of triangulation which, according to Coles and McGrath (2010), addresses the question of validity.

### ***Member checks***

The researcher validated the data collected with interviewees by sending transcriptions to each to verify and make sure that the data did not contain misconceptions of ideas which could have occurred through bias or during transcription.

### ***Peer review***

The researcher used peer briefing sessions through the University of Namibia's seminar programmes, in which doctoral students were required to share and question each other's studies. The draft document of preliminary analysis was scrutinised by a range of research students and research experts during these seminars.

### ***Transferability of findings***

External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be transferred to other settings (Cohen et al. 2010). In this study, the concern of transferability was effected through the provision of a thick detailed description of every step undertaken in the study so as to allow institutions and individuals to compare and judge whether or not transferability of RPL would be possible in their situations.

### **3.10 Authenticity**

Cohen et al. (2010, p.134) suggest that since human beings cannot be completely objective, other people's perspectives are equally valid for uncovering what other people say. In this study, the authenticity of data was verified by submitting the transcriptions to interviewees for them to see whether their answers had been captured correctly.

### **3.12 Summary**

This chapter provided a description of research design, the data collection, data analysis procedures and ethical issues that were found appropriate in collecting data for this study. The next chapter presents and analyses the collected data.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATIONS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from interviews and institutional documents, including mature age entry (MAE) test scripts, in accordance with the research questions that guide this study. The study was conducted to explore the accessibilities to Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL) on the basis of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It explored what knowledge of prior learning was assessed, identified methods used to evaluate and recognise prior learning for admitting candidates into NIHL; solicited views regarding the implementation of experiential learning as a criterion for accessing NIHL; and solicited ways in which prior learning was accredited by the NQA.

In this chapter, the term *candidate* refers to a person seeking admission to institutions of higher learning, while the term *student* connotes people who have already registered in an institution and are studying in it. The term *prior learning* refers to any learning that was previously attained by the candidates seeking admission before the current application for admission. Work (experiential) learning is any learning which has not been certificated.

## **4.2 Presentations, Analysis and Interpretations of Data from UNAM Assessors**

The UNAM institutional context was provided in section 2.5.2.1 of this study. The UNAM Act 18 of 1992 provides for the entry to this institution through MAE scheme. Subjected to individual faculty or department, the provision of MAE implementation is open to every Namibian. All eight UNAM assessors interviewed had at least two years of experiences in setting and marking the MAE test scripts.

### **4.2.1 Knowledge assessed through MAE Test Papers (Research question 1.4.1)**

Mature age entry (MAE) is a test scheme written by candidates who have not met the normal entry requirements to enter the University of Namibia (UNAM). One of the criteria is that a candidate must have worked for not less than five years in work relevant to the course in which the application is made. Section (4.2.1) presents what knowledge is assessed through MAE for admission to NHIL. The researcher found it appropriate to understand how prior learning was defined by assessors before soliciting what knowledge is assessed.

#### ***4.2.1.1 Assessors' definitions of prior learning***

Assessors were asked to define the term Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as they understood it. In their responses a variety of definitions emerged, as listed in the table below.

**Table 4.1:** Definitions of RPL

<b>UNAM Assessors</b>	<b>Responses to the definitions of RPL</b>
<b>Assessor 1</b>	<i>It is an experience that proves the person has been working or has worked in that field for certain years.</i>
<b>Assessor 2</b>	<i>It is a learning that happens while working in the field, while getting exposed to community, but learners do not necessarily get a diploma or certificate or written form of acknowledgement.</i>
<b>Assessor 3</b>	<i>It is about practicing the skills informally without the academic component.</i>
<b>Assessor 4</b>	<i>It is having been working for years such as five years.</i>
<b>Assessor 5</b>	<i>It could be a course or programme which prepares people before entering a programme.</i>
<b>Assessor 6</b>	<i>Learning about things through life.</i>
<b>Assessor 7</b>	<i>Things we learn as we go through life, this learning is not certificated. It is your experiences in life.</i>
<b>Assessor 8</b>	<i>It is a learning that is acquired through work experiences or through maturity. It is a lifelong experience that people pick up in life and such experience is not acquired in formal learning. Such experiences can be transferred to academic setting or learning.</i>

As illustrated by the data, four different definitions of RPL emerged. Assessors 2 and 8 denoted RPL as learning that occurred while in employment; Assessors 6 and 7

referred to RPL as things learnt through life; Assessors 1 and 4 defined it as experience accrued over a certain number of years spent in employment; Assessor 3 referred to it as practicing skills informally; and Assessor 5 presaged RPL as a programme. The responses were not only diverse but also had different meanings (*learning, things learnt, experience and practicing skills informally*).

A lack of clear definitions of concepts not only creates doubts in conceptual understandings of RPL but also has the potential to divert the purpose of assessment (from the required purpose to different connotations) in an institution. The five different sets of definitions from an institution portray the way RPL is conceptualised in the institution. The UNAM assessors' definitions of RPL were so different from each other that they were unable to articulate them in a way that would enable the researcher to understand their meaning of RPL in the institution. The challenge of a common definition of RPL found by this study is consistent with what is stipulated in the literature, with Valk, (2009), Conrad (2009), and City and Guilds (2010) criticising the ambiguity, even within institutions, and stressing how this limitation constrains comparisons of the practice.

The data also revealed epistemological confusion among some UNAM assessors between *RPL* and *experience*. Assessors 1 and 4 responded that RPL and experience were the same thing:

*It is an experience that proves that the person has been working or has worked in that field for certain years. (Assessor 1, UNAM).*

*It is having been working for years such as five years. (Assessor 4, UNAM).*

The literature clarifies that RPL and experience were different. Suopis (2009) stresses that credit is not awarded for having accumulated experience but rather for demonstrating the learning that emerges out of it.

Assessors were then asked what constituted the content of the MAE assessment.

#### **4.2.2 Prior learning assessed in MAE assessment paper**

One of the criteria to qualify for the MAE test was the five years of relevant work experience. Various subject matters were mentioned, as detailed below.

##### ***English Language Proficiency***

Assessor 8 set and marked the English Proficiency tests, and all questions related to English Language were directed to him. Asked to define proficiency he said it was the ability to read and understand comprehension texts, to answer questions correctly, identify main ideas in the text, and apply the reading skills, which include scanning, skimming, fluency, and the ability to summarise and to interpret information. As explained by assessor 8:

*Proficiency includes the ability to read and understand comprehension texts, ability to answer questions correctly, to read, scan, reading with fluency and*

*summarise the text in own words, and to interpret information given in the text. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

The skills and abilities required to answer the questions correctly imply abilities to demonstrate and adhere to Mode 1 knowledge by answering as indicated in assessors' marking guidelines. However, the candidates being assessed had been out of the education system for more than five years, so the demand to answer questions correctly infers aligning them to academic demands which candidates did not possess. Equally, the same assessor explained that when students came to university they were not given English classes immediately but rather attended some of the lectures in their respective faculties before being given English classes. It was therefore apparent that assessors required English proficiency that candidates did not possess.

The same assessor was asked to specify the proficiency which they assessed in the English Language. This assessor maintained that they assessed writing skills and spoken ability to cope with academic environment:

*I assess writing skills in English Language, whether the student will be able to understand reading, spoken English, read academic environment and whether the student will be able to complete an academic assignment. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

The data implies that Assessor 8 assessed predictive skills in English Language in terms of writing, spoken and reading skills, which can aid candidates to manage academic requirements. It was also interesting to find out through probing that there was no provision made for practical assessment, rather the assessor implied that all these skills were assessed through written test questions. In addition to the skills mentioned, Assessor 8 assessed motivation and determination of candidates to remain motivated to academic studies once admitted. As implied, all these abilities were assessed through written forms as there was no practical assessment through MAE at the institution. When the assessor was asked how he assessed motivation he referred to willingness to adhere to academic requirements

*... when the student is willing to adhere to academic requirements. (Assessor 8, UNAM).*

The assessor's response was not clear but rather created doubts in the researcher as to whether spoken ability was indeed part of the MAE assessment.

Assessor 8 was asked whether the MAE that they assessed included prior experiential learning:

*Yes we do, because most of the texts that we bring in the test are related to experience and current issues. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

This assessor also had difficulty in differentiating between mere experience and learning from experience. The assessor's response indicates that the inclusion of related events of experiences in the test was in itself the presence of prior experiential learning. As earlier referred to, experience is not learning therefore the two cannot be the same thing.

Assessor 8 was also probed about the significance of the English Language in MAE and whether a candidate who failed it and passed other subjects could be admitted. The assessor responded that the knowledge of English was critical in MAE, hence any candidates who failed English Language failed the entire test. In the words of the assessor:

*... the candidate cannot unfortunately be admitted if he or she fails English in MAE test. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

The analysis of the assessor's responses in relation to English Language Proficiency infers that what is assessed in English Language is Mode 1 knowledge, the skills and ability as deemed right by assessors rather than the prior learning that candidates brought with from their previous employment. The interpretation of the responses deduces that UNAM not only determines what skills and knowledge to be tested but also prescribes the nature of the correctness of the answers required. The implication is that candidates must conform to the correctness of answers as perceived by assessors if they are to pass the MAE test.

The MAE at UNAM therefore does not test English skills attained prior to entering the institution but rather the testing of proficiencies measures the extent to which candidates know the skills that it prescribes. The more a candidate is able to answer correctly according to the perceptions of the assessor the more competent the candidate is labelled in English language and the easier he or she is admitted to the institution.

### ***Numerical Abilities***

Another content of assessment mentioned was *Numerical abilities*, which again only one assessor assessed. According to this assessor it included numerical concepts, measurements and the ability of candidates to think and reason logically in answering equations. A candidate was found to be competent if he or she was able to make correct calculations and arrive at correct answers. This information was attested by Assessor 4:

*I assess numerical abilities to calculate distances, measurements, to define concepts and the ability to think logically. For instance, it was logic that a car cannot travel a 1000km an hour. Candidates need to know that logic. (Assessor 4, UNAM)*

As illustrated by the data, in addition to abilities to calculate distances and measurements candidates also needed to define concepts. On probing what concepts were defined the assessor mentioned measurements, fractions, value and equations, and explained that they wanted to find out whether candidates

knew and understood that measurements as a concept involved lengths, speeds, mass and weight, and to determine whether they knew that distances referred to places between two points. The demand is significant in the sense that the institution not only prescribed to candidates what they should know but it also excluded those whose prior learning may not have been directed towards measurements, distances and concepts. The question arises as to whether the University perceives these concepts as part of work experience that constitutes the requirements for accessing the MAE test.

The assessor highlighted that 50% defines the pass mark in MAE Numeracy abilities:

*When a candidate earns 50% of the marks, he or she passes the test  
(Assessor 4, UNAM),*

Assessor 4 alleged that when the University advertised for MAE it looked for educational skills and not working skills. The implication is that if candidates who apply to enter the institution possess working skills rather than educational skills they are outside of the requirements. The assessor went on to explain that by virtue of the contexts of learning there appeared to be discrepancies between skills obtained in the workplace and those required by the University to facilitate admission to the institution. In his own words, Assessor 4 elucidated:

*There is a big difference between working skills and educational skills. We need educational skills and not working skills. (Assessor 4, UNAM).*

When the assessor was probed to explain the differences between the two (working and educational skills) he or she referred to working skills as the ability to perform in the workplace, whereas educational skills referred to study skills, concentration skills, logical thinking skills and the need to become a student. The assessor claimed that it was very difficult to assess abilities based on work experience, and the University did not do that:

*Working skills require the person to be able to perform his or her duties in the workplace, while educational skills demands for study skills, concentration skills, logical thinking skills and skills that a person need to become a student. We do not, the University does not test work experience. (Assessor 4, UNAM)*

This assessor did not perceive working skills as educational, rather referring to them as the ability to perform in the workplace without rationalising that the ability to perform was a result of possessing skills to function. Instead of examining the abilities that enabled workers to function in the workplace and to measure the outcomes against the skills needed to access higher education through MAE, Assessor 4 was dismissive of the possibility of assessing work abilities and cementing his argument with the understanding that UNAM as an institution did not

assess that. The understanding of the assessor portrayed lack of differentiation between experience as an occurrence and learning that could result from it.

When Assessor 4 was asked whether the test on numeracy abilities comprised prior experiential learning he responded that the tests did not include any experiences or work-related activities:

*The numeracy test does not look at work experience whatsoever. We just set a general numeracy test for everybody regardless of whether they have been working or not. (Assessor 4, UNAM)*

In the response above, the assessor categorically denied the involvement of work experience in Numeracy ability of the MAE test. The assessor associated work experience with something un-educational and made a sharp distinction between the two. When probed as to why the University asked for work experience in their criteria for MAE he maintained that the numeracy test did not in any way assess work experience, even if it was part of the MAE requirements. The assessor's response tends to conflict with the purpose of the criterion for work experiences as a requirement for MAE test. The situation is one in which the purpose of the requirements for MAE is not explained even to assessors who set and mark these tests. It is unfortunate that Assessor 4 did not seem to understand the purpose of work experience as part of the eligible criteria for MAE. When this assessor was again asked to indicate what he looked for in the candidates' answer scripts the responses referred to logical thinking and reasoning:

*I try to find out whether the student has got the ability to think logically and to reason. I ascertain whether the student has acquired relevant skills in relation to Numeracy. (Assessor 4, UNAM).*

It can be concluded that not only do the skills that the University examines in candidates exclude the work experience as requirements for the MAE scheme but also there are doubts created by responses of Assessor 4 as to whether assessors understood why work experience was included in the criteria for eligibility.

### ***General Knowledge***

Another content of assessment outlined by assessors was the *General Knowledge test*. Assessor 5 was responsible at the time of setting the test question papers and marking candidates' scripts. When the assessor was asked what was assessed in the General Knowledge test paper, she responded that they tested knowledge of current issues and abilities to know what was happening within and outside Namibia. Assessor 5 highlighted the following:

*The test I give consists of essay questions based on current happenings that are reported on national media. I ask them questions which they need to respond to. I look for knowledge of what is happening in Namibia and beyond. (Assessor 5, UNAM)*

The requirements to pass the General Knowledge question paper were indicated as the ability to follow current affairs in the country, for instance news and topical

issues. This specific requirement insinuates that only candidates who have access to issues and information provided for. Candidates who have limited accessibility to information may fail this component of the test because the candidate cannot answer the happenings in relation to the topics given in the test. On probing as to what happens to those who could not answer the questions because they were not exposed to the topical issues in the local media, the assessor explained that they would unfortunately fail the test.

The assessor was adamant that she assessed the knowledge of current issues:

*As I said earlier, I look for knowledge of what is happening in the country.*

Candidates needed to conform to the requirements or fail the General Knowledge test. The responses portrayed that the assessment targeted knowledge of current issues as a criterion of assessment and not the ability to communicate the current issues. When the assessor was asked whether General Knowledge included work experiential learning, the assessor rejected the idea in that they only looked for topical issues. As explained by Assessor 5:

*... there is no specific field attached, it is just General Knowledge. We just look for any topical issue that we give them to answer questions or write about. (Assessor 5, UNAM)*

When Assessor 5 was probed further as to whether there were available criteria for assessing General Knowledge she indicated that each assessor had developed a

marking guide for assessors could determine which answer was right and which wrong.

According to UNAM entry requirements for MAE, a candidate must have worked for five years, and the search for topical issues in the test paper was distinct from the requirements of MAE. There was confusion of purpose of this question paper in MAE, as not only was the rationale for this question paper imprecise but it was also unclear what UNAM intended to look for in it. Since the knowledge sought was general, without any reference to work experiences or any domain, it became difficult to explain how the testing of this knowledge contributed to the requirements for MAE access.

### ***Specific Subject Matter***

Five of the eight assessors indicated that they assessed special subject matter and they were interviewed in relation to their tasks. Asked to indicate what they assessed in Specific Subject Matter they mentioned theoretical and practical parts of the subject applied for and the relation between theory and practice. They indicated that they assessed the background knowledge of the subject matter, commitment and dedication to upgrade oneself, knowledge of the subject and the level of understanding, attitudes, special orientation, professionalism and ethics. The following table presents the actual responses given by assessors.

**Table: 4.2:** What is assessed in Specific Subjects Matters?

<i>Interview Questions</i>	<i>Assessor 1</i>	<i>Assessor 2</i>	<i>Assessor 3</i>	<i>Assessor 6</i>	<i>Assessor 7</i>
<i>What is assessed in the question paper for the Specific Subject Matter?</i>	<i>I assess the practical part and theory whether the student can do practical in relation to our field of study. Then we assess the relation between them.</i>	<i>Whether students have a background and knowledge of the subject matter and if they have the right experience.</i>	<i>We are looking for commitments to upgrade oneself and we are also looking for dedicated people.</i>	<i>Prior knowledge of the specific subject, level of candidates' skills and basic attitudes needed in the field. We give the candidate an opportunity to make drawing to express him or herself.</i>	<i>Ideas of professionalism and ethics because the field needs the application of these. We ascertain that candidates have five years' experiences.</i>

From the table above, the responses displayed diverse data of what is assessed in Specific Subject Matter. Assessor 1 concentrated on assessing practical and theoretical aspects and the relation between them. Probing of what practical knowledge entails, the assessor said asking candidates whether they could perform practical activities associated with the field applied for. In Music and Drama, for instance, candidates would be required to indicate whether they could sing or act. It was however stressed by this assessor that the practical assessment questions were

only asked after the candidate was accepted in the department, implying that such activity was not part of the admission test and its reference at this juncture was irrelevant. The assessment of theoretical knowledge was about naming concepts and the relationship between them. The question of theory and its relationship to practice was problematic, as, given that the candidates had acquired most of their learning through work practice, how could they be expected to tell the relationship between theory and practice? Where would they have learnt the terminologies of relating one concept to the other from? It would have been more relevant had the University had in place a system that assessed the practicality of performances, then candidates might be asked to perform and later explain performances.

Assessor 2 looked for background and knowledge in the subject, assessed through asking questions and the ability to answer them correctly. The background of the subject matter implies the possession of knowledge and ability to give correct answers concerning the subject. Assessor 6 indicated that prior knowledge in Specific Subject Matter was assessed by giving candidates a picture to draw. The candidate was expected to exhibit his or her talents in the drawing. This response implies that the ability to draw a given picture equals knowledge of expressions about a specific part of the subject. Assessor 6 mentioned also the assessment of attitudes needed in the field. Probing how the assessor assessed attitudes, he said that this was indicated by the interest and willingness to become involved in educational matters as shown by candidates. The response was not clear as the researcher understood that there was no practical demonstration of skills included in the MAE test.

It was neither clear how the assessor reasons about assessing interests and willingness to become involved in educational matters, nor how attitudes were tested given that what candidates felt or thought was not a concern to the assessors. Candidates were instead given questions that needed correct answers, but the question arises as to how attitudes can be measured against correct answers.

Assessors 3 and 7 indicated commitments and professionalism respectively, being asked to state how they assessed those. The responses referred to the ability to respond correctly to questions asked in the test question papers. Assessor 7 said that apart from assessing commitments and professionalism they also looked at the requirements of five years' work experience to qualify through MAE. However, on the question of how they assessed professionalism and ethics, assessor 7 responded:

*By answering the questions correctly and when more than 50% of the questions are correct I would say that it is a good assessment. (Assessor 7, UNAM).*

The data indicates that the issues of professionalism, ethics and commitment were all tackled under the provision of the correct answers (similar to what is in the assessors' guidelines). When assessors were asked to indicate whether they perceived what they assessed through MAE tests as inclusive of prior experiential learning RPL five of the eight agreed that what they assessed included RPL. Despite the assessors having different views of RPL, they all agreed that what they assessed through MAE was indeed inclusive of RPL. They believed they assessed RPL because of the nature of

the questions they asked in the test question papers, which required candidates to explain the experiences they had in the field. Again, the indication in this response was a limited understanding of the differences between experience as an event and learning from it.

Maintaining whether assessors assessed RPL in MAE, they stated that if candidates had been working in the field they must possess work experiences, and it was these experiences that assessors were examining. The following views were expressed by different assessors who believed that the assessment through MAE included RPL:

*Yes, we assess RPL because of the nature of the questions asked in the test papers which, require candidates to explain what they have experienced in the field, and not what they know or got their certificates on (Assessor 2, UNAM)*

*I don't think our question papers do justice to prior learning because the MAE takes two hours to write is too little to express all that you know. Also the framework and the structure in which these MAE people write do not do justice to RPL to test all the skills they have acquired. (Assessor 3, UNAM)*

*No. we do not look at any work experience whatsoever. There is no investigation in current work experience in terms of entry to campus. (Assessor 4, UNAM).*

*Yes, if we say the candidate should have worked in the field, should have work experience then I think we are definitely assessing RPL. (Assessor 5, UNAM)*

*Yes. We try our best, because we do not have a proper set of instruments that are developed to really do a formal form of assessment. We look at individual's capabilities and skills. (Assessor 6, UNAM)*

*I think, definitely we are all assessing RPL. We assess what these people taught themselves in the field (Assessor 7, UNAM)*

*Yes. We do it in a way that most of the texts that we bring in are texts that are related to experience. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

As depicted from the data above, five of the responses stated that they did assess RPL in the MAE question papers. All five were certain that the questions in the test papers required candidates to explain the experiences they had undertaken; hence these were in themselves the assessment of RPL. The connotation depicted also that the experiences undertaken in the field constituted RPL, which in the perspective of the five assessors was synonymous with experience. The literature (Harris, 2000; Michelson et al., 2004) has warned against this insinuation, arguing that what is assessed is not experience but the learning that emerges from it. It is therefore necessary that the learning assessed be specified either as certificated or non-certificated. Experience, on the other hand, is an event that was previously undertaken, not necessarily generating learning in the same way as a classroom does.

Experience is a curriculum through which candidates and assessors identify and extract what learning is attained. It is therefore different from RPL. Assessors did not seem to exhibit clarities between the two (RPL and experience). Lack of clarifications leads to misunderstandings not only of concepts but also of aims, purpose and assessment methods.

Two of the assessors indicated clearly that what they assess in their MAE question papers did not include RPL for two reasons. Firstly, they felt that the current instruments used in MAE did not prescribe for RPL. Assessor 3 felt that the two hours duration to write a test was not enough to test all the skills, competences and knowledge acquired by individual candidates. Although assessor 4 explained that there was no investigation in MAE of work experience on UNAM campus, he also perceived RPL as synonymous with work experience:

*There is no investigation in current work experience in terms of entry to campus. (Assessor 4, UNAM).*

That the assessor referred to investigation in work experience rather than work experiential learning, shows lack of distinction between experience and RPL. Generally, the conceptualisation of RPL at UNAM appears to equate RPL to experience.

Given the stipulated data on Specific Subject Matter, diverse responses were exhibited, which showed lack of cohesion and directives of what was specifically

assessed in specific subject matters. It appears that each assessor included any content in their specific subject papers without consistency of knowledge they were seeking. The purpose of assessing specific subject matters as well as the clarity of the type of the prior knowledge sought. Through probing, all assessors agreed that they were looking for knowledge that could aid candidates to cope with formal education, however it appears also that such knowledge was only believed to come from the academic subjects and not from what candidates had previously attained from their work environment.

#### **4.2.3 Methods through which RPL contents were assessed in MAE**

When assessors were asked to explain *how* the assessment of English Proficiency, Numerical Abilities, General Knowledge and Specific Subject Matter was conducted, they all reported written tests as the main method through which the assessment of learning was conducted over MAE. The following statements attest to what assessors said:

*Through written mature age entry test. (Assessor 2, UNAM)*

*In the past we had auditions but the requirement now is that our students go through the same process. We try and work that into the written paper. (Assessor 3, UNAM)*

*We give them a written test, but this test does not look at work experiences.*

*(Assessor 4, UNAM)*

*Students have to write the mature age entry exam. (Assessor 7, UNAM)*

*I assess it through the written examinations. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

The data in the quotations revealed that written tests were the main method used to assess learning through MAE. Three of the five assessors indicated that they gave written tests, while Assessors 7 and 8 mentioned written examinations. When they were probed on the differences between test and examinations, the two assessors (7 and 8) revealed that the use of examination actually referred to the test. As a result, all assessors indicated tests as the sole assessment method through MAE at UNAM. However, the use of different concepts used by Assessor 7 and 8 had the potential to allege different understandings which might impact on the weight of the content of assessment. Equally, interchanges of concepts imply inconsistencies in the use of terminologies that can confuse the purpose of the assessment and may indicate assessors' discrepancies in the understanding of the two terms.

Assessor 3 explained that they are used to audition but the University requirement demanded that all students write tests. This assessor elucidated that to maintain the audition strategy the department had decided to work the auditions into the written paper. This was done by framing the MAE test question papers in such a way as to extract practical experiences from candidates. Similarly, interviews were also

employed by specific departments if there was a need for such a strategy. However, none of the assessors had used it, not that the need was not there but the requirements for test papers were normally in written format.

The implication portrayed by the test method points out that candidates' learning acquired through multiple strategies, such as different work activities, was assessed through a single methodology (written test) rather than diverse methods such as auditions and interviews, to allow flexibility of knowledge exhibition. The use of one methodology interprets that UNAM appears to value the codified over performance knowledge. Codified knowledge as stipulated by Harris (2000) and Michelson et al. (2004) is systematically arranged and found in books, hence it can easily be identified and assessed. Performance knowledge is not arranged into components of different proficiencies to be followed systematically and sequentially as codified knowledge, hence this learning is difficult to identify and may become difficult for assessors to identify for assessment.

Some assessors felt that the test as a method of assessment is not appropriate to assessing RPL. They said that time allocation, structure and framework of assessment were not designed to test RPL. The data designates that for UNAM to test RPL it has first to put measures in place that could pave ways to enable the assessment of RPL to take place. This was highlighted by Assessor 6:

*I think our institution does not have the necessary tools in place to assess and acknowledge non-certificated learning. The institution needs to put in place*

*specific testing instruments which have the capacity to extract the evidence of prior non-certificated learning from the candidates. (Assessor 6, UNAM)*

The data indicates that what is currently assessed at UNAM's MAE is not RPL since the institution has neither the right testing instruments that can extract evidence from non-formal learning nor the purpose of assessment. There seems to be a distinction between what counts as assessing RPL and what counts as assessing academic knowledge. Some assessors perceive it as one while others identifies it as two different things. In the perspective of the researcher, there seems to be a misconception of what RPL is and what it entails. Assessors did not show adequate understanding of RPL, hence what counts as assessing it.

#### ***Factors that determine competence in a candidate***

Assessors were asked to explain what determines knowledge and competence in a candidate. The data revealed that ability to answer questions correctly, to pass the test, to score designated marks of 40% for diploma and 50% for degree courses were the main determinant factor which indicated the competence of a candidate. It is these requirements that demarcate who passes and who fails.

**Table 4.3:** Determinants of competence in a candidate

<b><i>Assessors</i></b>	<b><i>Determinant Factors</i></b>
Assessor 1	When the work is done.
Assessor 2	The way the candidate writes the narrative as well as the way he

	or she answers the test questions.
Assessor 3	When they have achieved a certain level in the test.
Assessor 4	When 50% and above is attained in the test.
Assessor 5	When a candidate passes the test.
Assessor 6	When a student obtains between 40% for diploma and 50% degree, we know that the student has probably the academic capability to deal with higher education.
Assessor 7	If they should pass the question that we ask them by more than 50%.
Assessor 8	When they pass the test.

As the data reveals, the determinant factor of competences was the ability to answers the test questions and to pass the test with designated pass marks.

Through probing the researcher came to understand that what determines passing was actually the correctness of answers. Answering the questions correctly implied answering them according to the assessors' marking guides. The candidates in question were workers, whose abilities, competences and skills emerged from their working environments. It was therefore unfair to expect candidates to give similar and correct answers as deemed by assessors' guides. Generally, the use of the test as a sole method of assessment would deny flexibility to candidates to demonstrate the learning and skills they have attained from employment.

***Quality Assurance for MAE assessment tools***

Assessors expressed the significance of moderation to ensure quality standards by identifying shortcomings or strengths of the questions that were asked in the test papers. All eight assessors indicated that they assured quality of the MAE assessment tools through internal moderation of the question papers. Some of the assessors' views are indicated as follow:

*The question papers are internally moderated. (Assessor 3, UNAM )*

*We are three of us in the Department and we get together to set the question papers (Assessor 7, UNAM)*

*Through moderation, we have an internal moderator. (Assessor 8, UNAM )*

The data affirms that quality of the test question papers is controlled through moderation. The data revealed also that moderation was conducted in a flexible way. There are no standardised moderation criteria to which moderation can adhere. Some assessors explained that they came together in their department to moderate question papers:

*We involve a second examiner and we involve our knowledge in the Department. We form a moderation committee in the department (Assessor 6, UNAM).*

Others conducted internal moderation without specific procedures. If assessors in a department were few and they came together to moderate, it demonstrates that they were in some cases the examiners and moderators at the same time of their question papers.

In response to probing on whether they had criteria defined for setting up test questions and for moderation, they indicated that they were assessors of the subjects that they taught at the institution, they were experts in what they assessed. Hence, there was no need for defined criteria for setting question papers, except on the length of the assessment instrument. However, Gawe and Heyns (2004) advise that there should be established standardised assessment criteria to which every examiner and moderator adheres, so as to create an opportunity for quality standards in MAE.

Giving a general perspective of the data displayed in section 4.2.1, critical issues were portrayed. It can be established that the University tends to assess the skills which they expect candidates to possess rather than the knowledge that they bring to the institution from employment. That the content and its correctness were already predetermined through the marking guides, candidates were obliged to answer according to Mode 1. However, by virtue of being in employment candidates may have attained Mode 2 rather than Mode 1 knowledge. The expectation of knowledge appears to create confusion between the requirements for candidates' eligibility to access MAE and the requirements for assessing knowledge in MAE.

The data has shown confusion between the uses of terminologies (RPL and experience, test and examinations), as the interchangeability of diverse terminologies has the potential to influence the weight of assessment towards the direction in which the individual assessor feels comfortable. Such inconsistency in the use of terms may compromise the effectiveness of implementing RPL through MAE, implying that the purpose for entry through MAE may differ from the content assessed.

The written test was identified as the main method through which assessment of learning was conducted through MAE. In this assessment, candidates were obliged to present their prior learning in the format and requirements of higher education. Harris and Saddington (1995) indicated that whereas tests and examinations in MAE have been accepted by higher education due to their resemblance to the traditional assessment in formal education, these methods include linguistic bias, in which different language styles are used to refer to the same thing (examinations refers to tests).

Section 4.2.1 presented and analysed data in relation to what prior learning was assessed through mature age entry. The following section analyses data in relation to how prior learning was evaluated and accorded academic recognition.

### **4.3 Evaluation of Prior Learning and Accordance of Academic Recognition in NIHL (Research Question 1.4.2)**

This section provides analysis of data regarding the methods through which prior experiential learning is evaluated, accorded academic recognition and aligned to academic learning for recognition purposes.

#### **4.3.1 Methods of evaluating Prior Learning through MAE**

The data revealed two methods of evaluating learning evidence at UNAM: the score marks attained from the test and the alignment of candidates' previous learning to course content. The two methods are explained below.

##### ***Marks from the Test***

Assessors were asked to indicate how work experiential learning was evaluated to have equal value to that of academic credit and to eventually enable access to the University. The data implies that evaluation of learning evidences through MAE was measured against the marks attained in the test. It was explained that 35% was required to qualify for a certificate level, 40% for a diploma and 50% for an undergraduate degree. Attainment of these marks qualified a candidate for credit award and the availability of spaces in a specific course applied for enabled access to UNAM programmes. The following statement was made by Assessor 8:

*The pass or fail status is determined by the score marks attained in the test. The candidate must obtain 35% for certificate purposes, 40% to enter diploma courses and 50 to register for normal undergraduate degree courses. These marks justify the pass or failure; there are no other procedures for marks allocation. (Assessor 8, UNAM)*

The data indicated that there were no specific procedures used to evaluate learning, except by attaining the required percentages from the test. When marks were higher the assumption was made that such a candidate was competent to cope with university learning demands, hence eligible to enter UNAM. This was explained by Assessor 6 as follows:

*There are no special credit allocation procedures, learning is evaluated based on the scores marks attained from the test. The assessors allocate marks according to the weight of learning evidence given in the test script. Candidates, who obtain higher marks in the test, are believed to have achieved the required knowledge, hence get admitted into the University. We do not have any other way of allocating marks to candidates.” (Assessor 6, UNAM)*

It was also explained by Assessor 2 that candidates who already possessed a certificate in this specific field of study and who happened to pass the MAE test were exempted from attending the first-year programme. This means their previous learning was recognised towards credits. Assessor 2 attested to this:

*If you enrol in our field of study with a certificate, and have been in the field with relevant experiences, when they come to UNAM we recognise the prior learning of such a candidate and give him or her credit an exemption for one year. However, we had also students who came in with mature age entry in the degree course who could not manage. (Assessor 2, UNAM)*

Upon probing whether the exemption was the University policy, Assessor 2 clarified that this was done by individual department after the assessment to give credit to candidates for their previous learning was attained. This was within the regulation of the University, and as clarified by Assessor 7, UNAM did exempt prior learning but did not award certification for it:

*We use to assume that with a Grade 10 and relevant work experiences the candidate has some knowledge that the UNAM can exempt. However UNAM does not give certificates for what is exempted. We only certify the learning that was acquired from us. (Assessor 7, UNAM)*

Evaluation, as described by Killen (2004, in Maree and Fraser, eds.), is the ability to make judgments about the quality or value of things. Judgment in this case was embedded in the marks attained. Candidates who managed to score higher marks in the tests were perceived as academic competent, hence qualifying for an academic credit award and eligible to access the institution. The data affirms that there were no specific ways through which learning was evaluated other than against the allocation of marks from the test. When assessors were probed as to whether the marks

allocated did measure up to the weight of learning for which credit was given, assessors responded that UNAM only utilised the cut-off marks system and any candidate who attained such marks was said to have passed the MAE. It was indicated also that eligibility of entry to the institution lay not only in passing the test but also in the availability of spaces in the course of study applied for.

### ***Alignment of prior learning to academic learning***

Assessors were asked to explain how prior learning was aligned to academic learning to gain equivalent status to that of formal learning. In responding to the question various answers emerged, some revealing that alignment was made in accordance with the course outlines of each subject tested, by comparing grades attained from MAE tests with experience, or by comparing work with experiences. However, some assessors said they did not align learning as they did not consider work experience, only marks. The various responses are as exhibited in the table below.

**Table 4.4 Alignment of prior learning into academic learning**

Assessor 1	<i>In accordance with the course-outlines of each subject we teach and test them.</i>
Assessor 2	<i>We look at the grades for mature age entry test and the experiences of candidates then compare.</i>
Assessor 3	<i>We compare work with their practical experiences</i>
Assessor 4	<i>We do not align with work experience because we do not</i>

	<i>consider work experience whatsoever.</i>
Assessor 5	<i>I have no idea about this question.</i>
Assessor 6	<i>We look at students' natural aptitude in terms of our curriculum.</i>
Assessor 7	<i>When you read the answers of candidates, you would have an idea of what they know already and what you are going to teach them, you can link the two.</i>
Assessor 8	<i>No, we don't necessarily match, we take the score marks attained.</i>

Assessor 1 indicated that they aligned work experience with course outlines of each subject taught and tested in MAE. It appears that candidates' previous learning was compared with future learning, something that they had not yet studied. They were seeking admission to a programme and could not be expected to know the content of the courses they had applied to study. Assessor 3 also mentioned the alignment of rapporteur of work with practical experience, although the data earlier indicated that practical testing was not part of the MAE tests. Assessors 4, 5 and 8 either indicated that they did not align learning acquired from work with academic learning, or the assessors did not understand the question and hence could not respond to it.

The responses from these assessors seemed to contradict each other, with Assessor 6 earlier having indicated that there were no other procedures used for evaluating prior learning, but here referring to natural aptitude in terms of curriculum. When probed on what natural aptitude meant Assessor 6 referred to knowledge of candidate

concerning the curriculum applied for. Given contradictory responses in which some assessors agreed and others disagreed on alignment of prior learning to academic learning as a method of evaluation, the researcher doubted whether any alignment was actually happening at the institution. The method of judging learning or evaluating it was therefore by marks attained.

The researcher found nothing in the sampled UNAM documentations concerning the term RPL. This limitation at UNAM may have influenced the practice at the institution and participants' perceptions of RPL. The participants from UNAM may not have been sufficiently exposed to the concept of RPL to deduce the understanding of what RPL entailed. Because UNAM is the highest institution of learning in the country it was supposed to show the most interest in innovative ways of learning and acquiring knowledge.

Having analysed the data collected from UNAM assessors, the following section presents the summary of findings from the analysed data in accordance with the research questions of this study and with the objectives of the analyses of data indicated in section 4.2.

#### 4.4 Summary of Findings from UNAM Assessors' Data

This section provides a summary of the findings that emerged from the data collected from UNAM assessors. The objectives of the analyses were to find out what knowledge was assessed through the mature age entry admission tests and how it was evaluated to accord academic credits and recognition. Therefore, the following points presented the summary of findings towards the stated objectives:

- The UNAM assessors differed in the ways they define RPL. Some perceived it as *learning from life*, others referred to it as *experience*, and others defined it as *mentoring programme*.
- There was epistemological confusion among UNAM assessors in terms of defining terms *RPL* and *experience*. As a result, assessors consistently used these two terms interchangeably.
- The data indicated the assessment of academic subjects in MAE but there was no assessment of work experience.
- The data indicated that there was no alignment of prior learning with academic learning, but rather learning was evaluated by measuring score marks.
- Ability to answer questions correctly and to articulate the English Language in the tests guarantees candidates' admission to the University through MAE.
- The knowledge assessed through MAE at the University was solely Mode 1 knowledge derived from *English Language proficiency* (ability to read, write with fluency, to interpret and summarise information), *Numerical abilities*

(knowledge of numerical concepts such as fractions, distances, mass, volume, length and ability to think logically), *Current Issues* (knowledge of current issues inside and outside Namibia), and *Specific Subject Matter Content* (theory, practice, and knowledge of the field of study applied for).

- Written tests were the sole methods of assessment found to assess learning through Mature Age Entry at UNAM. The literature had premised test methods under the Credit Exchange Model, which ensures control of knowledge and the assessment of Mode 1 knowledge. In this method, candidates' evidence of learning was matched against the requirements of the host institution (Popova-Gonci, 2009). Therefore, the data found that only Mode 1 knowledge was being assessed through UNAM's MAE tests.
- Learning through MAE is evaluated in accordance with the marks obtained in the test. The test scores of 40% in Diploma courses and 50% for Bachelors programmes were used as sole determinants of learning achievements needed by candidates to access University programmes through MAE.
- Assuring quality of the MAE assessment tools was conducted through internal moderation.

#### **4.5 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from UNAM**

##### **Administrators**

Since UNAM administrators work in the same context as UNAM assessors (see section 2.5.2.1), the working context will not be repeated in this section. The study set out to interview two administrators who were responsible for registration affairs

at the University of Namibia. By virtue of their work, coupled with the years of experience in their jobs, and the autonomous nature of the institution, these officers have the authority to revise (if needed) the criteria of admission procedure, and effect changes concerning admissions criteria. It is from their offices that any future inspiration of implementing RPL in the institution would be made. Interviewing these officials was indispensable as their inputs were needed on the implementation of RPL for access at UNAM. Only one of the UNAM officials was available for the interview so the data presented in this section reflects the views of only one.

#### **4.5.1 Administrator's views on the implementation of RPL in higher education**

To answer this question about administrators' views on the possibilities of implementing RPL, three aspects were considered: administrators' definitions of RPL; views regarding the implementation of RPL; and UNAM's position to implement RPL for access.

##### ***The administrator's definitions of RPL***

The administrator who was interviewed provided less information concerning RPL, given that there was no available policy on it in the country. Nonetheless, the administrator responded that RPL was about experience, learning which is not recognised by NQA, and redress:

*Experience must be the main factor when it comes to RPL. It is the learning that is not recognised by NQA or other institutions. RPL was about redress,*

*the Office of the Prime Minister expects us also to take candidates from marginalised communities. (Administrator 1, UNAM)*

The administrator infers that experience and learning are not recognised by NQA. The reference to giving opportunities to disadvantaged candidates as related to RPL indicates that the RPL is a mechanism for assisting the disadvantaged to gain and probably widen access. The understanding of this study advances the idea that entry to higher education programmes should be by virtue of knowledge possessed by individual candidates, irrespective of their backgrounds, and should not be merely a strategy for aiding disadvantaged communities. The RPL is not about accessing education programmes for the sake of widening access but for inclusiveness of all those who have the criteria required for access. The literature has acknowledged that RPL has not managed to increase access, given that only those candidates whose learning is close to formal education have managed to gain entry through RPL. The motivation, however, remains that alternative routes be created in which all knowledge categories are assessed and recognised.

When the administrator was asked whether RPL was being assessed through UNAM's MAE, the response sounded positive and certain:

*In a way, yes. Because of our mature age entry scheme and the fact that we look at the five years' work experience that is part of non-certificated learning. (Administrator 1, UNAM)*

The administrator's reference to the provision of the MAE scheme and the requirements of work-based experiences as the indication of assessing RPL in the institution implies two important aspects, firstly, that the provision of MAE alone was an indication of assessing RPL; secondly, the requirement of five years of work experience was perceived also as automatic assessment of RPL. If that was the case the data implies that UNAM only assesses number of years spent in a particular employment and not the learning acquired during those years of employment. The interpretation of the perception of RPL and the way the concept was defined illustrated lack of understanding of what RPL entailed.

#### **4.5.2 The Administrators' views regarding the implementation of RPL for access**

When the views of the administrators were sought in relation to implementing of RPL for access at UNAM, the administrators expressed interest in implementing RPL for access at their respective institutions but also suggested conditions that should first be in place. Among the required aspects were the development of an institutional policy and the training of staff members as assessors. The Administrator mentioned that NQA ought to assist UNAM in this regard and wished to have trained assessors who understood what and how experiential learning was assessed. The following were the words of the administrator:

*We need NQA to assist in the crafting of an institutional policy that will cater for those in need of this type of recognition, and the training of staff*

*members on how and what to look for when we evaluate a person's knowledge. (Administrator 1, UNAM)*

This shows the interest of RPL at the institution, however it stressed the need for the training of staff members to understand what and how it was to be assessed. It was clear from the data that assessors who indicated that they assessed RPL through MAE had not received training on how to assess RPL. It was also clear from the responses that they needed to know and understand the requirements of assessment. They indicated the lack of RPL policy at the institution. When asked how they intended to implement RPL, the administrator explained that once they had an institutional policy, facilitated workshops and work groups, they would be informed on how to assess and cater for those in need of RPL. The administrator stated that:

*We would need to have workshops and work groups with other institutions to work out how best we can implement this prior learning system.*

The data indicates the need for consultation with other institutions so that the implementation does not become an institutional exercise but an academic strategy. Once the UNAM staff are trained on what to assess and have consulted with other institutions, and when a UNAM RPL policy is available, they will manage the implementation of RPL. Harris (2000) explains the procedures for access through RPL within Higher Education by advancing the need for institutional capacity to assess and ascertain the legitimacy of claims of prior learning. Harris advised that institutions develop guidelines that spell out *what* and *how* RPL is implemented in an

institution. Similarly, Stenlund (2010) reports on studies that have recommended investment in both time and money and a change in University's organisational culture and policy. The UNAM Administrator was also certain that, given the policy and consultations with other institutions, UNAM would find ways to implement RPL and provide the much needed service to the Namibian nation.

#### **4.5.3 UNAM's intentions to implement RPL for Access**

Administrator 1 was asked whether UNAM intended to implement RPL:

*Definitely yes. Some of our programmes ask students to have certain numbers of years of experience already in certain positions. So, I think we would look into implementation of RPL. (Administrator 1, UNAM)*

The data illustrates that UNAM as an institution is willing to implement RPL. The data shows also that since some of the institutional programmes require students to have a certain number of years of experience, the institution had already started implementing RPL through MAE.

This section provided an overview of the findings that emerged from data collected from UNAM administrators. The objectives of the analyses were to find out views in regards to the implementation of RPL for access in higher education. The University of Namibia indicated its interest and intention of implementing RPL for access, provided certain structures are put in place.

#### **4.5.4 Summary of Findings from the UNAM Administrator**

The following points present the findings that emerged from data collected from one UNAM administrator in relation to the objectives of analysing data given in section 4.5 of this chapter.

- As with the UNAM assessors, the administrator showed lack of understanding of the differences between RPL and experience.
- The UNAM administrator expressed that the institution would implement RPL to facilitate access into their programmes.
- The administrator viewed the implementation of RPL as successful if the institution had a policy to guide issues of implementation.
- The University required assistance from NQA to train staff in assessing, evaluating and developing an institutional policy of RPL.

Looking at the data from UNAM assessors and the administrator there is a great consistency in the way they perceive RPL. Both assessors and the administrator view RPL as learning which is synonymous with experience. They both connote the inclusion of exercises in the MAE questions papers as indication of practicing RPL. The perception of equalising learning to experience show little understanding of what RPL entails in either assessors or in the administrator interviewed. None could express how learning differed from experience and contradictions appeared between data. As much as assessors referred to assessing prior experiential learning through

MAE (see 4.2.1.2) the administrator indicated the need for training in how to assess, so that assessors would know what prior learning to look for.

The preceding section focused on the presentation and analysis of data solicited from UNAM administrators. The subsequent section deals with the presentation and analysis of data from assessors and administrators from the Polytechnic of Namibia.

#### **4.6 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from the PoN Assessors**

This section presents and analyses data solicited from assessors and administrators at the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN), which like the University of Namibia (UNAM) is a public institution that offers a diploma and degree qualifications in various fields. Act 33 of 1994 made provision for implementation of MAE by the institution through its different Schools (see section 2.5.2.2). Therefore, the analyses of data from PoN was conducted by soliciting definitions that assessors attach to RPL, investigate methods used to evaluate and to accord academic credits to work experiences and to solicit assessors' views on the implementation of RPL at the institution. These subheadings contribute to answering question 1.4.1.

Through interview, the researcher was informed that only 10% of the polytechnic's annual intake was admitted through MAE, because PoN could take away places from candidates who did not need the assistance of mature age entry to access the institution.

#### **4.6.1 Knowledge assessed through MAE Test Papers (Research Question 1.4.1)**

Two assessors from PoN who at the time of the study were responsible for setting and marking test scripts for MAE participated in this study. In addition, seven assessors of students' portfolios as evidence in various departments also participated. In total, nine assessors from PoN participated in the study.

##### ***Assessors' definitions of RPL***

All nine PoN assessors were asked to define RPL but the two assessors who assessed learning through MAE declined because that they did not know enough about it. Two of the seven assessors also declined to define RPL, giving that they were unable to give a definition of RPL. It was interesting that assessors who claimed to assess RPL were unable to define the concept they assessed. The definition from the other five referred to RPL as acquisition of knowledge through experience gained on the job, learning without a certificate, non-certificated learning gained through experience, and as an assessment of knowledge. The definitions were stated as follows:

*It is a type of learning or acquiring knowledge through experience not through official journals (Assessor 2, PoN)*

*It is the experience one has gained on the job, but this learning is not certified. (Assessor 6, PoN)*

*It is when a person has learnt something but never received a certificate or diploma for it. The person has the knowledge but he cannot show it.*  
(Assessor 7, PoN)

*It is a non-certificated learning gained through work experience not acquired through formal classes.* (Assessor 8, PoN)

*It is how to assess a person's knowledge that is not gained through theoretical book knowledge.* (Assessor 9, PoN)

Although many of these responses were differently phrased, they equated RPL with learning acquired outside the formal system. These definitions elucidated RPL as experience gained on the job, knowledge that has no proof of acquisition, or knowledge not gained through book value. The interpretation of these responses connotes the assessment of a learning that cannot be proven; a type of learning different from the traditional way. Logically, since the production of this knowledge differs it should be assessed differently to bring out its unique diversity.

Although many of these responses portrayed the understanding of RPL as different from the formal knowledge, Assessor 6 maintained that RPL was 'the experience' gained on the job. This understanding (referring to RPL as 'experience') was similar to what UNAM assessors had indicated. The diverse definitions of RPL indicate non-coherence in the concept among some assessors of RPL at PoN. Although the definitions of most PoN assessors implied RPL was learning, Assessor 6 claimed it

to be experience assessed for exemption. The reference of RPL to experience equates RPL to mere experience. This reference is problematic as it implies that the assessor performs tasks from the perspective of RPL as mere experience. The assessor demonstrates a situation in which, because each assessor has a different understanding of the RPL they assess, (*knowledge from experience, experience gained on the job, knowledge that cannot be proven, non-certificated learning acquired from experience, and a strategy on how to assess a person's knowledge*) the assessment of such knowledge is also differently conducted.

These assessors not only indicated the different understanding of RPL among them, they actually displayed challenges which they appeared to face in identifying the exact nature of knowledge they assessed. The implication is either that the assessment of RPL at PoN was compulsory, irrespective of whether or not assessors understood what they were supposed to do, or some assessors simply were not motivated to do their jobs. Motivation to conduct RPL should come with the training and knowing what it entails, and the understanding of the epistemological differences between *RPL* and *experience*. It shows that assessors were assessing prior learning only to fulfil the job requirements of the institution, without much comprehension of the weight of their duties. Such a limitation has the potential to compromise the quality of what is assessed.

Irrespective of Assessor 6, generally, there was significant coherence of understanding shown by PoN assessors in defining RPL as compared to UNAM assessors. Nonetheless, diversity persisted in the way some PoN assessors (who

claimed to assess RPL for exemption) defined RPL, indicating a different understanding of RPL (experience) within the institution. This cohesion of defining RPL among UNAM assessors was not definite. It can however be maintained that although many PoN assessors referred to RPL as learning acquired outside the traditional classroom and not as ‘experience’ (as it was the case at UNAM), PoN still has a diversity of views on conceptualising RPL. The reference of RPL to learning by PoN assessors can largely be attributed to the practice of RPL for exemption at the institution. The data revealed that PoN (Prospectus, 2009, 2010) adhered to the principles of assessing RPL, which may have influenced to some degree an understanding of what RPL meant.

#### **4.6.2 Prior learning assessed in MAE Assessment Paper**

As mentioned above, there were only two assessors at PoN who assessed MAE. The rest indicated that they assessed prior learning through the portfolio of evidence. The two assessors who assessed learning through MAE explained the content (English Language and Numeracy Abilities) through which they did so.

##### ***English Language***

The assessor of English Language was asked to state what prior learning was assessed in the MAE test papers, and mentioned comprehensive passages to test the understanding of the English Language; answering of questions; writing ability through essay; arranging sentences by putting them into correct sequential order; and

the use of correct parts of speech. The content of assessment was explained by Assessor 1 as follows:

*...We give them comprehensive passages, essay topics, sequencing of sentences, parts of speech and all spectrum of the English language.*  
(Assessor1, PoN)

Similarly to the case at UNAM, the English Language tests at PoN were also highly controlled. The requirements of the comprehension, essay topics and parts of speeches were prescribed and candidates were told what and how to write the test. This implies that they did not have an opportunity to write freely what they had learnt from work experiences, rather they were tested on how much of the formal knowledge they knew and wanted to bring to PoN. It was evident then that the knowledge assessed in the MAE was not what institutions asked candidates to possess (work experience) but what they deemed significant to test. The analysis of the data shows that the knowledge assessed through MAE testing was similar to that assessed at UNAM. Such knowledge is purely academic and is deemed necessary to predict the scope of formal knowledge known by candidates.

Asked to state what they were looking for in the candidates they mentioned skills and ability to understand and command use of the English Language. They looked for the ability to articulate and to express oneself in reading and writing. The desired outcomes of learning were expressed as follows:

*We look for skills, verbal skills, language skills, reading and writing. We look for the candidates' ability to express himself both verbally and in writing We look for the minimum or medium criteria of what we have set and which we expect candidates to know.(Assessor 1, PoN)*

The data reveals the need for ability to express oneself verbally, although the test scripts did not made reference to oral testing. Assessors expected candidates to answer the test questions in relation to set criteria. When asked to indicate how they determined competency of a particular candidate, the most frequent answers given were required abilities and knowledge of the language. The requirements show that answers which resembled the set criteria in the marking guides of assessors were mostly rated as competence, as opposed to those answers which differed from the criteria outlined in assessors' marking guides. It was also explained by Assessor 1 that setting criteria (marking guide) was essential since candidates were placed in the English Language courses according to the marks they obtained in the:

*To us, there is no failing or passing, the set criteria help us to determine the placement of candidates in modules. (Assessor 1, PoN)*

Those candidates who needed more assistance with English Language were placed in the modules that taught basic skills. Those who obtained higher marks in the test were placed in advanced English modules.

On a question as to whether Assessor 1 thought RPL was part of the MAE test, he responded:

*Yes, but it may be possibly more difficult to assess the students because they are not always in the same level. (Assessor 1, PoN.)*

The understanding of reveals that prior learning as being uniformly assessed, hence the assessor thought it was difficult to assess students at different levels. This understanding conforms to the perceptions allocated to RPL by many assessors at UNAM.

It was interesting to note the similarity between the assessments of the English proficiency at PoN with that at UNAM. Both tested the abilities to articulate, comprehension passages and essay writing. As much as these contents were portrayed indicators for the use of the English language, it was evident that the topics used to write essays and comprehension passages were predefined. Such content did not represent prior experiential learning of candidates, rather the topics represented academic subjects. The more candidates were able to articulate the given topics as expected by assessors the more they were perceived as intelligent and fit for access to higher learning. Stenlund (2010) described the use of RPL in Higher Education as a predictive process in which the candidate is tested to have his or her prior formal learning measured against the course outcomes of the subject applied for.

On probing as to whether they were trained to assess RPL, all seven assessors claimed that they were given first-hand information on the procedures of RPL because they were expected to assess the learning outcomes of what they taught:

*We were given first-hand information on how to deal with RPL. Remember we assess RPL in the subjects that we teach (Assessor 8, PoN).*

The response implies that they received information about RPL but not necessarily how to assess it. It should be noted that competence in the content of a subject does not equate with knowledge in the assessment of it.

### ***Numerical Abilities***

In response to what was assessed in Numeracy, Assessor 5 indicated:

*We assess aptitude areas, basic numeracy and basic statistics. (Assessor 5, PoN).*

When probed as to what this entailed, the assessor mentioned graphs and practical numerical calculations such as mass, distances and weight. The assessor alleged that the numeracy test given through MAE was so easy that anybody with a Grade 10 certificate or numerical experiences as a manager in the workplace would be able to give correct answers to the given test questions:

*We look at those questions that can be answered by those students who had done mathematics up to Grade 10. We look at Mathematics that accommodates everyone even those who have acquired experience in their places at least somebody who is a manager.*  
(Assessor 5, PoN)

Assessor 5 indicated that the assessment included sums about logical thinking to accommodate those candidates who had numeracy up to Grade 10 and those who used it as part of their job performance. However, the response from the same assessors about the content of the numeracy test indicated that basic numeracy and statistical abilities related more to academic (Mode 1) knowledge than work experiential learning. When Assessor 5 was asked to give an example of the statistic calculation they gave, he mentioned the calculation of electricity units or items to be divided among a number of people and to solicit how much each person was receiving. These types of exercises were perceived by Assessor 5 as having been derived from work experience, hence at least managers would be able to calculate the correct answers. The exercise of the said type was not an experiential task but a mathematical equation that provide numeracy literacy. It did not require one to be a manager to calculate the units of electricity. The data from the assessor still implied lack of understanding of what RPL entailed.

When Assessor 5 was asked whether RPL was part of the assessment through MAE, he pointed to difficulties raised by diversity of experiences acquired by candidates:

*It is practically impossible to set a particular instrument to test their work experiences. At the PoN, we do not test experiences of their jobs; we only test their critical thinking and abilities to carry out assignments and academic demands. (Assessor 5, PoN)*

Assessor 5 was adamant that questions asked in the test elicited critical thinking and knowledge in numeracy. The assessor, like others, referred to experience as a mere event and not to the learning that emerges out of it. Also, whereas Assessor 1 believed that RPL was included in the assessment of learning through MAE, Assessor 5 disputed this. The contradictions of the two assessors for MAE on whether or not they assessed RPL through MAE gave the impression that they had a different understanding of what RPL was and how it functioned.

#### **4.6.3 Method used to assess English Language and Numeracy at PoN**

When the two assessors were asked *how* they assessed English Language and Numeracy skills through MAE they responded that they did so through written tests. The written tests consisted of questions:

*Candidates write English mature age entry test. (Assessor 1, PoN))*

*We develop assessment instruments in the form of test questions to look for aptitude areas of Basic Numeracy. (Assessor 5, PoN)*

The data continues to show that tests were the leading methods of assessing learning through MAE in Namibian institutions of higher learning.

***Determinant factors of competence in MAE test***

Asked to indicate the determinant factors of competence in the MAE test, the two assessors of MAE said they looked at whether or not the criteria set in the marking guides were met and by how many marks attained from the test:

*We look at the criteria we set in our papers whether or not they were met.*

*(Assessor 1, PoN)*

*... that is measures by how many marks attained from the test. (Assessor 5, PoN)*

The determination of who was competent was based on the amount of marks attained from the test and by ability to answer questions correctly. There was nothing in the assessment of either institution to indicate the assessment of learning acquired from work experiences.

***Quality Assurance of MAE assessment tools***

Asked to indicate strategies for ensuring quality in the MAE test papers, the assessors indicated internal moderation as the sole quality assurance mechanism that PoN used. They added that inputs and views of various staff members in the department were included:

*For the mature age entry test papers are normally moderated. We have various people in the department who work on the papers. We usually have a thorough general discussion on the papers, change what needs to be changed and add what needs to be added. (Assessor, PoN 1)*

*The test papers are moderated (Assessor 5, PoN)*

Both PoN and UNAM assured quality through internal moderation by members of departments in which the papers were set. Similar to some cases at UNAM and the MAE question papers, they indicated moderation conducted by department members, including the examiners themselves. It is not clear how examiners could moderate the same papers that they had set, suggesting the MAE test was not being taken seriously at the two institutions, and a lack of assurance of quality. There were no differences in the way MAE was conducted at either PoN or UNAM. The two institutions allocated tests as method of assessing learning and in both cases it was the academic learning that institutions prescribed rather than testing the amount of learning from work experience that candidates brought to their institutions.

#### **4.7 Assessment of Portfolio of Evidence**

Seven of the sampled assessors at PoN indicated that they assessed RPL for exemption purposes. The interest of this study was to investigate how RPL was assessed in higher education for admission purposes, however, the study found that

PoN did assess RPL for exemption. Since the purpose of the study was to investigate what and how prior learning is assessed, assessors at PoN were questioned on how they assessed experiential learning from the portfolio of evidence.

The assessment process was described as a lengthy one which started with the briefing in class by a lecturer who introduced to students the RPL and how it could be accessed. Interested students would apply to the department concerned, each being asked to submit a portfolio of evidence containing learning that satisfied the outcomes of the module to be exempted. A portfolio of evidence is a collection of records which reflect events and processed to show evidence of learning to be submitted by registered students who are seeking exemption from a specific module on their curriculum. All seven assessors who had to assess portfolios had two or more years of experience doing so.

Assessors were asked to state what knowledge they assessed through portfolios, and several responses emerged, including qualifications previously obtained and general knowledge, academic ability to think critically, attained knowledge, content of portfolios resemblance with course content, work done in employment, and whether students possessed work experience that covered 80% of the exempted course. The following table exhibits some of the assessors' responses:

**Table 4.5 What knowledge is assessed through portfolios of evidence?**

<b>PoN Assessors</b>	<b>Knowledge assessed</b>
Assessor 2	<i>I ask students to submit to me the qualifications that were obtained before such as the National and School leaving certificates, as well as general knowledge of current affairs, politics and sport within Namibia.</i>
Assessor 3	<i>We look for academic abilities and ability to think critically. When a student demonstrates these attributes we believe that such a student can learn.</i>
Assessor 4	<i>We assess applicant's attained equivalent to academic knowledge, skills of the subject and whether corresponding notional hours were attained.</i>
Assessor 6	<i>The content of the portfolio of evidence against the course content of that particular subject. The portfolio must have 80% of the course or module content; only then a candidate can be allowed to sit for the final test that determines the exemption.</i>
Assessor 7	<i>We need to see that the content of assessment resembles the evidence submitted. We check what types of work she or he has done while working. We then see that the student did what is required in the course that we offer.</i>
Assessor 8	<i>We assess if the student really has the work experience that can covers 80% or more of what is offered by PoN.</i>
Assessor 9	<i>We assess work experience indirectly the questions are set in such a way that the person with work experiences in my view can answer them.</i>

From the table above four of the seven assessors (4, 6, 7,8) indicated that they assessed the resemblance of the content of portfolio against the learning evidence, to see whether or not such resemblance met 80% of the course applied for. Two

assessors said that they assessed qualifications previously attained and academic abilities. In other words, these assessors assessed pure academic (Mode 1) knowledge. One assessed work experience indirectly by setting questions that a candidate with work experience could answer. These answers show diversity in the understanding of what prior learning is and the correlation being assessed is the extent to which the learning evidence resembles the exactness of the content of the exempted course. If the requirements of the correlation are 80% then, it can be deduced that what is assessed through portfolio is a pure academic (Mode 1) knowledge.

When assessors were asked to state what constitutes the evidence of learning in the portfolios, they mentioned the content of the portfolio and certified copies or testimonials from employers as evidence of working:

*The content of the portfolio of evidence and the industries' certified copies such as a letter from the student's supervisor confirming that the student had actually worked there. (Assessor 4, PoN)*

*It is the description of the work done, and the testimonials from work places saying that such a student has worked there for so many years and has gone through so many training. (Assessor 8, PoN)*

The indication here is that letters or testimonials from employers were the determinant of competence, however, they also confirm attendance of work or

training rather than the assurance of knowledge obtained from the many years of training attended.

Through probing the researcher was informed that students were expected to compile the portfolio of evidence on their own, without assistance from their lecturers (who were in this case their assessors). This was specifically affirmed by both Assessors 7 and 8:

*We do not assist in portfolio compilation. The student should bring the portfolio to us. We do not interfere in any of it. We want to know what he has done without our interference, then we can make a better judgment that the student has the right attitudes and attributes to go into this specific programme. What we tell him is that the portfolio must be as explicit as it can be, that is basically what we want from him. (Assessor 7, PoN)*

*Normally we take them through learning outcomes of the specific course and we invite them to evaluate themselves against the learning outcomes and we ask them to present the portfolio of evidence to us. (Assessor 8, PoN)*

Whereas the data revealed self-assessment, identification and verification of learning, as well as records and presentation of evidence, as the actual skills required by students to compile a portfolio, none of these were mentioned by assessors as skills or abilities that they looked for in assessment of portfolios. Instead, assessors looked for previously obtained qualifications, general knowledge, academic abilities to think

critically, and whether students possessed work experience that covered 80% of the exempted course. Students were entrusted with the duties of identification, alignment of their learning, verification of the learning evidence and ensuring that their learning evidence matched the learning outcomes of a particular module for which exemption was sought. In addition to identification and verification, students were expected to ensure that the learning presented in the portfolio was authentic and of sufficient quantity to meet the 80% correlation. It was interesting to note that all of these requirements were entrusted solely to students to deal with.

Assessors may have high hopes of students' abilities to carry out all these requests, however, since they were already on the course they would obtain the required competences from books and through interaction with fellow students. Reading from books could enrich evidence with additional and more structured information, which may as a result influence the language of presentation and accelerate the eligibility for exemption. However, such an act would not facilitate prior knowledge but would rather reinforce current learning. This attainment would be against the principles of RPL which advocate the idea of prior learning attained from non-formal contexts. The knowledge gained from books would still be non-certificated learning, however, it would not be prior to the assessment period as required.

The literature indicates a need for more research on whether or not students should be assisted in the compilation of their portfolios (Joosten-ten Brinke, 2009). The debate has focused on ownership of knowledge presented in the assisted portfolio.

Should such knowledge be owned by students who compiled the initial draft of the portfolio or should it be owned by the tutor whose comments modified the first draft?

When assessors were probed on whether they had been trained in assessing prior non-certificated learning through portfolios, they indicated that they had not undergone intensive training, only a one-day orientation session in which they were guided on the procedures and evidence that they needed to look for:

*We were not trained per se, however, we had a one day orientation towards the procedures, we were taken through the process and shown what to look for when assessing the portfolio. (Assessor 3, PoN)*

The same assessor claimed that although they had been oriented to the process, they had not acquired adequate information to make them competent in their duties of assessing learning through portfolio of evidence:

*Although we were oriented, such information was not adequate to fully understand the process of assessing RPL. (Assessor 3, PoN)*

According to this assessor, they were not adequately trained in the job they were entrusted to perform, and by virtue of the duration of the orientation one- or two-day sessions were not adequate to cover the scope and depth of assessing RPL. In other words, assessors were not trained in how to actually execute the assessment of prior learning itself, but only informed on how it could be conducted.

It was also explained that only students who were already registered with the institution were eligible for this service, thus the provision was exclusively for students and not for candidates (see 4.1). The analysis indicates that PoN, like UNAM, did not value prior learning for its divergence from prescribed knowledge, but rather the two institutions deemed academic knowledge as predetermining students' access to higher education.

#### **4.7.1 Methods of assessing portfolio of evidence**

Assessors were asked how they assessed evidence of prior learning presented in the portfolios. In their responses they stated comparisons of the portfolio of evidence with the prior learning submitted by a student:

*We compare the portfolio of evidence against the course content of that particular subject. We look for the relevance of the experience against the course content of the particular subject. (Assessor 6, PoN)*

*We test the tasks that are covered in the syllabus of that course against the content of the portfolio. (Assessor 7, PoN)*

Assessor 6 described how the assessment was conducted by comparing the evidence of learning submitted against the course content to attain equivalent knowledge and to establish whether such equivalency met the 80% correlation. This response corresponded well with the view presented by Stenlund (2010), which stipulates that

the results for assessment for exemption purposes were normally to control equivalency of what was submitted to pre-existing courses. The researcher perceived the equivalency as supposedly of equal knowledge in value to experiential learning, and the subject content not to be the exact content to meet percentages of correlation.

When assessors were asked what was compared between the course content and the evidence of learning presented in the portfolio they confidently stated that they examined theory behind the practical knowledge and the 80% correlation:

*We want to see that the student has the theory behind the practical knowledge he or she acquired in the field.(Assessor 6, PoN)*

*We compare evidence in the portfolio with 80% of what is offered by PoN.  
(Assessor 8, poN)*

When assessors were asked to state what precisely they compared in a portfolio they looked surprised, implying there were other things to be compared between learning evidence and course content other than the 80% resemblance. The indication from all assessors was that comparison was actually about the resemblance of evidence with course content. However, since the students were already on campus they would copy from books to attain the requirements of the exact 80% correlation. The result of copying would be that there would be no guarantee that the inclusion of the exact content in the portfolio equated learning attained by students through experiences. The knowledge of the course included in the submitted portfolio and the knowledge

gained from work experience are two different things, requiring two different assessment methods. Assessors at PoN need to have this understanding since currently there is much confusion as to what is assessed through the portfolio of evidence.

Similarly, the researcher was informed that the 80% correlation was a determining factor in writing an RPL test, which was equivalent in content and scope to summative assessment given in the particular course for which exemption was being sought:

*Upon the assessment of the portfolio, students are given the final RPL test which equals in content and scope to the end of year examination. Passing this test means the student will be exempted from attending such a course. (Assessor 6, PoN)*

When assessors were probed as to why students should be subjected to compiling a portfolio which also require them to present similar academic knowledge, they said that the portfolio was the requirement of the institutions to give an overview and indication of how much a student knew about the course from which he or she was seeking exemption. These views were shared by the following assessors:

*Comparing a portfolio is an institutional requirement. (Assessor 6, PoN)*

*We need to know how a student know about the course he or she is seeking exemption from. (Assessor 7, PoN)*

*Evidence submitted in portfolio gives an indication how much the student know about the course. (Assessor 8, PoN)*

Assessors followed the procedure as prescribed by the institution, irrespective of whether it was in the interest of the students. The procedure that 80% of course content consisted in the portfolio was adequate as an assessment of RPL, without compiling of portfolios of learning evidence. Assessors did not seem to find anything wrong with the procedure as they explained to the researcher that the test question papers were internally moderated, as were any other examination question papers in the institution. After the moderation the test paper was sent to the faculty officer who eventually sent the question papers to the registrar's office for administration of the summative test. Students were invited to write the test, after which the scripts were sent to the HoD concerned for the lecturer (assessor) to mark. After marking, the scripts were returned to the faculty officer for another round of moderation, then sent to the office of the registrar for recognition of the marks and awards of credits for exemption or failure of the exemption process.

#### **4.8 Evaluation of Prior Learning and Accordance of Academic Recognition in NIHL (Research Question 1.4.2)**

This section provides and analyses data regarding the methods through which prior learning was evaluated and accorded academic recognition.

##### **4.8.1 Evaluating prior learning at PoN**

In this study evaluation refers to the interpretation of assessment evidence and whether candidates and students have achieved the learning criteria established for them. This study investigates the methods of evaluating prior learning at PoN. Two methods were identified, illustrated as follows.

##### ***Marks from the MAE Test***

The two assessors of learning through MAE at PoN were asked to indicate how work experiential learning was evaluated so as to have equal value to that of academic credit and eventually to enable access to the institution. The two assessors indicated that learning from the MAE test was evaluated through attainment and alignment of marks against the test scores and it was said that there were no other means of evaluation used.

*Learning is evaluated through the score marks attained in the test. We do not have any other means of evaluation other than the score marks.*  
(Assessor 1, PoN)

*If a student obtains marks that are rated as a pass for the mature age entry that becomes an indication of admission or exemption.(Assessor 5, PoN)*

As explained in section 4.2.2.1, to obtain the marks that were demarcated as pass was an indication of passing the MAE. However, the percentages made available to this study show that passing the MAE was not a guarantee of acceptance to the institution, while being admitted did not guarantee enrolment. The percentages demonstrate the limited number of MAE candidates who might enrol at the institution in the year. The Polytechnic admitted only 10% AE of the total annual applicants.

### ***Comparison of learning evidence against course content***

Concerning the question on how learning came to warrant academic recognition, assessors responded that it was evaluated through the final marks attained in the RPL test. The 80% correlation required from the portfolio was purposely used to allow access to write the RPL test. Assessors explained that the comparison of learning evidence was conducted based on face value and on the marks attained in the test:

*We just take it on face value that the student will be able to make it if he passes our test that we have given him or her. (Assessor 3, PoN)*

*That is measured by how many marks a candidate attained in the test. (Assessor 6, PoN)*

*It is these tests that determine, if a student passes or fails. (Assessor 7, PoN)*

*If a student manages to pass the test, that indicates that the candidate has acquired the theoretical knowledge because the practical knowledge has already been assessed.” (Assessor 8, PoN)*

The data indicated the attainment of the pass marks as the main evaluation strategy used at PoN. Obtaining these at face value evidently aligned the candidate to qualification of passing the test. The higher the marks obtained from the test the greater indication of competence. Assessor 8 upheld the view that practical knowledge was tested through portfolio and the summative test was examining theoretical knowledge. It is interesting to perceive the assessment of portfolio as a way of examining practice, given that its content is associated with the content of the course for which exemption was applied. This suggests that the content of most courses are in themselves practical.

The preceding data presented the views regarding the knowledge assessed and evaluated in higher education through the MAE. The following section presents the findings that emerged from the data presented, indicating that the value of learning demanded by NIHL is solely placed in Mode 1 knowledge grounded in tests. As referred to in this document, norm-referenced tests do not give an indication of learning achieved but rather present the sequence of marks attainment in the test.

Literature (Harris, 1999; Ralph, 2009; Volbrecht, 2010) suggests synergies between experiential and academic learning as blending strengths from the two methods.

#### **4.8.2 Summary of Findings from PoN Assessors Data**

The following points present the findings that were derived from data collected from PoN assessors in relation to the objectives of analysing data in section 4.8 of this chapter:

- There were inconsistencies in the way PoN assessors defined RPL depicting different understandings of what it is within the institution.
- The value of learning assessed through MAE and through RPL was related to Mode 1 knowledge obtained from the contents of test marks. The higher the more competent the candidate is believed to be.
- Assessors test the learning capabilities of candidates to study in higher education rather than testing the prior learning.
- Credit awarded towards the MAE is for access purposes whereas credit acquired through the assessment of portfolios of evidence was gained towards exemption from a course in a PoN curriculum.

- PoN only assess Mode 1 knowledge through the MAE and in RPL. The data did not make reference to assessing prior experiential learning but rather the assessment concentrated on academic content through test methods.
- The attainment of 80% correlation of evidence of learning with the content of the subject applied for by students relates to the RPL test and is not a determinant factor for exemption. Students have to write an RPL test, which ultimately determines the pass or failure according to predefined passing mark.
- Students at PoN who are seeking exemption from courses in their curriculum are expected to compile the portfolio of evidence on their own, without assistance from tutors.
- The assessment of portfolio of evidence at the PoN does not appear to embrace the developmental models of assessing RPL, which has a component of pedagogical support for students with the compilation strategy of portfolio. Students at PoN are expected to compose the portfolio on their own without assistance from the lecturers (assessors), to prevent bias in their assessment and judgment.

There were several features in PoN data which displayed similarities with and differences from the findings from UNAM data. The similarities included inconsistency in the way assessors perceived RPL. Assessors from both institutions

portrayed diverse understanding of what RPL entailed, hence such understanding appears to have influenced the way RPL was conducted by individual assessor at these institutions. Neither institution assessed learning from work experience as required in their eligibility criteria of MAE. Nor did either institution place value of learning on Mode 1 knowledge through institutional test methods. The test marks were viewed from both institutions as the strategies through which the scope and in-depth of learning could be justified. From the perspectives of assessors from both institutions, answering questions correctly appeared to define competence in a candidate. The data stipulates also that neither institution used any methods of evaluating learning other than the marks which are measured on the basis of the highest.

The differences highlighted the definition of RPL. Despite assessors from both institutions presenting diverse definitions of RPL, many from PoN referred RPL to learning and many from UNAM referred to experience, implying also the influence in the way they understood and practiced it. PoN has made the assessment of prior learning an official business through the institution's prospectus booklet (although only for exemption), UNAM, on the other hand, has not claimed to assess RPL in any way, apart from some of its activities indicating the potential to do so.

The diverse definition and conceptualisation of RPL may place a great burden on the implementation strategies of RPL, given that the people who were supposed to implement it have limited understanding of the concept. As explained above, difficulty in defining RPL has not only lacked precision on the types of learning

being referred to but has also made international comparisons of RPL difficult (Valk, 2009; DRPL, 2011). Diversity of definitions has the potential to influence the perception of knowledge and the way such knowledge is assessed in these institutions.

The above paragraphs presented the analysis of data and findings derived from PoN assessors. The subsequent section offers analysis of data from PoN Administrators.

#### **4.9 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from PoN Administrators**

The Polytechnic administrators work in the same context as the PoN assessors referred to in section 2.5.2.2. The setting and conditions of work remain the same as those for assessors, therefore, the working context at PoN will not be repeated in this section. The study interviewed two administrators who were responsible for registration activities at the institution. By virtue of their work, like those at UNAMN, they had the power to affect changes concerning admissions of students in their respective institutions. They could decide which appropriate measured to use for advancement into courses that were registered at the institution. The administrators' offices were mandated by the power that governs the PoN to deal with issues of admission and exemptions for courses, therefore they were essential to this study.

#### **4.9.1 Administrators' views on the implementation of RPL in higher education**

The two PoN officials were available for the interviews.

##### ***The administrators' definitions of RPL***

When Administrators were asked to define RPL they mentioned learning derived from experiences that students bring to the institution:

*It is a learning acquired from experience. Students who are in our programmes who feel they are competent in a particular area because of their experience or because they have worked in this particular area for long time can apply for exemption from a semester course. Such learning is not certified or recognised. (Administrator 1, PoN)*

*Lots of experiential learning that students bring along at the PoN but we do not necessarily have an idea at the level of such learning. It helps to draw up evaluation that helps us see and get an indication of possibility of success, such strategy is called RPL (Administrator 2, PoN).*

Administrators at PoN had clear understanding of what RPL was about and their explanations during interviews were clear and solid in the way they distinguished RPL from mere experience. The definitions from both administrators depicted RPL as learning that emerged out of experience. Administrators clarified that such learning was uncertified, hence not accorded recognition by institutions, including

the NQA. Whereas Administrator 1 referred to RPL as learning, Administrator 2 said that it was also an assessment strategy. Administrator 2 explained that RPL was a strategy used to measure the level of learning which students bring with them to institutions of learning. Due to its unidentifiable nature it was difficult for assessors to ascertain it. In his response, the administrator contradicted PoN assessors' responses to question soliciting what prior learning they assessed. All assessors (for MAE and for portfolios) indicated that they assessed predefined knowledge through academic subjects. Those who assessed portfolios mentioned the correlation of 80% against course content (see 4.9.2). Other assessors' responses were different from the definition of the Administrator as they referred learning to experience. It was therefore not possible to assess the level of students' learning which they brought to the PoN, given that at PoN students were provided with the scope of content in which they were to assess. The institution did not test the learning which students brought with them. The data from interviews with assessors revealed that assessment only targeted Mode 1 knowledge, not necessarily the level of equivalence of knowledge between subjects and experiential learning.

Whereas the two administrators showed clarity and understanding of RPL, assessors at the institution demonstrated a limitation in relation to conceptualising RPL. It was not clear from the data whether the administrators' understanding of RPL was their own individual perspective or that of the institution. If the latter there were discrepancies between the way academics with the responsibility for assessing learning understood about RPL and how the administrators identified and understood

it. The interpretation implies that administrators had the necessary understanding of RPL, while assessors faced challenges in relation to conceptualising it.

Administrator 1 made reference to Rule AC2.4, which provides for the practices of RPL at the institution. This rule allows exemption from specific courses in the PoN curriculum:

*Rule AC2.4 provides RPL services to students that are competent in particular area because of their experiences or they had courses elsewhere which are not recognised. (Administrator 1, PoN)*

The administrator appeared convinced that Rule AC2.4 was the guiding principle through which the provision of RPL was made at the institution. Administrator 2, on the other hand, commented that although the institution perceived RPL as competence and a learning activity it was not practiced at the institution as a definite programme:

*RPL is not a definite programme, we do not have a policy for it yet, we are sure to learn. It is probably a viable system. (Administrator 2, PoN)*

The response gave rise to two connotations. The first implies that the lack of institutional policy to guide the implementation of RPL may have made the practice of RPL a non-definite programme as it was occasional offered. Secondly, RPL was practiced voluntarily by assessors who felt the necessity to assess it. While

Administrator 1 claimed rule AC2.4 made provision for its services, Administrator 2 believed that such a programme could be viable under the policy guide. This response implied that either the programme was not in operation or its service was not counted for. Through probing, Administrator 2 clarified that the provision of RPL was not definite as there was no institution policy to guide it, but rather it was a procedural document. The interpretation of the data implied different terminologies (AC2.4 and procedural document). The two terminologies were inconsistent and probably an indication of an unusable document. During the interviews, only one assessor and one administrator made reference to Law AC2.4.

The analysis of the data implies that RPL at PoN was exclusively for students who had registered and were seeking exemption from the institutional programmes. Administrators alleged that the institution could not overload its programmes with MAE candidates, while leaving the children in high school who had worked hard to get places at the PoN. Experience had also taught Administrator 1 that most MAE candidates struggled to cope with PoN's programmes, hence the fewer they accommodated the better it was for both candidates and the institution. Administrator 2 pointed to the quota of 10 that PoN allocated itself for MAE annually:

*We do not want to overload our programmes with mature age entry candidates because our experience is that, in most cases, these candidates struggle to cope with the Polytechnic's programmes. It will also be unfair to children in high school who work hard and do not need a help of mature age*

*entry and we leave them to put a lot of MAE candidates. (Administrator 1, PoN).*

*... there is a limited quota of ten per department but usually some departments don't even have a quota because department like Y, X and Z are very specialised areas and we cannot compromise on entry requirements because their work carries a lot of responsibilities. (Administrator 2, PoN)*

The two administrators indicated that since MAE candidates were entering the institution on the basis of redress, the fear might be that MAE would negatively affect the traditional success rate of the institution, hence the best solution might be to avoid accommodating many of them.

#### **4.9.2 Views on the implementation of RPL for access at PoN**

On the question about administrators' view regarding the implementation of RPL at PoN for access purposes, both administrators expressed the will to implement RPL for access:

*Yes we would, one of the things that the PoN is conscious about is that we are interested in building strong national systems. We believe that we have a contribution to make however, we will look at the government for resources because we do not want to drop our requirements just to get people in. (Administrator 1, PoN)*

*Yes we would, we are also bound by what the government prescribes as national development plans. It will be something that provides more coherent basis from which we can frame the institutional policy. At the moment we borrow by benchmarking from other neighbouring institutions. (Administrator 2, PoN)*

The two administrators expressed the institutional position on the implementation of RPL for access purposes. They said that PoN would definitely be interested in using it as an assessment tool and as a contribution to the government's National Development Plan aimed at building a strong national system. However, willingness to contribute to nation building comes with concerns in relation to candidates' capability to cope with higher learning and the assurance of quality and maintenance of their requirements. Administrator 1 doubted the capability of RPL candidates to meet the normal entry standards:

*RPL is not an easy way to get credit or exemption as we are going to assess them at the same level and against the same learning outcomes as we would assess the people who would go through the course. (Administrator 1, PoN)*

Administrator 1 stressed that if RPL were to be implemented for admission purposes there needed to be developed a national set of assessments that were valid, reliable and robust enough to give assurance that RPL candidates could cope with PoN

programmes. Administrator 2 called for the Council of Higher Learning to set up conditions and criteria for assessing RPL in higher education:

*There needs to be developed a national set of assessments that are valid, reliable and robust enough to give us the assurance that these people really can cope with PoN programmes. (Administrator 1, PoN)*

*We must device a set of RPL tests that ensures that when we say you have twenty five points in five subjects and a Grade C in English, you are equivalent to what volume of learning, and it is that volume we must assess (Administrator 2, PoN)*

The fear expressed by the two administrators implies that the inclusion of RPL candidates equates with the reduction of entry requirements of higher institutions. Administrator 1 was stressing how strictly the assessment would be, whereas Administrator 2 specified what should be assessed. The principles of assessment of RPL demand exhibition of knowledge on an equivalent basis to assessment criteria. The NQF Levels have the potential to provide that match.

Despite the fear of failure that RPL candidates might bring if accepted to the PoN, Administrator 2 appeared more comfortable with the idea of it being for access, expressing that such a stance would give the institution a coherent basis from which to frame their institutional policy. The institutions currently borrow benchmarks from other institutions and they wish they could change that:

*The Council for Higher Education should set up conditions and criteria for assessing RPL into different levels of qualifications in higher education. (Administrator 2, PoN)*

The response suggests that in spite of the will to contribute to nation building, concern remains about the quality of assessment. Whereas UNAM looks up to NQA for policy development and training of staff members, PoN requires the development of set of standards and assessment tools from the Council for Higher Education. These calls connote two interpretations. The first tends to show lack of confidence in Namibian institutions of higher education to implement RPL. The two institutions appear to be looking up to other institutions to act on their behalf, developing national set of assessment tools instead of suggesting that they themselves develop reliable assessment tools within the framework of the NQA or Council of Higher Learning. Secondly, the calls appear to affirm the status quo of knowledge control in which candidates are given the content of assessment. What will be the content of such a national assessment tool? The fear expressed by PoN is consistent with the literature's finding that academics may reject the provision of RPL if they lack the understanding of what it entails (Conrad, 2009). Therefore, institutions need to be informed about RPL and understand what it means before advancing to implement it.

#### 4.9.3 Assistance that PoN requires from the NQA

Administrators were asked to indicate the assistance their institution would require from the NQA in an effort to effectively implement the RPL for access at PoN. As stated in their responses, administrators felt the development of assessment tests would specify to providers what was embedded in levels three or four, and the national development template indicating what content was assessed:

*The NQA needs to design a template to portray the contents for these assessments tools (Administrator 2, PoN.)*

Administrator 1 suggested a set of RPL tests that would specify the NQF Levels. A set of assessments that would assure providers that the RPL candidate could function at the specified level. Administrator 2 further stated that both UNAM and PoN agreed on the content of these assessment tools:

*We must devise a set of RPL tests that will ensure that what we are testing is against the same standard. A set of assessments that will assure us that the RPL candidate can function at level three or four, and the University and PoN must agree on the content of these assessments that is what NQA must assist us with. (Administrator 1, PoN).*

The suggestions are for generic assessment content which would inform providers what level of knowledge is equivalent to NQF Levels three or four. The suggestion is

valid, but begs the question: will the NQA have the insights of knowledge demand that UNAM and PoN require? It would be more practical to direct the suggestions to both NQA and institutions of higher learning than shifting the entire responsibility to NQA or National Council of Higher Education (NCHE).

The administrators commented that only with national assessment strategies in place and specifications of certification would institutions be ascertained with qualifications issued by different organisations and to ensure transferability.

#### **4.9.4 Summary of Findings from the PoN Administrators**

The following section presents the findings derived from analysis of administrators' data in relation to the objectives of analysis offered in section 4.9. The analysis explored issues concerning the views of administrators in regards to implementing RPL for access at the PoN, and the assistance that PoN may seek from NQA for effective implementation of RPL.

- PoN is willing to implement the assessment of RPL for access on conditions that quality of assessing RPL is assured.
- The assistance required from the NQA includes the *test templates* to indicate what content is assessed, *conditions and standards* of assessment designed by NCHE and *National Assessment Tests* for RPL developed by the NQA.

- PoN has Rule AC2.4 currently used as the Procedural Document to guide the implementation of RPL for access at the institution. Nonetheless, only two staff members made reference to it during interviews.

The following section presents the analysis of data from the NQA officials.

#### **4.10 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA)**

This section presents and analyses data collected from interviews with NQA officials referred to in this study as ‘accreditors’. Four NQA officials (accreditors) were sampled and all had more than two years of experiences in dealing with issues concerning accreditation of prior learning. The NQA is a public institution which does not confer qualifications but mandates by law to assure quality of education and training in Namibia. The institution accredits institutions and persons who provide trainings or assessment of learning. This study was interested to find out how NQA accredits prior experiential learning, therefore, the analysis was conducted to solicit the understanding of what accreditation is, to explore how it was conducted and to solicit supports that the NQA offers to RPL providers. Four officials who dealt with the accreditation of non-certificated learning were interviewed by this study.

##### ***Description of accreditors’ working contexts***

The understanding of the working context and level of implementation of the activities (accreditation) is significant as it informs the study of the scope of

monitoring and assessing learning before the awards of the accreditation status. The NQA was established under Act 29/1996, with a mandate to administer a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), to set curriculum standards, achieve occupational standards as well as to recognise competencies learnt outside the formal education and training. According to NQA Act of 1996, all forms of learning are valued, irrespective of how or where such learning was obtained, so long as it can be justified. That all learning is valued by NQA demonstrates that RPL competencies have the potential to be accorded equal status to formal learning. Institutions that assess RPL are required to undergo accreditation and are awarded certification that assures the quality of their assessment.

#### 4.10.1 Definitions of accreditation

To find out the conceptual understanding of the term ‘accreditation’ the researcher asked accreditors to define it. Several responses emerged that accreditation was a formal status approved by the NQA, a confirmation made by NQA, a quality assurance of an institution and a means of quality to assure the education provided. The definitions and conceptions were stated by the four accreditors as follows:

**Table 4.6: Definitions of accreditation as perceived by accreditors**

Accreditor 1	<i>A formal status granted by NQA under the section and regulations that an institution must comply with</i>
Accreditor 2	<i>A confirmation of whether a provider such as an institution or</i>

	<i>individual person giving training has the capacity to deliver the courses or assess the people per taking those courses.</i>
Accreditor 3	<i>A quality assurance of an institution through the accreditation process.</i>
Accreditor 4	<i>To quality assure the education provided to the Namibians.</i>

Despite the different terminologies of accreditation (status, confirmation and assurance of quality), these responses all refer to the same connotation of conforming, verifying and assuring quality of learning, as delivered by different providers. Accreditation is therefore understood from these responses as the proof that assessment or training providers have met in relation to the criteria set for quality assurance. It is however interesting to note that accreditation as defined by accreditors does not refer to acquisition of learning but to the fulfilment of set criteria of assuring quality either of training or for assessment. The assessment is of how a provider delivers service to clients rather than what has been acquired from the service. This means providers can still be accredited, even if it produces incompetence, so long as such institution or person fulfils the accreditation criteria.

#### **4.10.2 Accreditation of RPL providers**

The interest of the researcher of this study was to find out how RPL was accredited by the NQA. During the interview it was clarified that the NQA did not accredit learning, only the providers of learning:

*The NQA only verifies that RPL is practiced solidly. (Accreditor 1, NQA).*

When accreditors were asked how RPL was accredited, the responses verified that accreditation of providers had not taken place yet. At the time of the interviews (November 2010), the RPL policy had not yet been approved by Namibian cabinet. The accreditors explained that even after the policy was approved they would still need to set standards for accreditation which providers would use:

*We have not done any accreditation of prior non-certificated learning yet because the RPL policy has not been approved yet and we should first implement it.” (Accreditor 4, NQA)*

Since the accreditation of RPL providers had not yet taken place accreditors were unable to specify what it entailed. Nevertheless, they were able to envisage that it would follow the procedures conducted in accrediting formal learning providers, that is holistic assessment of site, resources, personnel involved, qualifications to be attained, assessment or training procedures, monitoring of services and above all the capacity of the providers to provide quality education:

*We look at everything; the providers of education and training include institutions, persons and organisations. We look at the facilities, qualifications of providers, defined assessment procedures, the moderation and the quality regime in place, description of how evidence is presented and capacity of the provider to assess learning. (Accreditor1, NQA)*

The data implies that accreditation is about ascertaining through observation and interviews with people at the site, whether or not the providers have available facilities, personnel, resources, documentations and procedures that were essential for the effective and smooth delivery of assessing prior non-certificated learning. Infrastructures and other physical properties were easier to ascertain since they could be seen, but skills and competences of the instructors (assessors) were variables that could not be easily attested until the claimant has performed and proven the capability and knowledge attained. Therefore, it was not very clear what the NQA was actually accrediting, whether it accredited the capabilities of providers for the attainment of quality of learning, or they were accrediting the availability of resources at the site.

Is accreditation about the assurance of availability of resources or about skills and capacities of providers? When accreditors were asked how they intended monitoring the accredited institutions it was indicated that there were various ways the NQA could do so. Among these were site visits, institutional reports, qualifications issued, and institutional documents. Accreditors mentioned that they would also talk to the graduates who went through the assessment process of prior non-certified learning. Through this, accreditors would examine if the work had been properly done as it was defined in the application for accreditation. It was also said that the success rate of their candidate's performances were invested in the kinds of training being offered, the quality training would result in quality outcomes and its services.

#### 4.10.3 Assistance that NQA can offers to institutions of higher learning

The NQA, as the mandatory body to ensure quality of all learning in Namibia, has the responsibility to assist institutions to develop strategies to enhance quality education and learning. The researcher wanted to find out what assistance it would give to institutions of higher learning which require the assessment and recognition of RPL for admission purposes. In response to this question, several suggestions of assistance were highlighted, such as assessment, standards of assessing RPL, development of institutional policy, mentoring, facilitations and promotion of RPL policy. The issues were stated as follow:

**Table 4.7: Assistance that NQA may provide to RPL providers**

Accreditor 1	<i>We have to set standards so that institutions can take those standards and assess the people against them.</i>
Accreditor 2	<i>To let tertiary education use the NQF Levels, unit standards and assist them understand the outcomes and competences required for a specific qualifications.</i>
Accreditor 3	<i>To guide them according to the policy of RPL, what they need to do and to guide them on the whole process.</i>
Accreditor 4	<i>We can assist them with assessment, mentoring, facilitation and certification.</i>

Accreditors were ready to assist institutions and persons who had been accredited to provide RPL. They can offer standards that they had set for institutions so that they

could develop learning outcomes based on those standards. Officials at the NQA would assist by educating tertiary education staff about NQF Levels, unit standards and to help them understand the relevance of learning outcomes. Since the NQA are the custodians of the RPL policy, it becomes their responsibility to assist providers to adhere to the national policy on RPL and to assist with the whole process of RPL. Accreditor 4 said that they would assist providers with assessment processes (the use of NQA levels and unit standards), mentoring, facilitation and certification. All assessors implied that they were ready to assist anyone in need of their help.

The NQA would make standards available to be followed by providers and to monitor institutions to set their own standards accordingly. Since the RPL policy had not yet been approved, the NQA officials appeared to find it difficult to explain the kinds of standards that would be designed for RPL assessment. It was explained that institutions intending to implement RPL as a criterion for assessment would need first to develop their own institutional RPL policy. The NQA would then verify whether this adhered to the National RPL Policy before implementation by institutions were undertaken. The accreditors also indicated that the ideal way of practicing RPL in higher education was to integrate the RPL within the whole assessment policy of the institution and not as a separate activity. When the assessment procedures were integrated in the mainstream, the award of qualifications would also be made integral part of the main system:

*The NQA would verify that RPL in an institution is properly implemented not perceived as a stand-alone practices whereby its assessment is done*

*separately from other institutional assessments. In a system where the 'RPL qualifications' are valued equally to institutional qualifications, the standards of assessment is emphasised. (Accreditor1, NQA)*

The NQA states that it would verify that RPL is properly implemented, the term 'properly' being explained as using steps in the assessment adhering to the National RPL policy. The claim of verification by NQA may be doubtful in this case, given that providers are accredited based on the fulfilment of criteria of appropriateness of personnel and resources and not necessarily on their competence. What there is to be verified would probably be ascertaining the availabilities of resources rather than determining the competence in providing the service.

Accreditors mentioned also that although they were unable to show precisely how they would build confidence in RPL, it remained the case that education providers needed to be ensured about quality of RPL. The quality assurance would enhance trust of RPL among stakeholders. Similarly, accreditors alleged that the use of NQF Level descriptors was essential for accepting learning in an institution or programme. Institutions ought to make use of NQF Levels to gain understanding of the level of learning acquired by the candidate: *"Institutions should make use of NQF Level descriptors which gives them an indication as to the level of functioning of that candidate."* (Accreditor 3, NQA).

The NQF Level descriptors were portrayed as indispensable, not only in terms of information depicting the depth of learning of candidates but also in the possible

level in which a candidate can be placed. As NQA levels are essential to RPL, these are so general and broadly stated that limitations have the potential to expose them to diverse interpretations.

#### 4.10.4 Criteria for accreditation

When accreditors were asked whether they had criteria that they used to accredit RPL, they responded as follows:

**Table 4.8: Criteria for Accreditation of RPL**

<i>Accreditor 1</i>	<i>Accreditor 2</i>	<i>Accreditor 3</i>	<i>Accreditor 4</i>
<i>We look at evidence gathered through various mechanisms that the evidence must be current, and grasp.</i>	<i>Currently the NQA has not yet gone into the criteria. We are waiting for the policy to be approved then we can develop standards.</i>	<i>The policy is not yet approved and the criteria are stated in the draft policy.</i>	<i>We have not set the criteria because the policy has not yet been approved. Until when the policy is approved then we can set criteria of our functions.</i>

The indication among accreditors was that they had not designed criteria that they would give RPL providers to use in the implementation of RPL because the national RPL policy was yet to be approved by Namibian cabinet. At the time there were no

authentic criteria for accrediting RPL, suggesting that the criteria set would be based on the national requirements for 1 quality standards. One of the accreditors mentioned currency of information as one of the timeframes that would be adhered to by all RPL providers.

#### **4.10.5 Monitoring the Implementation of RPL**

When accreditors were asked how they intended to monitor the implementation of RPL, all four mentioned the two monitoring systems that the NQA currently had in place, which included the submission of reports, and any feedback to be given after six months or after a year on how providers were performing. Secondly, the NQA relied on the potential for success that would be transmitted through the quality of the provider's graduates and the qualifications offered. It was explained by Accreditor 3 that if the success rate of RPL was low then the NQA would definitely know and may intervene to see whether the provider indicated in the application for accreditation was similar to the practice on the ground. In other words, the NQA would audit providers according to the national policy, to see whether they were adhering to the policy of RPL.

Accreditors indicated that because accreditation in Namibia was optional it presented a great challenge. Any providers would be allowed to practice, irrespective of the quality of their services and the lack of quality control would not only impinge of the quality of education in the country, but also constrain the chances of transferability of RPL candidates among institutions:

*Accreditation in Namibia is a voluntary process that is why some institutions are just starting their programmes without the accreditation certificate. (Accreditor 4, NQA)*

Asked for a solution, the accreditor recommended:

*...a law must be enacted to demand that all providers of education be accredited. (Accreditor 4, NQA).*

It can be speculated that those institutions which refuse to be accredited may have done so out of ignorance of the essentiality of the accreditation services. The NQA needs to vigorously raise awareness of the importance of accreditation among education providers, not only in relation to guiding quality but as assurance of individuals' learning protection.

#### **4.10.6 Summary of Findings from the NQA Accreditors**

The following are findings that emerged out of the data collected from Accreditors at NQA:

- The national policy on RPL has not yet been approved, and this hinders the implementation of RPL in higher education.

- The exercise of accreditation in Namibia is voluntary so institutions can decide not to undertake it.
- The voluntary nature of the accreditation hinders quality control of education services provided in the country.
- Accreditation does not ascertain the amount of learning acquired by the candidates, but rather it ascertains the availabilities of resources.
- The NQA is willing to provide guidance to those aspiring to implement RPL.
- The ideal way of practicing RPL in higher education is to integrate the RPL within the institutional assessment policy and not as a separate activity.

Having presented, analysed and interpreted data from interviews of assessors, administrators and accreditors, the discussions of findings would not be complete without the analysis and interpretation of data derived from institutional documents including MAE question papers that were given to candidates during the years 2010 and 2011. These questions papers were written by candidates seeking entry to UNAM and PoN through the MAE option. Therefore the following section presented analysed and interpreted data from the institutional documents.

#### **4.11 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data from Institutional Documents**

In addition to interview data presented in preceding sections, document analysis was another source from which data was collected. Documents analysed included copies of the MAE test papers from the University and Polytechnic of Namibia, the Draft

Policy of the Recognition of Prior Learning, the Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL in Namibia, the Polytechnic of Namibia's guidelines for the assessment of RPL for exemption and the Accreditation of Learning in Namibia. The analyses of these documents were conducted to find out what knowledge was assessed through MAE test papers. This section comprises three main sections.

#### **4.11.1 Knowledge assessed through MAE test papers (UNAM)**

##### ***The University of Namibia***

The researcher had hoped to analyse MAE scripts from 2008- 2012, but was unable to obtain copies of these or scripts written beyond 2010. The researcher was informed by UNAM that the institution only stored MAE question papers and answer scripts for a maximum of two years, after which they were destroyed. The researcher was only able to obtain the 2010 and 2011 copies of the test question papers and scripts.

##### ***The MAE English Language test paper (2010)***

The English Language question papers (2010) consisted of 13 pages, including the cover. The duration of writing was two hours and candidates were expected to answer all the questions. As normal to most test and examination papers, the names of the examiner and moderator were indicated on the cover page. There were three instructions to candidates to (a) answer all the questions; (b) to write in the space provided unless otherwise stated; and (c) to write neatly and legibly. The total marks

to be obtained upon successful completion of the test paper were not indicated on the cover page but appeared against each question. The paper comprised three sections.

### ***Section A***

This section titled ‘Reading comprehension’ comprised three main questions.

Question one included a reading comprehension passage of one and half pages. The passage was written in 12 short paragraphs of not more than five sentences each and each paragraph was numbered. Under the comprehension passage were 10 questions, all of which candidates were asked to answer. These questions were derived directly from the reading passage.

Question two was about finding words or phrases in the passage that were synonymous with words provided in the paper.

Question three required candidates to say whether statements given were true or false by circling the correct answer. These questions solicited understanding of content in which candidate had to indicate whether the sentences given were true or false, such as:

*“Cyber slackers do not need to take lunch” (true or false) (UNAM, MAE, 2010,p.5)*

The total marks allocated to section A was 25marks.

### ***Section B***

The section was about grammar and consisted of six questions.

Question one was made up of ten sentences, each with two words in brackets and candidates were asked to underline the correct one.

Question two also comprised ten statements, each having one word written in capital letters at the end. Candidates were asked to form a word that fitted suitably in the blank spaces, for instance :

*“There is no \_\_\_\_\_ between personality and productivity at work (RELATED).”*  
*(UNAM NAE, 2010).*

Candidates were to use the word RELATED to form a new word to fit in the blank space. In this case a word RELATIONSHIP was appropriate. The marks were out of ten.

Question three had five sentences in which candidates were required to identify the part of speech (word class) of each of the underlined words. They were to choose the answers from the list given in alphabetical order or words given. An example was given of how to answer the questions. The first sentence requested candidates to indicate what part of speech was **I**? Was it a noun, adjective, article, conjunction, interjection, noun, prepositions, pronoun, or verb? The total marks for question two were five.

Question four under this section consisted of 12 sentences which requested candidates to write provided verbs in the past tense.

*“My car (break) \_\_\_\_\_ down.”*

Candidates were to write the given verb (break) into past tense. All 12 sentences followed this pattern.

Question five had five statements which were to be changed into question forms.

Such as:

*“I enjoy playing football.”*

The statement was to be changed in a question form (a candidate who asked “*do you enjoy playing football?*”, was marked wrong).

Question six has six statements which candidates needed to change into negative forms. For instance, “*I read a newspaper yesterday,*” was to be changed in a negative form. The total marks for this section were 50.

### ***Section C***

This section had one question which requested candidates to write an argumentative essay to discuss what they thought were the advantages of using the Internet. They were instructed to write on the space provided, with each paragraph containing a main idea and supporting sentences. Sentences were to be linked with appropriate linking words and the focus was on the disadvantages. At the end of the question paper was a box in which further instructions were given in relations to marking the essay. It was stated that there were seven marks for relevancy of content to title, another seven for using correct sentence construction and subject agreement with their verbs. It was stated that six marks were for the use of appropriate linking words and developing ideas should be expressed in clear and correct tenses. Finally, five marks were allocated for vocabulary, with formal words preferred to informal expressions. The total marks for this section were 25.

The knowledge tested in this question paper can be characterised as: reading comprehension; ability to read and understanding given passages; ability to answer questions correctly; and knowledge of synonyms and understanding information to be able to know when the information is true or false. Section B examined grammar

by gauging ability to choose the correct word to fit in a sentence; formulation of words; identification of parts of speech; and indicating which parts of speech were nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. Candidates' abilities to turn statements into questions and negative forms were also examined. In section C candidates were tested on their ability to follow orders to write essays and identify main ideas in the essay; knowledge and usage of supporting sentences; make appropriate links and know and understand the disadvantages of the Internet. The ideas in the essay were required to be expressed clearly and in correct tenses.

The analysis and interpretation of data in this test question paper revealed problematic areas. First, the test paper comprised 12 pages of questions that needed to be written in two hours, which for candidates of mature age, 25 years and above, and returning to education after five years of employment, was excessive. The time allocated to the required task was probably more intimidating to adult candidates than the knowledge they were requested to present. The content assessed did not translate into the work experience of candidates, given that they were adult workers who had been out of formal education for more than five years. The data was consistent with what the UNAM assessors (Assessor 8, UNAM) indicated, that they assess skills of reading, writing and the ability to use them. During the interviews at both institutions, assessors were asked whether they assessed prior experiential learning in the MAE, to which they responded positively.

The explanations of the RPL that they assessed fitted well with what was assessed, but it was not RPL. The testing of grammar in pure academic context cannot be labelled RPL. The knowledge that UNAM tests in English Language has nothing to do with the learning that candidates attained from employment, therefore such learning was not prior experiential learning. What UNAM tested were skills and knowledge that assessors required the candidate to possess as prerequisite for admission. In other words, there was no testing of prior experiential learning, only prior academic learning.

***The MAE English Language test paper (2011)***

The English Language question papers (2011) consisted of seven pages, including the cover page. However, apart from this only the first four pages consisted of test questions, with the last two being blank to be written on by candidates. The duration of writing was two hours. There were no instructions for candidates. There were no names of the examiners or moderators indicated on the cover page. The information on the cover page differed from the information given in the 2010 test question paper.

The 2011 English Language test paper consisted of two sections; section A, titled ‘Reading Text’ and section B, titled ‘Writing’.

***Section A Reading Text***

This section comprised four questions:

Question one required candidates to read the article given and to answer the questions. The text given was three paragraphs of not more than ten sentences each. Above the text were four phrases, labelled *a*, *b*, *c* and *d*. There were no instructions written to explain what candidates were supposed to do with these phrases.

Question two comprised eight options of three sentences each. Candidates were requested to choose and tick the best option for completing each of the sentences given, for instance:

1. *While working for a major insurance company, Pauline Portas....*

- a) ---- *reached a high position*
- b) ---- *was frustrated with the lack of career progress*
- c) ---- *did not find her job interesting” (MAE test paper, 2011)*

Upon reading the text in question one, they were asked to tick the best of the three options given.

Questions three required candidates to find from the article given in Question 1 a word or phrase that was synonymous with the phrase provided, as indicated on the example below:

*“Generally speaking (para.2)” \_\_\_\_\_*

*(MAE English Language Test, 2011,p. 4)*

Candidates were required to find from the provided passage (in paragraph two), a word or phrase synonymous with the word given.

Question four consisted of four questions which required candidates to answer given questions in a short sentences and in their own words, for example:

- 1. *What is meant by “She had climbed the ladder” .....?*
-

---

---

Three long lines were provided (as space for answers) for each question.

***Section B: Writing***

This section comprised an essay question in which candidates were asked to write an essay of 150 words, arguing whether it was advisable for women to become state presidents. Two and a half pages were provided (150 words required).

The 2011 English Language MAE test paper measured reading abilities in which candidates had to read the article, choose correct answers and give synonymous words or phrases. Other skills tested included understanding of phrases and writing an essay about a predefined topic.

The researcher found discrepancies between the two MAE test question papers presented to candidates who sought admission to UNAM through the MAE scheme during the year 2010 and 2011. The 2010 had three sections consisting of reading comprehension, grammar and writing, whereas the 2011 had reading comprehension and writing section only. There seems to be inconsistency in the style and scope of content presentations. The weight and scope of content of the test papers for 2011 looks limited in comparison to content presented in the 2010 question paper. The interpretation is that every year assessors set question papers according to what they deemed fit, regardless of the adequacy of the assessment content. Equally, the scope of proficiencies described by assessors in the interviews and those presented in the test papers differs. The assessors described proficiency of scanning, skimming, oral

and interpret information. These proficiencies were not clearly articulated in the 2011 paper, except the interpretation of information. As much as there were differences in scope of content assessed in the test paper 2010 and 2011, the knowledge assessed in both remained academic (Mode 1 knowledge) rather than prior experiential learning.

Generally, the data from English Language Proficiency test papers both for 2010 and 2011 showed that the knowledge assessed was traditionally classroom and highly academic, and required technical instructions from the teacher. There were no indications of prior experiential learning being tested, even when Assessor 8 agreed that RPL was part of the MAE test paper. The understanding exhibited by the data indicates that either the assessor had a different understanding of RPL, which may have affected perceptions of it, or the assessor simply lacked knowledge of what RPL was about.

### ***Numeracy Test 2010***

The test paper for 2010 was a two-hour one, allocated 80% marks. The cover page instructed that calculations or cell phones were not allowed in the test. The paper comprised two sections, A and B. Each of the sections consisted only of one question.

### ***Section A***

This section had only one question with 30 multiple choice exercises scoring one mark for each correct answer circled.

***Section B***

Section B had two questions. Question one instructed that from the list of abbreviations (km, cm, mm, m, g, kg, ml, l, kl, ha) candidates must find the most appropriate abbreviations for each statement given. The first sentence read as follows:

*“ The capacity of a farm dam is 50 \_\_\_\_\_ “*

Question two in this section required candidates to identify the numbers marked A to J on the number line and they were asked to list sums as per questions.

***Numeracy Test 2011***

Similar to the 2010 Numeracy test, the 2011 test paper was also a two-hour one, but this had marks of 100. In the 2011, calculators were allowed and the instructions required candidates to circle the correct answer and to round off answers to one decimal place where needed. This paper, like the 2010 paper, had two sections, section A and section B.

***Section A***

Section A as in the 2010 test paper comprised multiple choices which required candidates to circle the correct answer. The multiple choice questions included the ability of the candidate to determine the right answers. Candidates were asked to determine the correct answer to the multiple choices given, an example of which given to candidates was:

*“  $\frac{1}{4}$  km-195m-200cm-3000mm ”*

Candidates were required to choose the correct answer from five different answers that were presented. The total marks allocated to section one were 90%.

The ability and competence over the results of a multiple choice exercises are practically difficult to judge. Multiple choices can infer two things: either that the candidate sincerely understood and possessed the knowledge of the correct answers or that the candidate simply guessed the answers correctly without any understanding of the calculation involved in the sums. The correct answer in this situation was taken to measure competence and knowledge of the subject, hence translating to passing the test.

### **Section B**

The question requested candidates to fill in the correct measure from the list provided (*km, m, cm, mm, kg, g, kl, l, ml, ha*). The first exercise was:

*“ Mass of a brick 3 \_\_\_\_\_ ”*

The candidates were required to indicate the mass of a brick using the measure from the list in brackets. It could be 3kg, or 3g. This exercise had ten questions and was allocated 10 marks.

The data from both papers for 2010 and the 2011 test papers required candidates to choose the correct answers from the multiple answers and to fill in the answers by writing the abbreviations of capacity, mass, length, distance and area. It can be interpreted that for numeracy there were great consistency in the kinds of questions asked in the 2010 and the 2011 test papers. The data from the two question papers

concurred with what the assessor indicated to assess (numerical abilities, calculations of distances, measurements, mass, weights, lengths, value and speed). This assessor had strongly expressed that in their department they did not assess learning from experience nor align the questions in the test paper to the work context. Therefore, the pure academic knowledge presented in the two question papers corresponded well with what the assessor expressed during the interviews.

### **General Knowledge test papers 2010**

The test paper titled ‘General Paper 2010’ was of one hour duration and allocated 25% of the total marks. The instructions on the cover page required candidates to answer only one of the two questions provided. They were asked to write an essay discussing the issue presented in the topic and to illustrate their answers with clear examples.

#### Question 1

*“Corporal Punishment is the only solution for children who are not disciplined.”*

#### Question 2

*“In your opinion, what are the main causes of child abuse in Namibia?*

*Discuss the strategies which can be used to protect children from abuses.”*

The question papers tested the abilities to write essays, discuss, illustrate with examples, and to identify causes. Candidates had to exhibit how much of that knowledge they possessed and whether what they knew corresponded with the

content in the assessor's marking guides. It was the assessor who determined the correctness of knowledge and who was perceived as competent.

### **General Knowledge test papers 2011**

The data indicated that as in the 2010 General Paper the 2011 paper also required that only one question be answered. The total marks were similar to the 2010 paper, at 25%, and the paper was one hour in duration. Instructions were similar in both 2010 and 2011 question papers.

Question one was divided into two, *1a* and *1b*. Question *1a* required candidates to write an essay on the different steps the Ministry of Education could take in order to improve learners' performance in schools in Namibia. The discussion was to include five current problems which affected the learners' performance in schools.

Question *1b* solicited three suggestions with examples on how to improve learners' performance in schools. The total marks allocated to question 1a were 10, and for 1b 15, both totalling 25marks.

Question two was also divided into *2a* and *2b* questions. Question *2a* required candidates to discuss with examples the five main causes of 'baby dumping' in Namibia.

Question *2b* asked for three mechanisms which could be used to address the problem. Both questions also amounted to 25%.

When the assessor of this subject was interviewed and asked what it was that they assessed, she explained that it was general knowledge of current issues and abilities

to know what was happening in Namibia (4.2.1.2). It was not clear whether the objective of the general paper was about knowledge of current issues alone or also some English proficiency. The questions in the two papers tested abilities to discuss, identify, explain and suggest rather than mere writing to exhibit knowledge of current issues. It can be interpreted that knowledge assessed in both the 2010 and 2011 test papers was academic (Mode 1 knowledge).

### ***Specific Subject Matter 2011***

The researcher of this study was unable to obtain copies of the test question papers for specific subjects' content written in years previous to 2010, only the copy of tests question papers for specific subject matters that were written in 2011. Since the analysis was conducted using two copies per domain, the researcher analysed test papers for two different subjects: General Management and Nursing, which had both been written in 2011.

### ***General Management test question paper 2011***

This was also a two hour paper in duration, consisting of three main questions, all of which candidates were requested to answer. Question one of the General Management test paper consisted of 25 exercises which solicited general knowledge through the use of multiple choice questions. An example of the question in multiple choice:

*1. Management is considered the force that:*

*(a) Maintains the status quo*

*(b) Makes things happen*

(c) *Keeps labour from taking over*

(d) *Looks out for its own interest.*

Multiple choice required candidates to exhibit intrinsic understanding and knowledge of the subject matter to be able to identify and choose the correct answer. Since the right answer was already provided candidates had only to identify it, demonstrating control of knowledge sought by assessors. It was the knowledge to identify the right answer that assessors were searching for in the candidates' answers. The ideal situation would not be what candidates had acquired through work experience but what they had learned from it.

Question two called for candidates to indicate whether statements were true or false. The test was based on an assumption that since candidates claimed to know the area of study whatever was provided in relation to the study area would be known. Examples of statements that candidates had to answer true or false were as follows:

*“An important purpose of management is to make things happen.”*

*“The entrepreneur is characterized by innovative behaviour.”*

*“One purpose of controlling is to check up on performance.”*

These questions were not related to experiential learning, given that they did not emerge from experience that was undertaken in non-formal contexts. The learning was actually part of the Grade 10 assessment, therefore such knowledge had already

been assessed. The sentences were part of academic knowledge and should not be mistaken with experiential learning.

Question three asked candidates to write an essay and allocated 50 marks. Examples of the essay questions were:

1. *Why do organisations hire managers?*
2. *Discuss the level of Management. Indicate which one you would enjoy the most at this stage of your career.*
3. *Discuss basic functions of a manager.*

Question three had nine similar statements but, due to space, the researcher only gave four short statements to indicate what was required in the test paper. The instruction indicated that Question 3 was an ‘essay’ and it was allocated 50 marks. The instruction in the test paper was not very clear and did not explain whether it required each of the nine questions to be answered in essay format or how they were supposed to be written. The total marks allocated in the paper were said to be 50 but only amounted to 46.

### ***Nursing papers (2011)***

Another specific subject that was analysed was Nursing, which consisted of 11 questions.

Question one asked candidates to write down what they did in nursing and the experiences they gained in the profession. There were no indications of the kinds of

experience required. Since the experiences required were not specified, candidates indicated what they did in the field. In the marked scripts of this subject the assessor marked the stated experiences as wrong. It was not clear whether this implied that they had not done what they inferred in the explanations, or that they wrongly explained how the experiences were attained. The question inquired as to what was done in the field but did not specify what it was that was required. The question did not indicate whether the assessor was looking for the learning yielded through the practices of nursing or simply a narration of the participation by candidates in nursing activities.

Question two asked candidates to state five characteristics of nursing sick people. The correct answers (marked 'correct' and with full marks) given by candidates included *care* for the sick, *confidentiality*, *patience*, *respect* for patience, *alleviation of suffering* and *working in harmony*. These answers not only required knowledge of the subject matter but obliged the candidate to know the academic vocabulary, as well as to demonstrate an ability to formulate correct and meaningful sentences in the English Language, which most of the candidates lacked. The question was, how different would it be for candidates to articulate the required characteristics in a vocabulary different from the traditional vocabularies known to assessors? What if the candidate used phrases such as '*keeping secrecy of sick person*' rather than '*confidentiality*' - would the candidate still be gaining full marks and be perceived as competent and capable of learning in higher education?

Questions three to seven requested candidates to write about swine flu and how Namibia responded through developments to such a disease. Another question asked was about ethics in nursing and required explanations of preventions of medico-legal hazards.

Question eight was a multiple choice one, seeking knowledge of theory and philosophy in life, knowledge about the founder of the nursing profession, definitions of concepts, knowledge of the nursing council, and knowledge of causes of common diseases such as malaria, gastroenteritis and HIV.

Questions nine to ten required candidates to respond by filling in true or false to statements given in the test paper.

When assessors were asked what they assessed through specific subject matters, they replied that they found out the relationship between practical and theoretical knowledge. Assessors wanted to examine what background information candidates had and how much commitment they displayed as motivation to study in higher education. The test papers for General Management and for Nursing were similar in that both papers tried to solicit knowledge of the subject matter through multiple choice exercises and through the indication of true or false statements. The two were similar in that they did not specify what knowledge they assessed. It was not clear whether the narrative of experiences in the Nursing paper solicited the experience or the learning yielded from it. This study found discrepancies between what the assessors indicated as being what they assessed (practical and theoretical

knowledge). Only theoretical knowledge was assessed and there was no indication in the question papers about assessing practical knowledge or examining the link between theoretical and practical knowledge.

The preceding paragraphs presented, analysed and interpreted data from MAE test papers for candidates gaining entry to UNAM on the basis of MAE. The subsequent paragraphs present data from MAE test papers at PoN.

#### **4.11.2 Knowledge assessed through the Mature Age Entry test papers (PoN)**

##### **Polytechnic of Namibia**

Similar to the case at UNAM, the researcher was unable to obtain the MAE test papers from the years beyond 2010 and 2011. The Mature Age Entry *English Language Question paper* which was provided to the researcher was a 2010/2011 paper. The indication of 2010/2011 implies that this paper was written in 2010 and the same paper written again in 2011. The description of this paper is presented as follows.

##### ***English Mature Age Entry Test 2010/2011***

The instructions on the paper indicate 2½ hours duration of writing the test, with over 100% marks (probably due to miscalculation of marks). The paper comprised four main questions, all of which constituted several sub-questions. Question one tested writing abilities. Candidates were instructed not to write or make any mark on

the test question paper, indicating that this same paper was written for those seeking admission in 2010 as well as 2011.

Question one required candidates to write an essay of not more than 250 words on ONE of the given topics. The topics given included:

1. *Why computers can/cannot replace books*
2. *Other pleasure in life besides alcohol*
3. *The burden of freedom*
4. *Ambition: virtue or vice?*
5. *The corruptive nature of power.*

The prescribed topics maintained the power and controlled knowledge by higher education. UNAM requires the exhibition of ability to articulate in the English Language.

Question two had four sections, all of which aimed at identification of errors in each of the sentences given, and to cross the box in the answer sheet, for example:

*“A country could therefore achieve a maximum rate of 35 points.”*

A                      B                      C                      D

The idea was probably to ask the candidates to identify the error reflected by the symbol in a sentence and give the correct answers from the symbol given in the

answer sheet. The question tested knowledge of the English Language and the ability of candidates to manipulate the English Language correctly.

*In section two* of question two candidates were obliged to choose among four words or phrases provided, to indicate the most suitable to complete the given sentences, such as:

*“Sitting near a fountain is----- to be good for your health.”*

<i>A declared</i>	<i>B told</i>	<i>C said</i>	<i>D stated</i>
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The candidates were required to choose the most appropriate word from the four.

*Section three* of Question 2 asked candidates to choose a word among the provided four words or phrases, which had a similar meaning with the underlined word.

*“ If you eat green mangoes you will get a stomach ache.”*

<i>A fresh</i>	<i>B ready</i>	<i>C mature</i>	<i>D raw</i>
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The candidates needed to know the vocabulary and understand the synonyms.

*Section four* of Question 2 required the candidates to choose a word that did not mean the same as the underlined word in a given sentence. This question was similar to the activities in section three, except that this information solicited the knowledge of opposite words rather than synonyms.

Question three asked candidates to read three texts (which consisted of a paragraph each) and to answer the subsequent questions. Questions to these texts were given as multiple choice with candidates required to choose and circle the correct answer from the four answers provided for each question. The idea was that the questions tested understanding of the content of the passage as well as ability to scan for correct answers. As referred to above, it is difficult to ascertain whether correct multiple choices were a sign of competence or of guesswork.

Question four also required candidates to arrange sentences in the correct order. Four were given, which candidates needed to arrange in the correct sequence. All three exercises that were under Question 4 required the arrangement of sentences. Ability to arrange as per requirements demonstrates the capability and knowledge of the language and hence abilities to study at PoN. The literature indicates that only individual candidates who possessed formal knowledge would be able to score correct answer to facilitate passing the test. Despite the academic nature of the content tested through MAE in this paper, the content was consistent with the data from the interview of the assessor who assessed this subject (see 4.9.2.1) The assessor indicated assessment of abilities to write essays, sequences, parts of speech, skills in reading writing and the capability to express oneself.

The study found many similarities between the content of assessment presented at UNAM and those presented at PoN in regards to MAE test question papers. Both institutions tested Mode 1 knowledge, soliciting pure academic abilities. True or

false exercises were based on precise subject content, which required correct answers. The view of knowledge being exhibited by the two institutions illustrated the adherence of the credit exchange model, which posits that there is only one form of truth. Under this view, candidates were either able to demonstrate the required knowledge or they were not. If they were, they would be labelled as competent and if they were not they were incompetent. The requirements of synonyms and reading comprehensive texts tested the abilities to follow academic demands. The essay writing and answering through multiple choice were all testing the extent to which candidates were able to function academically and their command of the English Language, more than exhibition of learning attained from experiences. However, differences were also identified in that UNAM had separate question papers for the two years under review while PoN presented only one paper for both 2010 and 2011.

### ***Numeracy Test 2010***

The researcher of this study was only able to secure from PoN one copy of the Numeracy question paper for 2010. The numeracy paper titled Mature Age Entry Test (Numeracy) indicated two hours duration and the total of marks was over 68. The instructions on the cover page read that the question paper contained 20 compulsory questions. Candidates were asked to do their rough work in the spaces provided underneath each question and question papers were to be handed in at the end of the examination.

The question paper was divided into section **A** and **B**.

**Section A** was about Quantitative Aptitude and General Logic, which carried the weight of 27 marks. This section consisted of 11 different questions that required candidates to write down the process used to get the answer of the specific sum given. For instance:

*“ 1. Write down the next three numbers in the following sequence 1, -3, 9, -27,.....”*

*Answer* \_\_\_\_\_ . (3)

Candidates were required to do the rough work underneath this question and write the answer in the space given. Other questions solicited issues such as age differences between mother and daughter, meters, true or false calculations, and household finances which required candidates to write *yes* or *no* to appropriate sentences.

**Section B** titled Numeracy had 13 different kinds of questions which solicited knowledge of maximum and minimum scores, costs about telephone calls, operation, evaluation of expressions such as ‘  $34 + 42 - 83 =$  ’ , knowledge of inches such as 12 lines makes one inch, 12 inches makes one foot, how many inches will you get from 72 lines? Reading of pie chart information, given the minimum score of getting into a certain college what should be the least score for admission out of a number given.

Although the content of the test paper was derived from day-to-day activities it was clear that the sums were highly aligned to academic context (such as sequencing -3, 9, -27;  $34 + 42 - 83$  or exercises such as *an adult man has 32 teeth and lost three teeth how many teeth has he lost?* or *how many inches can be derived from 72 lines?*). these exercises solicited disciplinary knowledge which had less meaning to adults learners writing them. The knowledge assessed depicted more disciplinary Mode 1 knowledge than experiential knowledge.

#### **4.11.3 Knowledge Assessed through Portfolio of evidence (PoN)**

The researcher was unable to secure either a copy of the portfolio compiled by students at PoN or a copy of the final test given to students upon fulfilling the 80% correlation between the portfolio and the course outlines of the subject applied for. The researcher was informed that the institution did not keep records of the RPL portfolio or tests. The portfolios are returned to students therefore there were no records of them. It was not possible to compare what the assessors said they looked for in the portfolio and the actual portfolio of evidence provided. The researcher was nonetheless able to get the LawAC2.4 (Procedural Document) which guided the assessment of RPL at the institution.

#### **The Law AC2.4**

The Law AC2.4 (Procedural Document) was a one-paged paper printed on both sides in font 11 (New Roman). It listed procedures and steps that should be followed when administering an assessment of RPL to registered students and to encourage

interested students to apply. The description given in the paper was more on the role of who administered the applications received from candidates than how RPL knowledge was assessed. The paper was not helpful in assisting assessors who would use it as a guide.

#### **4.11.4 Accreditation of learning by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA)**

When officials of the NQA were asked how it conducted the accreditation of learning, the responses were that officials visited the site of learning (the institution in which the learning was to take place) to inspect and ascertain the availability of resources (human, financial, physical) used in learning. The Regulations for the Accreditation of Persons and Organisations (2006, p.5) show consistency with the NQA officials' responses concerning the site visits as means of verification and report of the level of compliance with the criteria of accreditation.

The Regulation for the Accreditation document stipulates that to accredit an institution or persons, the following procedures should apply:

- The NQA receives an application from a provider.
- The application is checked for completeness and inclusion of all required information.
- The complete application is given to the evaluation desk in the NQA that checks on issues about subject matters and site of the training.

- A site visit is organised and conducted by NQA staff and relevant subject experts to validate the delivery of the subjects offered by the provider.
- A draft report is written by the NQA staff who visited the site and this draft report is send to the applicant to verify the information gathered from the visits.
- Once the report is found to be accurate by the provider, a final report is prepared for the accreditation.
- The Accreditation, Assessment and Audit (AAA) committee of the NQA council recommends the application.
- The NQA makes the decision of the accreditation by either accepting the AAA recommendations committee and granting the accreditation certificate for up to three years, or the committee may request further investigation.

As indicated by NQA officials, no RPL accreditation providers were operational at the time of this study (2010), given that none of the institutions applied for the accreditation of RPL either because none of the institutions practiced the assessment of RPL or the NQA simply did not receive any application. However, the researcher was assured that the RPL accreditation procedures would follow the steps indicated above. The indicated steps only outlined the administrative steps to be followed in the process of accreditation, and these in themselves did not indicate how the accreditation of learning was conducted. The in-depth account of what was assessed and ascertained at the site was not very clear from the interviewees as they emphasised the site visit to ascertain the availability of resources. The accreditation implies that observation that normally takes place at the site is to ascertain whether

the resources (human, physical, finances) were available and adequate to support the provision of services. There was no testing of knowledge at the sites.

#### **4.11.5 Summary of Findings from Document Analysis**

The next section presents the findings that emerged from document data analysis.

- The data did not find the reflection of prior experiential learning in all the MAE test question papers, the content of the test papers were strongly aligned to academic content Mode 1 knowledge.
- The knowledge being assessed was formal and candidates' knowledge was only recognised if it fitted the assessment criteria developed by assessors.
- Knowledge assessed through the Mature Age Entry is hierarchically organised into disciplinary components (subjects) and controlled to reflect academic credibility and reason.
- The Law AC2.4 of the Polytechnic did not explicitly state how RPL was supposed to be assessed, rather it outlined the administrative steps to be followed in the process of assessment.
- The Accreditation of learning is about verification of resources (human, finance and physical) and not about assessing the intellectual capabilities of providers.

#### 4.12 Main Findings of the Study

Given the preliminary findings that emerged from data analysis and interpretation in this chapter the researcher scaled down to a reasonable amount of findings to be discussed in Chapter 5. Hence, the following main findings of the study emerged:

- The data revealed that there was no consistency in the way RPL was defined in Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL).
- The study found out that most participants at NIHL did not distinguish between RPL and Experience.
- The data revealed that only Mode 1 knowledge was assessed through MAE in NIHL.
- The written test was the sole assessment method used to assess knowledge through Mature Age Entry in NIHL.
- The data revealed that the development of a portfolio of evidence is another assessment method employed in NIHL to assess RPL
- Prior learning was evaluated through the alignment of the score marks obtained from MAE tests.
- Participants from NIHL were positive about implementing RPL for access in higher education and suggested implementation strategies such as: (a) the integration of RPL within the institutional assessment policy; (b) development of National Assessment Tests and; (c) defined conditions and standards of assessment.

- Accreditations in Namibia ascertain the availabilities of resources more than determining the expertise of the providers.

#### **4.13 Summary**

This chapter has presented, analysed and interpreted data obtained from interviews and institutional document analysis which explored the knowledge assessed through MAE. The chapter explored views held by assessors and administrators concerning the assessment of RPL at respective institutions and the ways used to accredit experiential learning by NQA. The analysis and interpretation of data generated findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the main findings of the study derived from the analysed data collected on the assessment and evaluation of prior experiential learning in Mature Age Entry (MAE) tests conducted in Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL). The findings are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed and the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study. The interviews from research participants supported by MAE test scripts provide useful insights into knowledge being assessed by the two institutions through MAE tests. Interrelated themes are grouped and scaled into main findings that are discussed in this chapter.

Eight major findings have emerged, revealing lack of consistency in the way RPL was defined in NIHL, with most academics interviewed not distinguishing between RPL and Experience. The data shows that only Mode 1 knowledge was assessed in NIHL through MAE, and written tests were the sole assessment methods found to assess knowledge through MAE in NIHL. The development of a portfolio of evidence was another method of assessing RPL found in NIHL. The data shows that prior learning was evaluated against the score marks obtained from MAE tests, and not against the evidence of learning submitted by candidates. Participants from NIHL were positive about implementing RPL for access to higher education and suggested implementation strategies such as: (a) the integration of RPL within the institutional assessment policy; (b) development of National Assessment Tests; and (c) defined

conditions and standards of assessment. It was found that the NIHL require assistance from the NQA to implement RPL and that the accreditation in Namibia ascertains only the availabilities of resources at the site rather than determining the expertise of the providers.

In addition to the discussion of the findings, the chapter presents considerations of the framework of assessing RPL in NIHL. In this section the reference to ‘applicants’ includes both candidates and students.

## **5.2 Discussion of Findings**

This section discusses the findings in detail.

### **Finding 1. No consistency in the definition of RPL by assessors in NIHL**

The data from assessors revealed inconsistency in the way RPL was defined by assessors from NIHL. Three diverse concepts were aligned to RPL (*learning through life or work, experience, and as a programme*). These definitions showed diversity in their meanings as well as in their functions, hence they cannot possibly mean RPL. The definition of learning through life or work can mean receipt of information but not necessarily the value of that information. Learning through life or work can also imply several concepts. The NQA states that RPL is an official acknowledgement of previous learning acquired through any contexts (in a classroom, a project done or in a community). The NQA definition has not specified

the type of learning being referred to (whether learning is formal or non-formal), therefore the definition by the country's Qualification Authority were also inconsistent. The failure of NQA to precisely state the type of RPL being referred to presented a problem in relation to the definition of RPL in the country.

The question of definition of RPL is significant to the study of RPL as it contributes to what knowledge is assessed through MAE for admission to NIHL. Consistency in the definition of RPL is crucial both for assessors and institutions as it creates the foundation upon which to base the practice. Consistency implies understanding of the concept, hence comparability with international practices and avoidance of misunderstanding among practitioners. Despite different labels having been used in the process of RPL in different countries and institutions, the consistent gap in efforts to create a common ground which captures an overall idea behind the different terms of RPL still stands and the indication of the definition remains essentially the same (Stenlund, 2010). The inconsistency presented by the data in this study implies that participants from NIHL had diverse understandings of RPL. This understanding has the potential to disrupt any effort to practice RPL in NIHL. Different perspectives of RPL would hinder transferability of candidates between institutions, given that the understanding of RPL from one institution differs, for instance the ideas behind an *experience* and a *programme* cannot equate learning which RPL represents.

During the interviews at NIHL most of the participants who claimed to assess RPL either through MAE or for exemption purposes defined RPL as an experience or a programme. Stenlund (2010) stresses that when providers are not consistent in the

way they define what they do, the reliability of what is done becomes questionable. Similarly, if participants from NIHL claim to assess RPL yet are inconsistent in the way they define what they assess, the reliability of what is assessed becomes questionable. The implication is that these participants' perceptions and understanding of RPL influence their definitions of RPL, hence the way they assess RPL in their respective institutions.

The lack of consistency in the definition of RPL is akin to indications in the literature (Harris, 1999; Valk, 2009; Conrad, 2009; City & Guilds, 2010). Stenlund (2010) states that definition challenges create difficulties in finding a framework within which to understand and define the various processes that exist within the practice. Harris and Conrad assert that if the language that explains and describes the process of RPL is not clearly defined and articulated, RPL can easily be entangled with better understood concepts. In similar circumstances, despite most assessors agreeing that they assess RPL (synonymous with experiential learning), the exercises in the assessment tools (MAE test papers) did not indicate anything related to the assessment of experiential learning, but rather they tested academic knowledge with which assessors were accustomed. In this case, RPL was consciously or not consciously reduced to a standards norm-related assessment.

Two explanations may be deduced from this. Firstly, there seems to be a lack of understanding of RPL, not only in its conceptualisation but also in the functions as an assessment strategy for learning in MAE and in the allocation of credit for exemption. If the understanding of RPL was present among NIHL participants they would have

created a common ground on which RPL could have been detected, even though with diverse definitions. Failure to align RPL with learning suggests a serious problem that both assessors and institutions face in their effort to implement it. Secondly, inability to provide consistency in the way of defining RPL points to an education system that lacks coordination between policy and practice. It appears that policies are enacted by authority (such as MAE) and without clear explanations being handed down for implementation. The participants from NHIL demonstrated a situation in which they assumed they were assessing RPL, but without understanding their duties in relation to the assessment of RPL through MAE or for exemption purposes.

Conrad (2010) and Stenlund (2010) both argued that policies, procedures and practices of RPL should be clearly defined for effective implementation of RPL. Similarly, the critical philosophy underpinning this study emphasises corrective measures of traditional practices that impede participation and reduction of democratic performances. Officials in institutions need to understand new innovations in institutional cultures and to have their views accommodated to influence strict orders that are imposed on them from above. Critical theory not only critiques but also empowers implementers to influence changes. The emancipation interest also advocates empowerment of workers to understand and have a democratic right to provide inputs in new innovations such as RPL. As much as RPL is an enabling strategy, officials who are entrusted with its implementation should be educated and empowered on its necessities. In this case, officials in the lower ranks would understand conditions that traditionally appeared more prescriptive or

definitive, and so bring about mutual understanding and change of new practices in institutions.

The current understanding revealed by the data is that as many assessors failed to exhibit familiarity with the concept there were not only doubts as to the roles of RPL in NIHL but also concerns in relation to the ability of NIHL to affect comparability of RPL practices with international organisations. If comparability of the practices with international bodies is suppressed due to ignorance by higher education staff, any chances of RPL growing in NIHL should be considered minimal. In particular, if practitioners do recognise what the concept entails they will still have difficulties finding common ground on which to practice it within or across institutions (Conrad, 2010). Therefore, a need exists in Namibia for a common definition that sets a parameter within which practitioners can understand the meaning related to the RPL.

**Finding 2. There was no distinction made between RPL and experience by assessors in NIHL**

The study explored the definitions of RPL from NIHL participants and found that many of the interviewed participants from NIHL did not distinguish between RPL and experience. Many of these participants used RPL interchangeably with experience. In the concept of this study, experience is an action or an event (what a person had done) whereas RPL connotes the recognition of learning derived from the action that one has performed. The two concepts (RPL and experience) imply different definitions and warrant distinction in their conceptions. An experience of

owning a business may not warrant credits but exhibition of learning attained from the business would be assessed and recognised. Dewey (in Zink & Dyson, 2009) writes that experience as an event is not necessarily educational but the learning that comes out of that event is what higher education should examine if it is to find out its scope and depth. At NIHL, many participants do not seem to distinguish between the two (see section 4.2.1.1 and 4.9.1).

The investigation of the distinction between RPL and Experience was necessary to find out if participants understood RPL. This study finds it problematic that many of the assessors who claim to assess RPL now refer to it as 'events'. Should one assume that the content of the test assessed by these assessors contains events which were perceived as RPL? That RPL is associated with learning acquired through work experience does not equate it to experience. Experience was supposed to have been examined to identify the knowledge, skills and competences which occurred in the process. The process of identifying the knowledge, skills and competences contributes to the self-consciousness of the individual. Applicants will interpret what learning means to them, and this engagement provides emancipation of applicants as they dig deeper in analysing and interpreting what the skills and knowledge mean to their lives and to assisting with furthering their education.

The inability of assessors to distinguish RPL from experience leaves much to be desired. The content of assessment becomes questionable, and it is not clear whether assessors do actually assess RPL or ask applicants to retell the events in which they participated. Ord (2009) argues that any relevant knowledge is derived from lived

experiences of the individual. The deliverance from lived experience does not imply reciting the events that happened but engaging within the experience itself to yield the skills, knowledge and competence that emerged from the events participated in. The use of RPL and experience interchangeably connotes a state of confusion among NIHL participants towards the concept of RPL, therefore a need exists to designate a concept that clearly clarifies the differences between RPL and experience.

**Finding 3. Mode 1 is the only knowledge assessed in NIHL**

The finding in relation to what knowledge is assessed in Namibian institutions of higher learning through the process of MAE tests is discussed in this section. Despite the work experience being one of the criteria required to qualify candidates for MAE tests, the data from interviews and document analysis showed that Mode 1 was the only knowledge being assessed through MAE tests at NIHL. It was only the disciplinary subjects' proficiencies and abilities that were included in the tests, such as ability to read, write with fluency, grammar, interpretations and summarising of defined content. The numerical concepts comprised fractions, distances, mass, volume, length and ability to think logically (see section 4.15). Candidates were required to provide correct answers and to write legibly. Equally, the interviews from assessors at PoN indicated that despite portfolios of evidence having been developed by students seeking exemption from specific subjects, passing of the exemption process was not influenced by how much learning evidence was included in them. the ultimate judgment of whether or not the students passes the exemption was placed entirely on the test, which was said to be equivalent to summative examination. It was

the outcome of this test that determined the status of students. The suggestion is that the experiential learning that may have been included by students in the portfolio needed a backup from Mode 1 (test) knowledge if such outcomes of the assessment were to be counted as adequate and valid. The process of assessment in both MAE and portfolios is what counts as knowledge in NIHL.

The question of what knowledge is assessed in NIHL is critical in the assessment of RPL since knowledge determines the application of competences and skills which permit the analysis of credits awards to enable access or exemption. As described in section 1.9.8 and 2.3.3 of this study, the literature has categorised knowledge into Mode 1 and Mode 2 (Mankin; 2009; Harris, 2000). Applying for eligibility based on a criterion of work experiences may have created an assumption in applicants that Mode 2 knowledge was in demand. The assessment tools however sought the extent to which applicants' prior formal knowledge fits the assessment tools. How well the applicants' prior formal knowledge resembled the prescribed test content determined their competence. There were no indications or associations with work experiential learning.

This finding in relation to what knowledge is assessed in higher education aligned well with the literature of RPL, in which Conrad (2010) alleges that the discussion of recognition of prior learning in the context of higher education is about power, pedagogy, nature of knowledge and the traditional role of higher education, which perceives itself usually as 'the gatekeeper of knowledge'. The power is invested in it and the obligation is on the keeper to protect and defend that knowledge. One way of

protecting academic knowledge in this case would be to constrain other forms of knowledge. Namibian higher education tends to preclude other knowledge through assessment systems. Despite work experience being a prerequisite the value of knowledge gained from work was not assessed in any of the higher institutions of learning sampled. What was assessed was the extent to which the knowledge possessed by applicants fitted into academic knowledge and how well. Assessment did not examine other knowledge forms but rather it maintained the traditional assessment rules. Two explanations lie behind the failure to assess work experiential knowledge. It can be deduced that either the NIHL sampled did not demand the assessment of experiential learning (knowledge that emerges from non-formal contexts in which work is part), due to ignorance of other knowledge forms or the institutions had neither the capability nor the ability to assess it, and hence assessment relapsed into what was familiar.

Critical theory is significant in this respect for questioning whose power it is that the assessment solicits only one type of knowledge which excludes other applicants from accessing higher education. Who determines legitimacy of knowledge? It is evident that legitimacy in most cases is determined by educational planners who are the academics and gatekeepers of traditional views of formal knowledge being above other forms of knowledge. Exclusion of people from benefitting from national services impinges not only on the democratic right of those who are denied entry but also on the goal of education, which in itself aspires to provide the educational services to all those who can benefit from it. In this case, not all are provided for and the provision is targeted towards those who can prove acquisition of knowledge from

formal contexts. The determination of what knowledge is valid and the determination of what makes it valid needs serious discussion in NIHL.

Dyson and Keating (2004) assert that academics hang on to the idea of knowledge ownership and their sole right to disseminate it. This suggests that in the perspectives of higher education any knowledge production exterior to the classroom context is contaminated with deficiency and should therefore face the stiffest filtration process if its standard is to meet the academic norms. In the view of this study, the stiffest filtration process applied by NIHL was the testing process on work-based applicants. This study does not suggest that the protection of knowledge is problematic, however, the point of contention is the prevention of other knowledge forms from surfacing and the employment of measures that thwart the effort of accommodating other constituencies that have traditionally been underserved by higher education. It is not clear what causes this rejection in higher education, whether lack of ability to assess foreign knowledge or ignorance of the existence of other knowledge forms. Wheelahan et al. (2003) also reported that some academics feel that people who graduated from RPL lacked something that other graduates had and that the qualifications gained through RPL lacked legitimacy. It should be noted that the assessment is undertaken by individual institutions, and they have the power to design strategies that ensure equivalency between the experiential learning of the applicants and the academe that they trust. Instead of praxis, higher education matches whatever knowledge is brought by applicants against their predefined content and methods of testing. In the process of coercing other knowledge forms, higher education tends to lose equity of access.

This study is in agreement with the view that education must be protected and legitimacy of standards adhered to, however, flexibility should be built into the protection measures to accommodate processes and interest in other learning dimensions. The toleration of other views distinguishes the uniqueness of the academe. In an example given by Osman (2003) in relation to students' construction of portfolio from work experiences at the University of Witwatersrand, the idea required students to articulate, analyse and reflect on their work experiences. Osman explained how students' work experiences showed them a richness and diversity that could not be matched by the experience accustomed to teaching in traditional programmes and that experiential learning revealed to them the gap in the curriculum. The example illustrates positive attitudes towards accommodating other forms of knowledge. The conceptual epistemology of assessors in relation to RPL should be embedded in the understanding that despite the function of knowledge being the same it is created at different locations under different circumstances. It contains different vocabularies and cultures, and is accustomed to traditional practices of the context in which such knowledge was developed. Therefore, it is not fair to standardise the testing of knowledge in an effort to yield Mode 1 knowledge.

Given the data, it is apparent that what counts as knowledge at NIHL is the proficiency and ability to use the English Language and other equivalent competences, therefore, it can be inferred that applicants who were assessed through MAE in NIHL were those with the ability to present their prior formal knowledge in required subject domains and who were perceived by assessors as possessing correct

information in terms of academic style. The implications, as also indicated by Ralphs (2008), are directed to applicants who may be new to the Higher Education environment and institutional demands, and who may have little time to be initiated into the ways of thinking and reasoning that are considered appropriate to the academy. These applicants were most prone to fail the test not because they did not possess the knowledge of their subject matter, but because they were not able to logically express themselves in the required academic standards of communication. This applies to applicants who for some reason do not use academic communication skills at their workplaces, have less fluent command of the English language, are currently excluded through assessment strategies, and are labelled incompetent. They therefore fail the MAE tests.

The findings of this study showed that what is assessed in NIHL is Mode 1 knowledge, as there was no evidence of soliciting knowledge acquired through work or life experiences. Institutions should embrace knowledge and advance the view that although incoming knowledge is differently acquired it shares the same validity and rigour, hence both forms of knowledge warrant the same recognition. In a situation in which boundaries between these knowledge cultures are ignored and one knowledge forms becomes entwined with the other form, the questions of what counts as knowledge will persist. The findings of this study indicate a need to engage Higher Institutions of Learning by virtue of their roles as knowledge creators, to debate and engage in discussions about what counts as knowledge in RPL. This should then become the determinant factor of the assessment of knowledge, not the site in which such knowledge was produced.

**Finding 4. Written tests were the sole assessment methods used in NIHL**

The data revealed that written tests were the sole assessment methods found to assess learning through MAE in NIHL. The assessment of RPL is understood by this study to refer to the testing of learning that was acquired from work experience before the commencement of the current study. The MAE tests in NIHL consisted of selected short questions and answers, comprehension passages, multiple choice questions, true and false statements and matching words. Kotze (2004) calls this type of testing method *objective* testing, in which applicants are required to use their cognitive abilities to recall prior formal knowledge. Similarly, the interviews and document analysis clearly indicated subject knowledge as being pure academic proficiencies presented in MAE in NIHL. It must be noted that applicants who are likely to request the services of RPL are those who need assistance to pursue their education and language development. To ask these applicants to give grammatically correct formulated responses would only create in them a feeling of exclusion and might promote anxiety towards learning. Stenlund (2010) has also advised that judgment of assessment should measure what has been learnt irrespective of the source of learning or ability to articulate, because articulation in a language does not always equate to intelligence. The researcher concurs with Stenlund in that ability to articulate grammar correctly does not give an indication of the in-depth nature of learning that a person has acquired. However, in NIHL, it appears that ability to write correct answers and to score high marks in the test indicates competence.

It is worth noting also that decisions made on the basis of test results have significant consequences for applicants, assessors and policymakers. The results derived from these tests can serve as predictive power to indicate eligibility for entry or a signal of incapability to cope with higher learning. Using grades to draw conclusion or make decisions about applicants who derived their learning experiences from diverse contexts may inevitably display discrete judgment of applicants as they do not demonstrate their all-inclusive performances. In a test method, achievement of certain percentages is the attainment of an identifiable level of knowledge, but this attainment neither illustrates the identifiable part of the proficiencies that have been reached nor the level of learning acquired. From a similar viewpoint, Saddler (2010) has argued that if the allocated grade is to be trusted as an authentic representation of a student's level of academic achievement, all the elements that contribute to that grade must qualify as achievements. The researcher concurs with Sadler in that achievement in the assessment of learning, irrespective of the source of that learning, should accommodate the representation of work experiential achievements. Since it may prove problematic to acquire authentic representation between learning from academic institutions and workplace learning, it is more feasible that representation of skills be sought in the field of practice.

Two problems against the test methods in MAE in NIHL have been discussed in the literature and these are akin to the Namibian situation. Firstly, the content presented in the question papers constitutes a problem. It has not been taught to candidates to enable them to cope with a standard question paper in the respective academic domains. Since applicants have not attended these assessors' classes they will have

difficulty in understanding what constitutes correctness of a response. They may not be able to figure out what the right answer is, or on which basis it becomes right. Despite applicants being required to possess learning from work experience and formal Grade 10, the NIHL sampled decided to assesses pure academic knowledge. It was not explained why the NIHL decided to align its assessment with Grade 10 knowledge only and leave out the requirements of work experiential learning. An ideal MAE test would be one that determines the level of competence attained by candidates, irrespective of site. It is practically unfair to assume that candidates who by virtue of their employment history have the capability to reason and present their work learning into pure subject learning outcomes.

It can therefore be argued that the test method as specified by NIHL insinuates divisive mechanism in education with the aim of promoting only one form of knowledge dimension while ignoring the other. Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2010) also argued against the use of one assessment method in RPL, advocating instead a combination of assessment methods. They trust that this would give flexibility to applicants to participate in the assessment, especially where demonstration of learning is involved and applicants are able to explain their learning in the language of practice. The ability to use their own learning would facilitate deeper reflection of their learning and would give them an insight of the self, to identify the degree of knowledge they possess and to understand what is required of them. The candidate can write up the experiential learning, and indicate how they acquired such learning from experience. For instance, a carpenter who has been making tables and chairs in the workshop can give a speech about what he or she has learnt from making them for

a five star hotel, and how different it would be making for a three star hotel. Also, if making tables for five, four or two star hotels constitutes the requirement of gaining entry to a diploma course at university or any higher education course, such a candidate should be allowed to use his or her learning experiences to advance to higher education.

The reflection on and analysis of learning gives an individual pleasure of knowing and self-satisfaction that adults look for in learning. It illustrates the degree to which a person has acquired learning rather than being required to answer correctly the standard test questions about a carpentry subject. As can be expected, the demand to answer questions correctly will eventually impinge on the style and language of presentation. The expectation of the examiner (who is from the higher institution) and the reality of the candidate may present a wide gap, which has the potential to disadvantage the candidate in the process. The idea of recognising learning from experience was to accommodate the philosophy of emancipation. Applicants should be empowered to critically question what disadvantages them and question the legitimacy of this exclusion. From Chapter 1 (section 1.1 in table 1.1), the number of *applicants* and the number of *enrolled* differs greatly. It is not clear what causes such differences, however, it can be speculated that of the many people who apply for access only a few were able to write the correct answers expected by assessors.

The second problem identified was the testing environment. That the tests were held at higher education institutions, in environments different from work contexts, would have been intimidating to adult learners. The adults who sought access through MAE

have been out of the education system for long and may no longer be comfortable with academic contexts. They needed to be initiated back into the system so as to feel comfortable. Adult education theories have emphasised creating conducive environments for adult learners. The researcher believes that these may have not been created, given that the content of the test was not only foreign but that the style and reasoning required was also different from what the adult learners were accustomed to. It would have been interesting to find out from NIHL how much of the experiential knowledge was brought by applicants to the academy, and whether NIHL made an effort to harmonise Mode 1 of the academy, and whether Mode 2 applied knowledge or NIHL instead cemented the differences that exist between Mode 1 and 2. It would have also been informative to find out how much work experiential learning contributes to the criteria of assessment, and how it aids accessibility to higher institutions. Instead of responding to these critical questions, NIHL appear to have used the test question papers in MAE either to ignore the learning that they themselves requested candidates to possess or the institutions had actually faced challenges in applying the assessment of the said forms of knowledge. Hence, they decided to distance themselves from testing prior experiential learning through MAE and instead placed emphasis on examining academic knowledge.

In advice given by Michelson, Mandell and Contributors (2004) the main task in the assessment of prior experiential learning includes the development of a narrative or an essay in relation to an incident which describes the knowledge acquired from work or life experiences. In this way knowledge from experience is assessed and then measured to see the extent to which it fits the expected learning outcomes for access

or for credit award. Since candidates enter the MAE on the basis of work experience one would expect examination of learning to derive from work environments. An essay type in which applicants would be asked to describe the knowledge they had acquired from performing an event would have demonstrated an assessment of experiential knowledge. Peters et al. (in Michelson et al., 2004) have also explained the use of learning outcomes as significant tools in equating experiential knowledge to formal academic learning. As explained, prior learning needs to be formulated in terms of the learning outcomes, demonstrating how the learning from experience matches the learning outcomes of an existing module. Applicants articulate a series of learning outcomes that match the experiential learning claimed, and relate these to the subject matter of the course applied for (Michelson et al., 2004, p.164). The indication of the assessment portrays the thawing of experiential learning into academic knowledge. It becomes problematic for applicants who find it difficult to align experiential learning to academic subjects' formulated learning outcomes because the two modes of knowledge are not the same, rather the forms of knowledge complement each other.

The MAE test papers were subject-oriented and required candidates to conform to the questions asked and answer the questions correctly. This was purely academic Mode 1 knowledge, which does not entirely conform to demand of reflection in the prior experiential learning (Michelson et al., 2004). In other words, the data affirmed that the validity of knowledge assessed in MAE at NIHL was ascertained by the extent to which it resembled formal knowledge and was not defined on the basis of its functionality. This view was consistent with that of Joosten-ten Brinke et al. (2010),

for whom measuring learning and knowledge is often better carried out through a combination of assessment methods, because grades are not clear indicators of what precisely went wrong. It is not clear whether an applicant failed because he or she did not relate academic learning to experiential learning, lacked academic writing style or failed to meet the instructions at the expectations of the assessors.

It should also be noted that the test *as a method* of assessment on its own does not constitute a problem, but rather the problem is invested in the content of assessment used in the tests. If the allocation of grades in tests could strictly equal the quality, breadth and depth of the applicant's achievement then the assessment outcomes would be logical and legitimate. In agreement with the grades being equivalent to the breadth and depth of the assessment content, Stenlund (2010) commented on the integrity of academic achievements, recommending that assessment evidence be of sufficient scope and allow inferences to be drawn about the underlying achievements. Critical theory fits well with the idea of meeting the required breadth and scope of assessment content since it is the deeper understanding of learning which yields appropriate learning to fit in the required breath and scope. The ability of candidates to judge such knowledge and to report it constitutes emancipation of knowledge and professional growth.

**Finding 5. The portfolio of evidence is another assessment method employed in NHIL to assess RPL**

Despite the assessment of RPL being conducted in a variety of methods, including challenge exams, tests, interviews, demonstrations and simulated activities, the portfolio of evidence is purposely considered by literature (Michelson et al., 2004; Joosten-ten Brinke, 2010) as appropriate for articulating and evidencing the prior experiential learning of applicants. The development of a portfolio of learning evidence is argued as suitable for orienting students into academia and providing them with an exposure to the ways in which academic knowledge is gathered, organised and used in disciplinary fields. Portfolios offer a reflective bridge between formal and non-formal learning to identify knowledge and skills gained through work or life experiences. The assessment of experiential learning through the portfolio of evidence is rooted in the social and economic contexts in which adult workers are encouraged to enter further education through the recognition of their previous learning. The portfolio is grounded in the critical theory, in which applicants are given an opportunity to question their own learning, identify, reflect and judge what they have acquired through experience destined to emancipate the applicants to understand the realities as demanded by NIHL.

The data indicated that only mode 1 knowledge is valued in NIHL, hence the assessment of the portfolio seemed to have been directed towards that knowledge. Applicants submit applications for RPL to be exempted in any course offered in their curriculum and are then required to develop a portfolio of their learning. The

evidence of learning should meet 80% correlation with course content, for which the application is made. It is on the basis of what is submitted in the portfolio that evaluators verify the correlation of the 80% which subsequently determines the appropriateness of the student to write the summative test (RPL test). Upon confirmation of the 80% correlation the applicant is allowed to write a summative test which is equal in content, scope and breadth to the summative examination. The RPL test is: *“set and moderated at the same standards as the assessment that students go through at the end of the whole semester course. If the applicant passes the test, he or she gets the exemption.”* This means the results from the RPL test provide an ultimate indication of whether or not exemption can be awarded.

Notwithstanding, the development of portfolio in NIHL and its reflection thereof appeared to have been mired by constraints that hindered its fulfilment. Three specific hindrances were identified in the NIHL. Firstly, the location of the portfolio in higher education is focused on orienting students into the discourse of formal education and helping them articulate their experiential learning in relation to the conventions and to the specifications of the academy (Ralph, 2008). It cannot be affected in NIHL as only one mode of knowledge seems to be valued. The orientations could be effective in contexts in which acknowledgement is made that different forms of knowledge (Mode 1 and Mode 2) exist and the understanding which portrays that although they can be expressed in different ways, their functions are the same and can be valued equally. There will be nothing to orientate, given that the intention was already directed to Mode 1 knowledge. Applicants were required either to fit in with the academic requirements or be perceived as incompetent to

access higher education. The system appears to retain some of its knowledge so that applicants would not be critical enough and would still lack the potential to enable emancipation from the bondage of Mode 1 knowledge. Applicants are not entirely freed from lack of articulation and presentation of skills in the different culture of knowledge, but rather they retain what they brought with them, without any additional education in it.

Secondly, the development of a portfolio alone requires skills such as self-evaluation, ability to gather evidence, identification of the evidence, and ability to know which evidence relates to which learning outcomes. The inclusion of these skills would depict the emancipation interest in which applicants were allowed to learn and articulate on their own, however, the question remains as whether these skills and competences were given to applicants in preparation of the development of the portfolios. Self-learning, through which applicants were supposed to have attained their education, may not meet the academic comparisons even if they have acquired equivalent learning to that of higher education. It would be unfair to expect them to know the academic genre and to allow them to navigate into the differences of these knowledge functions. NIHL may have assumed that knowing the skills implied ability to display them in any context, including formal education at higher institutional level. There were no indications of applicants who succeeded in exemption in the institutions sampled, it was impossible to relate what applicants can do in relation to what was required. Equally, if the portfolio does not count towards influence in the decision-making of the exemption, why should it be required as a separate phase in the process? Would the summative assessment not be divided into

two parts, such as writing an essay about prior experiential learning and an RPL test? The development of portfolio is a method used but its value has been absorbed by summative tests, causing the redundancy of the method.

Thirdly, apart from the responsibility of informing students about the availability of the provision of RPL services in the institutions and the procedures of applying for it, there were no other supportive mechanisms given to applicants during the process of compiling their portfolio of evidence. Participants in NIHL explained through interviews that they did not assist students in compiling the portfolio of evidence to avoid influencing the process of the portfolio development (section 4.9.6). Simosko and Associates (1988, p.27) outlined three elements necessary for the development of a portfolio: identification of learning; expression of learning in terms of the required level or standards and the relation of acquired learning to overall education; and career objectives. These components constitute skills that require training for someone to be able to execute them. The expectation of the academics (assessors) appears by virtue of students being registered at higher institutions to suggest they automatically possess the knowledge and capacity to act and perform whatever high education demands. The process of developing a portfolio requires them to explore a process of translating knowledge from one culture (experiential) to another (traditional academic culture) on their own. This process is not easy and is actually an academic one which on its own warrants teaching. That applicants were expected to know and be able to do it on their own is problematic.

PoN Researchers (Harris, 1999; Osman, 2003; Michelson et al., 2004) have indicated that tutors or assessors should avail themselves to assist candidates in the process of developing portfolios and that their value lies in their potential to bring students into active engagement with Mode 1 and 2 cultures of knowledge. Students are assisted in the process of compiling their evidence and reflect on what they have acquired from experience. Michelson et al., (2004) and Ralphs (2008) also advance the idea of assisting candidates in the process of portfolio development, stating that the assistance offers an opportunity for the applicants to interact with their self and to understand the two cultures of knowledge. However, it would require applicants to be initiated into the praxis process of the two modes of learning and to yield an understanding of their capabilities. They were not assisted in the process of self-reflection by external forces, so as to boost critical thinking, therefore the process of reflection remained inactive and the self-actualisation that adults seek in education remained un-promoted. This instance does not suggest that only through formal instructions can praxis occur, but that higher education demanded specific proficiencies gives a clue of what and how knowledge should have been sought from the experiential learning attained by applicants. In the absence of this assistance the quality of reflective exercise, and hence the final product of portfolio content in NIHL, remains questionable.

In addition, that PoN assessors did not assist students to compile the portfolio violates the principles of a developmental model of portfolios. A portfolio of evidence reinforces the aspects of pedagogy and the method is highly associated with the developmental models of assessing RPL. The model is perceived as developmental

since it adheres to seeking an engagement and harmonising between the two boundaries of learning (experiential and academic learning) (Osman & Castle, 2002). However, the tendencies of harmonising the two forms of knowledge did not appear to have been the target of practicing the development of their portfolios in NIHL. The PoN appeared not to value Mode 2 knowledge as it explicitly assessed only Mode 1 knowledge.

There are two possible explanations as to why NIHL do not assist applicants with the development of portfolios. It can be argued that either assessors at NIHL lack the capability to conduct the assessment of RPL or they themselves lack an understanding of the differences between Mode1 and Mode 2 knowledge, and hence have no idea that the two warrant separate assessment. It should also be noted that the assistance that NIHL could provide applicants with possible explanations of how they could identify, express and relate prior academic learning to assessment criteria. The NIHL was supposed to guide applicants to look critically at the evidence they identified and interrogate it in relation to what was required by the institution. Assistance should be limited to presenting information for clarification of the requirements of the portfolio and should not be about compiling the portfolio together with the student. Therefore, in a situation in which candidates were not assisted with the information about the compilation of portfolio, the method employed might not be interpreted as a developmental model of RPL. There was no development of professional growth given to applicants.

Generally, tests were the exclusive assessment tool used in NIHL, depicting the use of the credit exchange model. The developmental model was supposed to seek ways of valuing prior experiential knowledge through the portfolio on an equal basis to academic learning, rather than succumbing to its entire assessment results as in the credit exchange model. The absorbance of the assessment results into Mode 1 knowledge uplifts the credit exchange and cements the formal knowledge as the only authentic form of knowledge. The data in this study corresponds with the literature in that the assessment of formal knowledge takes precedence over other forms of knowledge, such as Mode 2 knowledge. It is not clear whether the focus of MAE in NIHL was intended to target the equivalence between formal knowledge and work experiential learning, or simply to seek the fulfilment of the requirements of higher education.

In Namibia, the ideal assessment process of RPL would be to equate Mode 1 with Mode 2 knowledge. In this process, the assessment of prior non-certificated knowledge is conducted against NQF levels rather than against subject learning outcomes or workplace competencies. Workplace competencies can only be used as a norm for workplace purposes, such as for promotions. Triby (2009) advised that equivalency should not be simply between experiential and formal knowledge but between worth and value of knowledge. The idea does not necessarily request subject learning outcomes against experiential learning, nor confine itself to a transformational model of RPL, which can emancipate the notion that knowledge is valuable in itself and can be accepted, even if it is not aligned to academic learning.

The use of the Namibia Qualifications Framework Level descriptors has the potential to provide the necessary equivalencies as advanced by literature.

**Finding 6. Prior learning was evaluated against the score marks obtained from MAE tests.**

The finding for the research question solicited how NIHL evaluates and accords RPL academic recognition for admission or exemption purposes. The findings of this study revealed that knowledge at NIHL is evaluated and accorded academic recognition based on the marks attained in tests and not by worth of learning evidence submitted by candidates. The MAE and summative RPL test defines whether or not the student qualifies for exemption.

“The pass or fail status is determined by the score marks attained in the test. The candidate must obtain 35% for certificate purposes, 40% for Diploma and 50 % for undergraduate degree courses. The marks justify the pass or failure of candidate, there are no other procedures for marks allocations.” (Assessor 8, UNAM).

“Learning is evaluated through the score marks attained in the test. We do not have any other means of evaluation other than the score marks.” (Assessor 1, PoN)

From the two quotations above, it appears as if the allocation of score marks justifies the competence of a candidate.

It is significant that the evidence of learning is evaluated to ascertain how much of the prior learning is exhibited by applicants and to what extent such learning fits the

assessment criteria. As revealed by data, NIHL weigh the competences of applicants based on attained mark grades from tests and not from the prior experiential learning. This system of ascertaining competence based on marks has been debated in literature as problematic in authenticating prior experiential learning. The allocation of marks employed in NIHL follows the traditional academic procedures which contemplate that the higher the marks attained from the test, the higher the intelligence of the applicant, who is hence perceived ready to study in higher education. In other words, the authentication of competence in NIHL does not clearly explain how a certain applicant with 80% gained from the test acquired more learning from experience than one who attained 40%. As discussed in this chapter, various issues may impinge on the responses of the applicant, such as lack of articulation and vocabularies and writing styles, but these cannot be equated to knowledge acquired. The ability to articulate does not necessarily equate with intelligence, and therefore the marks do not explicitly give reasons for the extent to which an applicant has performed, and cannot represent the evidence of his or her learning.

The interpretation of the data suggests that this procedure deceives the purpose of assessing prior learning since experiential learning cannot fit well with formal knowledge assessment. The original idea for the development of the portfolio was to provide an opportunity to applicants to reflect and demonstrate the learning acquired and to show how such experiential learning equated with academic learning on an equivalent basis and not on exact content. In the MAE test, the scores of 35%, 40% and 50% warrant a pass in certificate, diploma and degree courses respectively. The questions arise, do the scope and standards of 35% of learning evidence equal the

total value of learning required to enter a certificate? On what basis are these marks defined and who determined such resolution? The NIHL has aligned the candidates' work experiential learning (if any) against academic learning as determined by ability to answer questions correctly in the test. The two institutions assess formal subjects' knowledge through norm-referenced assessment and equate the marks to the intelligence of the candidates. The findings of this study indicate that despite work experience being a qualifying criterion for MAE, none of the NIHL explored in this study assessed work learning by aligning it against the assessment criteria, rather it explained how experiential learning was ignored against academic learning.

Concurring with Zink and Dyson (2009), experience is socially constructed, therefore individuals who lived the experience should be given a chance to demonstrate their realities. The evaluation of test results given to applicants who lived the experiences demonstrates the construction of foreign learning that is imposed on them, thus undervaluing all that has been previously attained by applicants. The reflection of the lived experience should not be absorbed into subject content or ignore the self-consciousness and learning in the industrial perspectives. Education planners need to understand that some of the educational policies (in this case through assessment) impinge on the democratic rights of people by preventing them through assessment and evaluation constraints. The ideas for which MAE and the exemptions were designed may have been virtuous towards assisting adult workers who wish to return to education, but the restrictions put forward through assessment and admission prohibit access by the same people that education intended to protect. If Namibia aspires to be a nation that contributes to knowledge development and management it

should use critical theory to question its policy development concerning MAE and the emancipation interest to free people from restrictive policies, and create democratic but authentic assessment procedures which provide opportunities for all.

There are two possible explanations for lack of aligning work experience with assessment criteria. One is the epistemological challenge in the case of assessors of experiential learning, given that Mode 2 knowledge is invisible, complex and difficult to assess, and that assessors may not recognise it. The assessors then relapse into what they know best (academic discourse). Secondly, assessors may have misperceived RPL to the extent that they were unable to differentiate it from subject knowledge. For Conrad (2010), there is a language difficulty in RPL that creates misperceptions in the RPL terminology. The term is confused with ‘transfer of credit’, which adheres to credits from formal learning and not necessarily to competences from experience. In earlier studies, Osman (2003) suggests that if RPL is to be used for access it is appropriate to assess a candidate’s potential to succeed in higher education rather than assessing mere academic calculations. Osman’s suggestion implies ability to equate the value of experiential learning against the institutional criteria which are believed to be essential for managing learning after admission. Criteria for such assessment are determined and specified to control whether the candidate has, for instance, the necessary writing skills because he or she will be required to write assignments. Anybody without such skill will be rated incompetent for admission.

Having argued for an evaluation system based on democracy and authenticity, it should be noted that for an applicant to succeed through RPL he or she must satisfy the requirements of the host institution, and show potential to develop academic skills in order to succeed in higher education, however, the requirements should not become a weapon to discriminate against those whose skills do not resemble the academic way of exhibiting knowledge. Applicants must first be provided with an opportunity to exhibit what they have learnt and become consciously aware of the gaps between what they possess and what they still need to learn. It is therefore vital that the purpose of assessment defines the tools of assessment rather than vice versa (Osman, 2003). The tests and evaluation process of prior learning in NIHL were found to be so biased towards one mode of knowledge that it became increasingly difficult to ascertain (external of marks) who qualified to access NIHL. The test system and its evaluation did not provide for all people who had an interest in accessing higher education in the country. Institutions of higher learning can allow candidates to write what they have learnt from experience and then use such content to examine what knowledge is lacking from the evidence. If such knowledge is below entry level, the candidate fails the MAE.

**Finding 7. Participants from NIHL were positive about implementing the assessment of prior non-certificated learning for access to higher education**

The findings of the research question in relation to administrators' views regarding the implementation of assessing prior non-certificated learning (referred to as RPL) in

NIHL revealed that all participants from them were positive about implementing RPL for access to higher education and suggested implementation strategies such as: (a) the integration of RPL within the institutional assessment policy; (b) development of National Assessment Tests; (c) training of assessors; and (d) defined conditions and standards of assessment.

The question of exploring views of administrators in the implementation of RPL for access was crucial as they have direct input on new and innovative aspects related to admission in their respective institutions. The negative aspirations about prior learning would influence and impinge on the successfulness of implementing PncL in NIHL. Despite administrators from NIHL having shown interest in implementing RPL for access in NIHL, they have suggested four aspects which constitute the discussions of this section.

*The integration of RPL within the institutional assessment policy*

Administrators were consistently positive about the implementation of RPL in NIHL, and all suggested it should be integrated within the institutional assessment policy, not practiced as a discrete activity. An institutional RPL policy is critical in the implementation of RPL as it defines what counts as knowledge as perceived by the institution, and this understanding influences the knowledge and practices, including the method of assessment, the credits to be awarded, and the evaluation of the required learning thereof. The policy determines the scope of knowledge to be

assessed and quality assurance mechanisms. In other words, the institutional policy successfully directs the implementation of RPL in an institution.

The study found that none of the institutions sampled had an institutional RPL policy. A two-page document, known as AC2.4, was identified at one of the institutions. This was made reference to by only two different participants, one of whom called it a 'policy' while the other referred to it as a 'procedural document'. The document gave brief explanatory information for users about the measures to be followed when applying for RPL. It made no reference to how it was to be assessed or evaluated, and there was nothing that directed its practice in NIHL. That only two research participants mentioned the AC2.4 during the interviews implies the unpopularity of this document among staff members. Policies are known to maintain levels of consistency and standardisation across all participants in an institution. It is unlikely that a policy concerning RPL would be foreign to the very people who claim to assess it.

Conrad (2010) is also in agreement with the significance of institutional policy, stating that lack of an official framework to regulate implementation can impinge on the quality of RPL provision, and create confusion on the use of terminology among staff members and eventually the practice of the concept at the institution. A policy on its own should not be seen as the saviour of a system, since a cohesive one may be available, but not all players would make reference to it. It requires the will and interest of policymakers at the institution to understand the rationale for offering RPL services. They need to recognise the demands of RPL to enable quality and

democratic services for all those who are seeking RPL services. Therefore, one can argue that currently the practice of RPL at NIHL looks as if it is constrained by lack of guidance, which may have contributed to limitations such as the interchangeable use of RPL and experience.

The institutional policy should guide what credit is awarded, how much of it and whether to focus on specific credit or general. The differences between the two were outlined by Harris (2000), with specific credit given to competencies that directly match the skills and knowledge specified in the national standards or course learning outcomes, and general credits being flexible as they allow broader alignment of knowledge to come from diverse contexts. The NQF Level descriptors, for instance, may be appropriate to facilitate the need for equivalency of general credit.

The integration of RPL within the institutional assessment policy will be effective provided the prior learning is defined without ambiguity and the process of recognition clearly outlined. When staff members are clear on their expectations they can self-assess and so maintain the required standards. However, as Smith (2011) argues, if the RPL department is placed in a section in which its specific duties are not clarified, it risks being marginalised and RPL officials given other work, such as administrative duties. Therefore, it is imperative that the institutional policy defines the knowledge to be assessed and outlines measures on how, RL should be evaluated and accorded formal recognition.

*Development of national assessment tests*

The data revealed that participants from NIHL required the assistance of the NQA to design a national set of assessment content that would assure that candidates graduating from RPL systems are capable and sufficiently robust to cope with higher learning. The assurance of the system is essential for the maintenance of quality, however, it is higher education itself that is responsible for assessing applicants. The institutions themselves should define their needs and requirements. It is of concern that institutional participants ask for the development of the national assessment tests, given that NIHL consist of institutions with various courses in diverse fields and targets. The request of NIHL to the NQA suggests insecurity in developing and implementing an RPL system. The concern features in literature on institutions of higher learning, with doubts expressed as to whether RPL's provisions would lower the value of their institutional standards. The participants may have doubted their ability to provide an RPL system with value, hence requesting the NQA to rescue them. The training of providers would therefore answer any doubts.

*Training and definition of conditions and standards of assessment*

Another doubt exhibited by NIHL concerned conditions under which RPL would be practised by them. Again, participants requested the NQA to develop a condition of assessment framework which would guide the assessment of RPL in the country. Despite such requests displaying lack capability by NIHL to deal with RPL, due to lack of training among institutional staff members, the NQA is an institution that is

mandated by the Namibian cabinet to assure quality through accreditation services, hence the quality of outcomes for transferability of graduates to other institutions is the responsibility of the NQA and the NCHE. Harris (2000), commenting on the concerns of institutions about quality and maintenance of standards, advised that assessment of RPL is an 'inexact science' which has no one right answer, hence the notion of fitness for purpose should prevail.

The national assessment test can be referred to a positivist view of control in which applicants have less to contribute. In such a notion, applicants will not be granted an opportunity to reflect and be free to judge what they have learnt, given that the content of the test will still be pre-determined and the correct answers outlined. The RPL is grounded in social upliftment of citizens, in which applicants are expected to engage in personal involvement with the self both in feeling and in cognition. If national content is given to applicants, what is it that will be tested? As discussed in this study, ability to articulate in the English Language does not equate with knowledge of the professional area that is required of candidates. Therefore, institutions aspiring to implement RPL should take a stand and decide what it is that they wish to do with RPL. It should be noted that the researcher of this study does not propose the use of vernacular in the assessment of RPL, however the assessment of English should not surpass the assessment of content of learning. The aim of institutions should be to develop and educate rather than educate only those with capability to articulate in English language.

*The data indicates a low enrolment rate of applicants to access NIHL through MAE*

Participants from NIHL specifically indicated that MAE was a provision given to a 10% quota of all the annual admissions. Due to shortage of spaces in the institution the data revealed that only the best few candidates usually managed to gain access through this route. This indication affirms the postulates made in the statement of the problem (section 1.3) that only a few of the candidates who pass through the MAE route access NIHL, and eventually contribute to the goals of widening access to higher education. It is hoped that the suggested framework for RPL in higher education will contribute to remedying admission constraints by changing the status quo on assessment for access towards a democratic assessment system which accommodates knowledge for its value and not on the basis of where it was produced.

The data also revealed English language proficiency among candidates who seek entry into NIHL as the prominent threat and constraining factor that can hamper the successful implementation of RPL in NIHL. The data from NIHL indicated that candidates had the required professional knowledge related to subject area of their field of study, but lacked the vocabulary and linguistic articulation skills to express what they knew. Therefore, the poor expression of candidates in English has the potential to impinge on what they submit as evidence of their learning. It can also be argued that the lack of English proficiency exhibited by some applicants stemmed from an inability to read and understand the content presented in the test questions, besides the methods with which applicants were required to answer those questions. Testing applicants in what they know may result in different perspectives.

The finding concerning the English Language is crucial to NIHL as the decision has to be made on whether it would be assessed in RPL. Institutions should clearly articulate its impact and whether or not it will be assessed concurrently with the content subject area or as a separate activity on its own. Currently, the data indicated that in MAE, failure in English Language implies failing the whole perspective of MAE. It should be clearly explained whether a similar route should be expected or alterations considered. This study calls for a situation in which the assessment of RPL would concentrate on the skills and knowledge of the applicant in relation to their professional study areas. English is essential for communication, however it should be used to mediate assistance and support of candidates who are willing to study further. Applicants should be examined with the understanding that identified gaps will depict in which parts of the English Language they need upgrading, and whether or not NIHL will assist in closing them.

Andersson and Fejes (2010) also questioned why applicants were not allowed to demonstrate their learning evidence in the language and vocabulary used in the community of their practice, and in which the required skills and knowledge were developed. It would need training of examiners to make visible the prior learning in the assessment tools and ability of assessors to identify the different knowledge dimensions.

**Finding 8. Accreditation in Namibia is voluntary and ascertains the availability of resources more than determining the expertise of providers**

The question soliciting how NQA accredited learning acquired non-formally found that NQA ascertains learning through an accreditation system. The data from both interviews and document analysis indicated that the NQA verifies learning through the provision of accreditation of providers. This is voluntary and concentrates on verifying the availability of resources at institutional sites through interviews, visits and observations. The data showed that the accreditation of prior experiential learning had not taken place at the time of the interviews (November 2011), due to the unavailability of a national policy on RPL at the time.

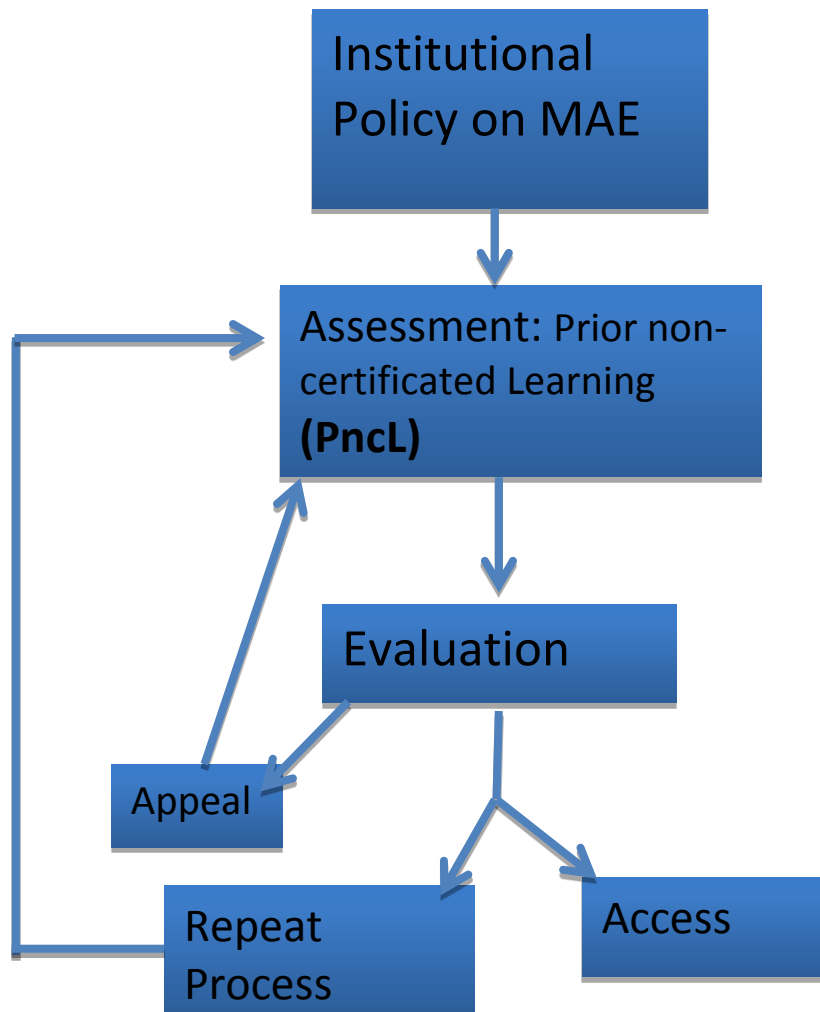
The accreditation is conducted by a group of NQA officials and subject and equipment specialists. The group visits the educational sites and observes facilities, inspects qualifications offered by providers, and examines defined procedures of assessment, the descriptions of how assessment is conducted and the capacity of providers to assess learning. Upon the site visit the group prepares a report recommending to the Accreditation Committee whether or not to consider the award of an accreditation certificate to the provider.

The process of accreditation raises two main concerns. Firstly, the voluntary nature of accreditation implies that any education provider can issue a qualification without verification. The colonial system that persisted in Namibia appears to have left many Namibians desperate for educational recognition and many people are looking for

ways to upgrade their knowledge to obtain qualifications. Against this background, people can register in any educational intervention to attain a qualification. The voluntary stance of the accreditation requires a law to be enacted to ensure that any education delivered in the country does not compromise the quality and standards that NQA is supposed to monitor.

Secondly, the accreditation is not about verification of ability of providers, but rather it appears to focus on the resources of providers. Resources and verification of qualifications do not equate with ability, but a provider can have well-equipped sites and many educators who have various levels of qualifications but whose ability to perform what they were recruited to do is questionable. There is no certainty that providers are competent to perform their duties, hence graduates of accredited institutions may as well turn out incompetent. The researcher of this study believes that infrastructures and other physical properties should be monitored, however invisible assets must be examined to ascertain ability to perform so as to identify where instructors may need assistance for excellent performances. Wevell (1996) states also that accreditation must affirm that applicants are assessed at the right level of the assessment criteria. This study doubts whether, through the process outlined in this section, the NQA can comfortably affirm the competence of providers to deliver quality education in Namibia. The verification of physical properties differs from ascertaining competences of individuals, therefore accreditation should become more conscious of quality than quantity.

Figure 5.1 The **Emerg**ed Framework for Assessing and Evaluating PncL in higher Education as an alternative to assessing only Mode 1 knowledge through MAE.



(Source: Shaketange, L.)

In order to address the inclusiveness of all Namibians who aspire to study in higher education, the researcher suggested a revision of the current assessment procedures through MAE. By virtue of requiring work experience (in addition to Grade 10) as a

criterion to qualify for MAE. Andersson and Fejes (2010) suggest that applicants be given a chance to express their learning evidence through the language and vocabularies used in their community of practice in which the assessed learning was practiced. Consequently, the assessment for work experiential learning should be conducted from the following perspectives.

*The Institutional Policy on Mature Age Entry (MAE)*

The institutional policy on MAE should explain the assessment of experiential knowledge and distinguish it from the assessment of formal prior learning. The suggested framework would be about assessing not only prior knowledge but also the non-certificated prior knowledge (used in this study synonymously with experiential learning). Much of the literature, in particular Conrad (2010), and the data from interviews, have indicated confusion over the definition of the term RPL (see section, 4.2.1.1 and 4.9.1), with many participants from NIHL referring to ‘experience’ and RPL interchangeably. To avoid ambiguities a different terminology has been suggested, namely ‘Prior non-certificated Learning’ (PncL), advocating the assessment of Mode 2 knowledge, through the development of portfolio of evidence and demonstrations of skills, competences and knowledge. The role of MAE policy would be to outline the rationale for assessing PncL, and describe the assessors of Mode 2 knowledge and how the practice of PncL would be conducted at institutions of higher learning. The cooperation between NQA, NCHE and individual institution of higher learning would be articulated in institutional policy of RPL.

*The term ‘Prior non-certificated Learning’ (PncL)*

Reserachers (Valk, 2009; Conrad, 2009; City & Guilds, 2010) have criticised the consistent problem encountered in defining RPL (see 2.3.1 of this document), so the suggested name 'PncL' is a response to the problems of conceptualisation. The distinction between RPL and PncL is necessary so that every player in the MAE would know and understand that the assessment of RPL is about the previous learning which has not yet been certificated, irrespective of the site of its production. This includes any learning obtained from contexts outside formal education, such as work, conferences, training, and community participation, so long as it has not been certificated. This distinction is significant to applicants, assessors in NIHL and for stakeholders.

In this type of MAE, applicants would be assessed through the development and presentation of a portfolio of learning evidence. Presentation implies flexibility of choosing the acquired learning. The process requires the ability to use prior learning to articulate the non-certificated knowledge, skills and competences acquired. This system is consistent with the call by Zink and Dyson (2009) for the first step towards consciousness and learning to be the individual's analysis of his or her own realities to produce self-knowledge.

The PncL also complies with critical theory in that candidates realise a gap in their knowledge and take initiative to explain what they know. The emancipation interest is incorporated in the process through developing and presenting the portfolio of learning evidence. The ability of candidates to conduct the reflection of past experiences, identify and align the learning to NQF Levels, hand over the portfolio of

evidence (in a written or presentation form) to examiners (assessors) is by itself an emancipation exercise in which candidates become conscious of their own worth. Applicants become self-motivated by reflecting on their deeds and engaging themselves with the demands of the host institution to produce essential results. The decisions involved in the process of portfolio development engage the totality of how applicants interpret and make sense of what they perceive as learning.

The institutional policy should indicate who constitutes the panel of assessors in a specific area of study and a decision be made whether or not compensation should be given to assessors.

#### *The assessment of PncL*

In this framework, the assessment of PncL is conducted as follows. Institutions of higher learning provide information about it in the local media by describing the process, interviews of interested candidates and the development of a portfolio of evidence. The decision would rely on institutions and whether or not they would assist with such development. If assistance is granted the candidates are allocated mentors whose responsibilities will be to direct candidates to gather learning evidence that meets the NQF Level required for access to the institution of choice. Mentors need training to be aware of their duties.

Upon receiving the portfolios of evidence the NQF Levels become paramount, as all learning is assessed towards them. The literature of RPL portrays the assessment of learning as alignment of experiential learning to academic requirements. Harris

(1999) argues that all models, irrespective of their strategies of delivery, lead to Mode 1 knowledge. The proposed framework in this study suggests the alignment of experiential learning to NQF Levels. If the NQF is a system of classifying and allocating volume of qualifications then the acquired learning from experience should be aligned with the volume of a qualification needed to access NIHL. The description of NQF Levels should become the criteria of assessment. This view implies that an applicant who is seeking entry to a diploma level would need learning that meets the volume of the certificate or any qualification that constitutes entry requirement to a diploma. Most Namibian institutions of higher learning require a Namibia Secondary School Certificate (NSSC), nationally referred to as Grade 12 certificate, which comprises 25 points and a C Grade in English. The NSSC is required by NIHL to enable access to undergraduate degrees in NIHL. The data suggested (see 4.11.1.2) a set of RPL tests that specifies equivalency to Grade 12. It is this equivalence of learning volume that this framework is suggesting. What constitutes the Grade 12 certificate that enables a candidate to access diploma or degree courses is the volume of learning which creates the classification of that learning on the NQF Levels and that would be used as criteria for assessment. Suggestions of how the alignment of experiential learning to academic requirements are outlined in section 6.4.2 in chapter 6.

A candidate who had worked with community projects would not be assessed on the years he or she had worked with community, or on the basis that he or she is a community activist, but rather on the learning that the candidate attained from being an activist. Has the candidate initiated projects? How was the initiation performed?

What part of level descriptors requires this knowledge? Has the person evaluated projects? What equivalent theories or methods were used? Are these requirements of Level four or three of the certificate? Is the English Language used equivalent to the level of Grade 12 with 25 points or to the Grade 12 with 22 points and on which NQF Level?

#### *Evaluation of PncL*

As much as the evaluation of Mode 2 knowledge is guided by convictions concerning the principles of equity and lifelong learning, the principal understanding should be that only deserving candidates who have met the requirements of the specified NQF Level should pass MAE. Failed candidates have two options: to appeal or rework the portfolio before resubmitting for re-assessment.

#### *An Appeal*

A provision for appeal is made available and should be clearly explained and understood by candidates, assessors and stakeholders.

#### *Access*

Candidates who pass MAE are awarded credits that enable them to register with appropriate institutions. Despite the candidate having obtained recognition and admission, this does not qualify the host institution to award such candidate a qualification. A qualification is only attainable upon completion of the RPL assessment stages or after attendance of classes

*Repeat the Process*

Candidates who fail the whole process have a choice of repeating or exiting PncL. The institutional policy should indicate how many times a candidate can repeat the process.

**5.4 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the findings obtained from interviews and institutional documents which solicited what knowledge was assessed, how it was evaluated and accorded academic recognition, views held by Administrators concerning the implementation of prior learning in higher education and the ways accreditation is conducted by NQA. Two key conclusions emerged from the discussions of the findings.

Despite the current provision made by NIHL to afford candidates an alternative access route to enter study programmes of their through the Mature Age Entry schemes, there was a need to distinguish between the knowledge assessed through this scheme to correspond with the nature and criteria of assessment conducted.

The next chapter makes recommendations and draws a conclusion from the findings.

## **CHAPTER 6: CRITICAL REFLECTION OF KNOWLEDGE, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The concept ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ (RPL) by itself does not explicitly specify what type of prior learning is being referred to, therefore a distinction needs to be made to specify it. The framework suggested in this study responds to this limitation by providing a term ‘Prior non-certificated Learning’ (PncL) to clarify the type of prior learning proposed to be assessed through MAE.

The Namibian Constitution provides that every citizen has the right to education (Article 20, Namibian Constitution, 1990), however, some policymakers and institutional managers develop policies that are not entirely explicit and inclusive in the provision of their educational services. The Namibian Education Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP, 2006) calls for the provision of flexible admission strategy into Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL) through wider access opportunities to accommodate persons capable of benefitting from higher education offerings. The NIHL abide by such policies and have established an alternative entry route through Mature Age Entry (MAE) schemes as a means to widen access to higher education. The criteria to qualify for MAE tests are a Grade 10 certificate, and a specified number years of working experiences. Despite the latter being a requirement for qualifying for entry into MAE, the data revealed that the assessment

conducted through MAE assessed only Mode 1 Knowledge, and did not indicate assessment of Mode 2 knowledge.

International perspectives have presented the process of assessing prior non-certificated learning (which they referred to as RPL) as a way of encouraging an open and flexible education system capable of facilitating wider access to training and career paths. While perspectives postulate that experiential learning can achieve recognition in relation to academic learning, policymakers in Namibian higher education did not seem to reflect this recognition in the assessment of alternative routes to higher education. The researcher has not located any published research or information on existing prior non-certificated learning initiatives as an assessment device to facilitate access into NIHL. Equally, the findings of this study reported that neither of the institutions of higher learning explored in this study (UNAM and PoN) have practiced the assessment or evaluation of experiential knowledge to aid access to their programmes. The current MAE scheme employed in NIHL has placed emphasis on the assessment of Mode 1 knowledge, which adheres to academic subjects, leaving out Mode 2 knowledge, which conforms to learning acquired experientially. Therefore, this study has responded to this gap by introducing a framework that advocates the assessment of Mode 2 knowledge in the MAE scheme. The assessment of PncL will align with the NQF Level and so classify the volume of learning needed to enter higher education. The postulate underpinning this study follows the understanding that knowledge should be assessed and valued for its validity rather than be based on sites of its production. The understanding implies that learning acquired outside the formal education contexts can be assessed, validated

and aligned to NQF Levels instead of being matched against specific course learning outcomes. The strategy of PncL will make the transition from experiential to recognised learning possible through the classifications of this learning on the NQF.

## **6.2 Synopsis of the Literature Review**

The literature reviewed raised issues in relation to RPL, major concerns of which are discussed here in association with the findings generated from the data:

- The literature of RPL has consistently classified the definition of RPL as problematic. The terminology has been described by various misconceptions and lack of epistemology about which prior knowledge it represents. Studies have indicated that this lack of explicit definition and precise specifications of the nature of prior learning being referred to makes international comparisons and discourses on the topic difficult (Valk, 2009; City & Guilds, 2010). The findings of this study are consistent with the problem identified by literature (Conrad, 2010). Consistent with the literature, this study revealed also a lack of coherence in the definition of RPL by respondents from NIHL. The absence of explicit definition of RPL at the two institutions of higher learning left academics confused as to whether or not they assess RPL through MAE. The confusion appears to have stemmed from the lack of understanding of what precise knowledge was assessed. Assessors from NIHL, through their responses, did not seem to understand what knowledge they were assessing, nor whether they were assessing prior knowledge of applicants to help

applicants to gain access to NIHL or prior formal knowledge to convince assessors of applicants' capability to learn in higher education (retrospective or prospective learning).

- The study employed critical and interpretive theories of learning. Critical theory was used to question the status quo of assessment and admission process, and advocates change through the proposal of the framework. It made it possible for the researcher to call for statutory laws that would revise the current MAE so as to provide room for the assessment of prior non-certificated learning in higher education. This study postulates that the assessment of prior non-certificated learning would promote the emancipation interest as part of the critical theory and so accord applicants a chance to engage with the events they participated in and identify what learning they attained from such interventions. The process of reflecting and engaging in learning would require an interpretive mind and interpretive theory to provide the space for applicants to generate explanations of what counts as knowledge to them and how such knowledge could be presented to NIHL.
- Although the legitimacy and significance of RPL is acknowledged and acclaimed as a social inclusion strategy in many institutions of the world, literature argues that many institutions have not yet implemented it due to various obstacles (Wheelahan et al., 2006), such as lack of epistemological knowledge understanding of what experiential learning is and its diverse nature from academic knowledge; legitimacy of knowledge acquired outside the traditional academy; whether or not it meets the standards of the

institution; and the willingness of institutions to accept different routes to access its knowledge base (Valk, 2009).

- The literature claimed that even if invalidity was to be the concern of higher education when rejecting different routes to access higher education, this would be invested in the system of implementing RPL and not in the RPL itself, suggesting that the strategy of recognising experiential learning is viable but procedures to carry it out may create doubts.
- The onus lies with institutions aspiring to implement RPL to decide whether or not to pursue the assessment of work-based experiential learning or to continue with the assessment of Mode 1 knowledge only.
- The institutional policy was alluded to (in some literature) as critical for the implementation of assessing experiential learning, with the assessment to be conducted in stages, such as pre-assessment, assessment and post-assessment.
- There are models used to define the conceptual understanding of RPL in institutions based on their assessment methods of RPL (credit exchange model, developmental model and transformational/ (radical/ Trojan-horse model). The literature questions whether the assessment representing these models gives true reflections about these models. Some institutions claim to use the developmental model (which demands mentoring of applicants) when they are deeply involved in the credit exchange model (which conforms to subject knowledge). The transformational model seems realistic but its implementation procedures have not been clearly explained to enable simulations. A need therefore exists for the precision and exact definition of

what knowledge should be assessed and which assessment model fits the type of prior learning assessed.

- The accreditation of learning is crucial for quality assurance, however, the findings in this study revealed that due to lack of a Namibia policy on RPL, accreditation of institutions or persons involved in assessing RPL has not taken place. That accreditation of formal learning which has taken place has centred more on ascertaining resources rather than affirming knowledge and capability of persons to conduct the required service.

### **6.3 Limitation of the Findings**

The researcher was unable to find data on candidates who had participated in the assessment of prior non-certificated learning in NIHL. The portfolios submitted by Polytechnic candidates seeking course exemption were not available for analysis. The researcher was informed that these had been returned to students upon assessment and hence could not be accessed. The findings of the study would have yielded richer information had it been possible for the researcher to obtain information from candidates who had lived the experience of having their prior non-certificated learning assessed. Equally, the study would also have generated additional information had there been information from candidates who had themselves developed portfolios, or if they were available for analysis. The findings of the study would have been more localised concerning experiential learning.

#### **6.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

The purpose of this study was to explore the knowledge assessed through MAE to enable adult workers access higher education, and to identify mechanisms that would ensure the implementation of Prior non-certificated Learning (PncL) as an assessment criterion for access to NIHL. In order to address this purpose the study investigated what and how prior learning of applicants was assessed by NIHL through MAE and how it aided accessibility of applicants to gain entry to higher education. The study challenged the sole assessment of Mode 1 and argued for the assessment of Mode 2 knowledge through the strategy of alignment. The term Prior non-certificated Learning (PncL) is suggested as an assessment criterion through MAE to clarify confusion of terminology that exists in the current literature about RPL.

The contribution of the dissertation to knowledge can thus be summarised as two main points: to clarify the confusion in the current literature about RPL by suggesting PncL as a conceptual term to be used when non-certificated learning is being assessed; and assessment of Mode 2 knowledge is to be conducted through the process of alignment of learning evidence with NQF Level three. The two contributions are discussed as follow.

#### **6.4.1 Clarification of confusion surrounding the term RPL**

One of the contributions of this study to the existing knowledge base is invested in the eradication of confusion surrounding the term RPL. The term ‘Prior non-certificated Learning’ (PncL) is proposed to offer the nature of knowledge being referred to in the assessment of MAE. The literature (Valk, 2009; Conrad, 2009; City & Guid, 2010) has acknowledged the consistent problem of lack of precision in the definition of RPL. Equally, the findings of this study revealed the misconceptions and inconsistency in defining RPL and the use of it as synonymous with ‘experience’. The use of RPL and experience interchangeably has the potential to impinge on the validity of content of assessment since assessors may not explicitly understand the differences between experience and learning and the knowledge that they were supposed to assess. Experience comprises events that have happened which do not necessarily ensure learning. If an assessor perceives prior learning as events that have happened it is possible that the content of the assessment tools would deviate from assessing learning acquired through experience towards assessing the descriptions of events that happened. Credit is not awarded for participating in an experience, but rather for the learning that emerges from it (Harris, 1999).

The term ‘Prior non-certificated Learning’ (PncL) addresses this confusion by describing the nature and the type of knowledge that NIHL should assess through MAE. Assessors, applicants and stakeholders should understand the knowledge required for assessment through MAE. Performance is likely to improve if

candidates know what criteria of assessment would be used. In this study, learning connotes the process of making meaning from the experience, in which an individual is consciously aware of an event and makes sense of that event and eventually transforms the sense into knowledge, skills and competence. The type of learning being referred to through PncL is the combination of the knowledge, skills and competences obtained from experiences. It is what candidates know, understand and are able to do that constitutes learning. This could be learning acquired from years of computer practice, or development of complex company reports, in which the candidate has excellently performed his or her duties but not been asked to organise or defend writing ideas logically. The practice of these skills, for instance, may yield the learning needed to facilitate accessibility to a computer course in higher education. However, the argument presented in this study suggests that for such learning to be recognised it should fall within the parameters of the NQF Level three descriptors and a specific name (PncL) be allocated to its assessment procedures.

The suggested term of PncL is new and has not been used in the current literature. Such a term is precise and would encourage comparison between and among institutions, given that players in the field have the same understanding of the knowledge being assessed through MAE, even if purposes of assessment differ. By virtue of its precise name, the process of assessment becomes sufficiently flexible to allow diverse assessment methods, such as demonstration, simulating, presentation, tests and other available choices. The introduction of the concept PncL also provides a cohesive opportunity to perceive MAE as an optimal inclusive practice in education and a methodological perspective that accommodates diverse learning

forms. All those interested in joining higher education, irrespective of their prior non-certificated learning backgrounds, have the chance to demonstrate what they know and can do.

The term PncL is embedded in critical theory, which advocates changing the status quo for improvement. In this study, the idea connotes the change of assessing academic Mode 1 knowledge to Mode 2 in an effort to include people with prior non-certificated learning. Mode 2 assessments in which PncL is grounded embrace the emancipation interest in which candidates critically face what they know and interpret whether this constitutes the learning required to access higher education. The process of reflection educates the individual and frees the candidate from the bondage of one assessment route: the test. The process in which prior non-certificated learning is premised provides a flexible structure in which knowledge becomes valid by virtue of its functions and not by years of its production.

If knowledge is personal then the knower should construct his or her own knowledge and have the understanding to match it against available benchmarks, such as NQF Level descriptors. The reflective exercise underpinned by PncL describes events and interprets reasons they occur, as well as the learning attained from them, giving a more complete understanding of the learning attained. This process of description and analysis of attained learning not only reflects the nature of critical questioning but also emancipates the individual. It emancipates those adult workers whose abilities and skills to access higher education were denied and so acquire experiential learning that appeared problematic to assess.

The reflective exercise is most beneficial to the many Namibian adult workers whose life experiences have been tainted by the impact of decades of apartheid. The world view of many of these workers has been one that sees the self as of less value, and the only one that made sense was that of the oppressor. The colonial system has made many Namibians believe and internalise negative images about themselves and has created doubt as to whether what they possessed could generate learning. After independence some people appeared to challenge their fears and to adjust their belief system to value not only their worth but also their self-esteem and their beliefs in upgrading their knowledge in relation to their work demands. The reflective exercise necessitated by PncL would emancipate and provide an opportunity for applicants to locate their own worth and their identity in education. Therefore, the process of PncL should be sufficiently distinct to accommodate the nature of knowledge acquired by candidates.

#### **6.4.2 Assessment of Mode 2 knowledge through the process of Alignment**

The study extends the current knowledge base by suggesting the assessment of Mode 2 knowledge through the process of alignment of applicants' prior non-certificated learning against the NQF Level descriptors. These are statements of learning achievements purposely designed to allocate a level to a qualification, such as the Grade 12 certificate. An alignment of PncL against NQF level descriptors provides equivalency in standards and volume of learning required to access higher education. Michelson et al. (2004) stress the need to find better ways to help students take

advantages of experience that was acquired outside formal systems of education. In this study, the alignment of PncL against the NQF level descriptors is a means of providing help to candidates wishing to take advantage of their experiential learning. The alignment is based on the conviction that instead of using tests and marks as indicators of knowledge and competences of candidates (currently dominating the assessment of MAE in NIHLs), the NQF Level descriptors would be used to classify the size and relevance of learning volume that meets the knowledge required to access higher education.

Since the Grade 12 subjects cannot be directly matched with NQF Level descriptors, given their numbers and diversity in content, a system of alignment should be used to equate the volume of learning. The NQF Levels have nationally been accepted as classifications of qualifications based on the size of learning acquired, such classification should apply in defining the volume of learning needed to access higher education as based on NQF Levels. The alignment between PncL and NQF Levels is grounded not necessarily on what is learned or how it was learnt, but on whether what was learnt reflects the standard and volume of the required learning.

According to the NQF (2007), the Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC) group award is NQF Level three qualifications (see section 2.5.1.5 of this document). This is a certificate which may represent a minimum of 40 credits and learning time of 400 notional hours, including directed or self-directed learning. In Namibia, NSSC is required to enter Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL). Given this understanding, assessed learning which produces considerable equivalent learning of

NQF Level three should be accepted as achievement of NQF Level three and all opportunities available to NQF Level three graduates should be applicable to those whose learning is assessed as equivalent. This study is premised also on the notion that once equivalence in outcomes of learning is achieved between PncL and NQF Level three, this would be recognised as the attainment of Level three and candidates with this status would be granted admission to NIHL according to the relevant programme that fits Level three qualifications.

The alignment is conducted by deriving learning outcomes (in relation to the study area) from the NQF Level descriptors. In consideration of attainment of competencies, skills and knowledge, assessors should consider the coherent cluster of outcomes of learning pertinent to experiences undertaken and to the volume and standards of learning achieved. An example of alignment of PncL against NQF Level descriptors is presented in the table below.

**Table 6.1: Critical Reflection: The Framework for assessing PncL through Alignment of NQF Levels**

<i>Description of NQF Levels Descriptors</i>	<i>Institutional Exit Learning Outcomes derived from NQF Level Descriptors</i>	<i>Specific Learning Outcomes that candidate is expected to meet</i>	<i>Candidate's learning evidence</i>
Employ some relevant theoretical knowledge and interpretations of available information.	Demonstration of knowledge of theories of 'adult learning' (as used in the work place).	Present learning evidence, through a case study, a narrative or through power-point presentation.	Candidate describes the learning acquired from many years of dealing with adults.

In aligning PncL to NQF Levels, the principle of equivalency is considered, by which the value of learning becomes the principle focus of assessment rather than the exact match of subject content against PncL. Candidates should be able to relate learning from experience to theory through the understanding of notions that grew out of their own practices. Candidates can describe theories in relation to how adults learn, and what happens if a learning situation is not conducive to adult learners. A case study of drop out of adult learners from a community programme can illuminate conditions in which adults learn. It is important that candidates are allowed to use their professional terminologies and styles of presenting information. Candidates may not possess the academic language to describe or discuss theories but they

would be in possession of the knowledge required to describe their viewpoints. The assessment of the portfolio would require ability to identify the required knowledge and the aptitude to understand the volume and scope of learning evidence if, for instance, such has to be equivalent to 400 notional hours. The judgment must ascertain that the learning presented in the portfolio is equivalent in scope, standard and volume to the required learning to access higher education. For quality assurance and smooth transferability, the learning outcomes derived from the NQF Level descriptors should articulate clearly the skills, knowledge and competences that meet NQF Level 3 and the alignment should meet these requirements.

This study concurs with the argument of Michelson et al. (2004) that the value of the experiential learning depends not on the experience of the subject matter but on the struggles around the way that it is interpreted by the candidate. The learning evidence is presented in the portfolio of evidence, which would respond to the learning outcomes developed from the NQF Levels descriptors to fit the subject matter. The learning outcomes from the NQF Level descriptors would be developed by departments as candidates would have neither the language of the academic to match their experiential leaning nor the style and format required to present in their learning.

## **6.5 Recommendations**

Despite the MAE scheme being perceived by assessors and administrators in NIHL as an alternative route that provides opportunities for previously disadvantaged

Namibian adult workers who do not possess the normal entry requirements to enter higher education and to further their studies, the study makes significant recommendations derived from the discussions of findings for the improvement of the MAE. The recommendations are divided into three sections, according to institutions sampled. The first group targets the institutions of higher learning in Namibia that employ the MAE scheme as an alternative entry route to access their programmes. The second addresses the Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA) as custodian of quality assurance in the country. The third is made for further research possibilities to improve on the findings of this study.

### **6.5.1 Recommendations for Institutions of Higher Learning in Namibia**

The following recommendations are made for Institutions of Higher Learning in Namibia.

#### ***6.5.1.1 Recommendations for the Office of the Registrar at the University of Namibia (UNAM)***

The following recommendations for the Registrar's office are advanced:

- The Office of the Registrar at the University of Namibia should consider reviewing the policy concerning the Mature Age Entry scheme and its assessment criteria to allow the University to implement the MAE focusing on the assessment of PncL for access. Prior non-certificated learning can be

aligned to NQF Level descriptors. The consideration of assessing PncL facilitates the aims of inclusiveness in education and promotes the policy of lifelong learning.

Within this recommendation the following should apply:

- (a) Development of the Institutional Policy for the implementation of PncL. One of the findings of this study revealed that there was no policy in relation to recognition of knowledge acquired outside formal learning at UNAM. The MAE policy is crucial as an official framework to endorse the practice of PncL at the institution. The policy is critical to define what knowledge is and how it is assessed, and for the conceptualisation and integrity of the practice.
- (b) The University of Namibia should employ PncL as a system that assesses only Mode 2 knowledge, targeting those who acquired the prior non-certificated learning. The findings of this study reveal that the description of RPL at UNAM is limited to mere *experience*. There is a need for clarity and precision of knowledge being assessed, therefore a specific name PncL should be allocated to maintain the required consistency. The University might not be interested in assessing a candidate with a business, but it would assess someone who claims to have learnt from running a business if that learning can assist the person to get access to an appropriate business course at the institution.

(c) Development of the evaluation in which prior non-certificated knowledge is aligned to NQF Level descriptors. This study found out that evaluation is based on the marks attained from the specific test in the MAE and not necessarily on the complexity of learning. There should be unit standards or learning outcomes or Level descriptors against which non-certificated learning is measured.

(d) The University of Namibia should support the development of a portfolio of evidence for candidates seeking entry through PncL. The findings from this study highlight that there was no information found either from institutional documents or through interviews with regards to portfolio of evidence at UNAM. The need exists for the University to provide a portfolio development course to candidates wishing to access UNAM through MAE. Doing so is essential to make explicit the claim of knowledge attained and to aid candidates with their experiential learning. The portfolio also offers remedial support to candidates and prepares them academically. English for Academic purposes should be offered as a preparation activity for the development of a portfolio and as an initiation into academia.

#### ***6.5.1.2 Recommendations for the Office of the Registrar at the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN)***

The following recommendations for the Registrar's office are put forward:

- The office of the Registrar should consider improving the procedural document AC2.4 into a fully-fledged PncL policy document for the implementation of PncL at the PoN.

This policy should consider the following:

- (a) Implementing PncL for Access. The institution currently practices advanced standing which targets only students who are already in it. The institution should extend the provision of PncL to accommodate candidates who aspire to enter on the basis of PncL.
- (b) The Portfolios of evidence should yield learning that fits the NQF Level descriptors. The findings from this study highlighted that the assessment of a portfolio of evidence is only aimed at determining whether or not an applicant should be granted access to the assessment for the course exemption. When the portfolio is found to comprise 80% correlation between its content and the course of study, a test is set which finally determines the status of the student. This dissertation recommends therefore that the NQF Level descriptors be used as the benchmark to determine entry success.
- (c) The policy on PncL should outline the criteria of assessment to avoid delay which currently congests the PoN's RPL assessment procedures. The policy should also define what knowledge is assessed from candidates seeking entry to the institution and what knowledge is sought from candidates seeking

exemption from a given course of study and how the two forms of knowledge be assessed.

- (d) The PoN should consider providing the portfolio development course for both students and candidates aspiring to access the institution on the basis of PncL.
- (e) An industrial representative should be part of the assessment panel in the final assessment of the portfolios. The representative would have additional practical knowledge and understanding of competences of which academic assessors may not be aware.

#### ***6.5.1.3 Recommendations for the academic staff at NIHL***

The following recommendations for academic staff at NIHL are provided:

- The academic staff members at NIHL would be trained and equipped to render academic support to candidates. The findings of this study reveal that assessors who claimed to assess RPL were not trained to do so. The interpretation was that such limitation might have contributed to the current deficiency of assessing RPL in the two institutions (UNAM and PoN). The training should include:

- (a) Ability to assist with the development, assessment and evaluation of portfolios. It is critical that assessors involved in the assessment of PncL

understand and have technical skills to develop portfolios, assess and evaluate learning submitted and to orient candidates to academic environment.

- (b) Extensive marketing of PncL should be pursued by NIHL. The findings from this study showed that there was a severe lack of knowledge of RPL at both UNAM and PoN, particularly among assessors. Extensive marketing needs to be conducted in order to make potential candidates and stakeholders aware of the provision of the assessment.

#### ***6.5.1.4 Recommendations for the Namibian Qualification Authority (NQA)***

The following recommendations for NQA are provided:

- The NQA should ensure that quality assurance in the provision of prior non-certificated learning is maintained: The NQA can ensure this by doing the following:
  - (a) Ascertaining that all institutions providing PncL services have been accredited. This is to maintain the rigour and standards of PncL and to enhance trust in terms of transferability of learning or qualifications to other institutions.
  - (b) Verifying skills and competences of providers.

- (c) The NQA designs and classifies the equivalency of volume of learning by indicating the equivalency of Grade 12 with 25 and 22 points.
- (d) The NQA to provide assistances to NHIL. The findings revealed that institutions of higher learning need the assistance of NQA to collaborate with higher education and stakeholders and to develop a data base to provide adequate statistical information that will be open to those needing such information.
- (e) To provide a framework that shows the link between the NQF Level descriptors, and non-certificated learning as a means of assisting institutions to define the assessment link in their respective programmes and those deciding to develop unit standards for PncL.

#### ***6.5.1.5 Recommendations for the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)***

The following recommendations for the NCHE are provided:

- The NCHE should consider establishing a substantial panel to spearhead the implementation of PncL in higher education. The involvement of the council is essential in the following aspects:
  - (a) To monitor and control quality of the PncL policy implementations. The data in this study demanded that the NCHE develop and maintain the conditions under which PncL is implemented in higher education.

- The duties of the NCHE should be demarcated from those of the Institutions of Higher Education. Whereas the institutions implement the PncL practices, the duties of the Council should be to control and maintain quality of the learning provided.
- Transerability of candidates between and among institutions is designed and assured.

#### ***6.5.1.6 Recommendations for further research***

The following recommendations for further research are provided:

The purpose of this study was to explore what knowledge is assessed in Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL) and how it was evaluated to help candidates to access higher education. This study has found out that none of the institutions of higher learning sampled were found to assess prior non-certificated learning and only Mode 1 knowledge was assessed in NIHL. It also found that accreditation of learning in Namibia is not compulsory, hence institutions are not obliged to have their educational offerings accredited. Within the context of the two limitations the following recommendations for further research are provided:

- Although there seems to be a generic conceptual understanding of PncL as learning from experience, the practice in the institutions suggests that PoN has clearer understanding of what RPL entails than UNAM. Further research is

needed to investigate how PncL could be conceptualised within the context of knowledge claimed.

- The researcher was unable to get copies of the portfolios or communicate to students whose portfolios had been assessed. A study should be commissioned to identify the actual knowledge assessed through portfolio methods and to suggest appropriate mechanisms for portfolio development and assessment.
- A follow-up study should be conducted to find out the scope of accreditation of PncL by institutions and person providing RPL services.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore what Namibian Institutions of Higher Learning (NIHL) assess and how they evaluate prior non-certificated learning for students entering their study programmes on the basis of work experiential learning. Explored in the study also was how the Namibia Qualifications Authority accredits learning acquired non-formally. The findings reveal that tests conducted through MAE do not examine prior experiential learning, but rather Mode 1 knowledge. The sole assessment method provided by the two institutions (UNAM and PoN) appears to have constrained candidates' chances of exhibiting what they learnt from work experience. The opportunity to assess experiential (non-certificated) learning was viewed by both institutional staff members and potential clientele not only as a way of compensating the loss of required credentials to access higher education but also as an opportunity to identify knowledge and skills gained over the years of learning

experience. In this way, the candidate can be assessed and accredited with legitimate learning equivalent to NQF Level descriptors appropriate for entry to required level. It was therefore concluded that the conceptual name RPL be replaced with PncL, that is one that exclusively aims at assessing non-certificated learning.

Critical to the extension and provision of flexible assessment of PncL was the need to establish wide options of assessment methods rather than concentrate entirely on test methods. The exact nature of assessing prior non-certificated learning and its evaluation thereof on the NQF Level descriptors should be clearly stipulated for every institutional member to know. It is concluded that the assessment and evaluation of PncL should focus on what counts as knowledge and encourage dialogue between conventions of knowledge (experiential and academic). In this system both epistemological and pedagogical differences of these types of knowledge being assessed are recognised, valued and contested if need be, so as to enhance the growth of PncL in institutions (Harris, 2000; Ralphs, 2008; Conrad, 2010).

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR UNAM AND PON ASSESSORS

1. How do you define recognition of prior learning?
2. What do you assess in the Mature age entry test (portfolios)
3. How is the assessment done?
4. What determines learning to enable access to NIHL?
5. How do you ensure quality of the assessment tools used in MAE admission test?
6. One of your institution's criteria for eligibility into MAE is work experiences, how do you evaluate work experience?
7. How do you align work experiential against academic learning
8. Are there any other issues that you want to talk about in relation to this interview?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR UNAM & PON ADMINISTRATORS

1. What do you think Prior non-certificated Learning is?
2. How do you recognise prior non-certificated learning?
3. If the RPL policy was out, how would your organisation consider implementing RPL for access?
4. What support would you need from NQA to enable the implementation of RPL for access in your institution?

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ACCREDITORS (NQA)

1. What does accreditation mean?
2. How is the accreditation of RPL conducted?
3. What criteria do you use to accredit RPL providers?
4. What monitoring mechanisms do you employ towards institutions that provide the service of assessing PncL?
5. What support or assistance does NQA give to institutions of higher learning that are interested in assessing PncL?

APPENDIX D: THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA MATURE AGE ENTRY  
 QUESTION PAPER: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY. **SEPTEMBER, 2011.**



**LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PAPER**  
**SEPTEMBER 2011**

**DURATION: 2 hours**

**MARKS: 100**

**SURNAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME(S):** \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT NO.:**

5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
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**CENTRE:** .....

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

$$22 \times 2 = 44 / 100$$

## SECTION A: Reading Text

### QUESTION 1

Read the article and answer the questions.

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) __ Female start-ups   | b) __ Female upstarts    |
| c) __ Women starting out | d) __ Women starting off |

Pauline Portas started her own business because she was fed up with corporate life. She had climbed the ladder at a major insurance company, becoming an area manager. Despite successive promotions she felt her views were not taken seriously. 'It's still a man's world out there. You have to battle twice as hard,' she says. 'I'd go to meetings and be one woman out of 30 men – you cope with whatever bad language and jokes happen to be around at the time.'

Ms Portas, 48, is one of a growing number of women setting up businesses, partly as an escape from the frustrations of being an employee. A survey carried out recently suggests that many companies are misusing and then losing female talent. A random sample of 350 business start-ups in London found that 67 per cent had been established by women. Of these, 71 per cent said negative experiences in previous jobs had driven them into entrepreneurship. Slightly more than a third of female respondents said they had been regularly overlooked for promotion and more than one in five said they had often been asked to work longer hours than male colleagues. Nearly two-thirds said that at some time in their career they had faced sexual harassment or suggestive remarks. 'Women are by and large much more flexible [than men],' says Sue Birley, a professor at Imperial College Management School. 'They may well find themselves unhappy with hierarchies and impatient with bureaucracy.'

The most popular types of female start-ups found in the London survey are in: financial services and business advice; media, public relations, journalism and marketing; and hairdressing, beauty products and fashion, the survey found. Only 5 per cent of the women-led businesses failed in their first 12 months, compared with 15 per cent of those started by men. But Bernard Hallewell, managing director of the National Business Angels Network, says the survey confirms that women tend to go into lower-risk, lower-growth sectors such as public relations and business services. Riskier ideas and 'bigger vision plans' for new products or technology tend to come from men, he says.

*From the Financial Times*

## QUESTION 2

Choose and tick the best option for completing each of the sentences below:

1. While working for a major insurance company, Pauline Portas ...

- a) ☒ reached a high position.
- b) ☐ was frustrated with her lack of career progress.
- c) ☐ did not find her job interesting.

2. Pauline found it difficult to be a women manager in her company because:

- a) ☐ the work was too hard.
- b) ☐ the male staff left ~~all~~ the work to her.
- c) ☒ other managers did not value her opinions.

3. The survey described in the article found that ...

- a) ☐ companies don't have enough women managers.
- b) ☒ companies often ~~fail~~ to make the most of women's skills.
- c) ☐ companies often dismiss women if they don't perform well.

4. The most common cause of complaint from women in the survey was ...

- a) ☒ not being considered for promotion.
- b) ☐ having to work longer hours than men.
- c) ☐ sexual harassment.

5. Sue Birley suggests that women ...

- a) ☒ often dislike rigid corporate structures.
- b) ☐ are less good at adapting to a changing environment than men.
- c) ☐ prefer to work within a tightly-controlled system.

6. Businesses established by women ...

- a) ☐ are more likely to fail than those started by men.
- b) ☒ are less likely to fail than those started by men.
- c) ☐ have the same rate of failure as those started by men.

7. Women tend to start businesses which ...

- a) are in relatively safe business sectors.
- b) ☒ have a high growth potential.
- c) are based on high-tech products or ideas.

8. *fed up with* (para. 1) means:

- a) exhausted and burnt out.
- b) ☒ bored and wanting a change.
- c) angry and upset.

## QUESTION 3

From the article, find a word or phrase that means the same as:

1. Generally speaking (para.2)
2. Rude sexual comments (para.2)
3. Willing and able to change (para.3)
4. Continual annoyance (para.2)
5. Establishing a new business (para.3)
6. One after the other (para.1)

A Random Sample ✓  
 Sexual harassment ✓  
 Tend to go into lower risk  
 Bureaucracy ✓  
 Bigger vision plans.  
 Battle twice. ✓

5

/6

## QUESTION 4

Answer the following questions in a short sentence and in your own words:

1. What is meant by: 'She had climbed the ladder'...?

She has been promoted from lower rank to the higher.

2. Why do women have to 'battle twice as hard'?

Women must work very hard to be heard by men

3. What kind of start-ups do men tend to prefer?

Business which are based on high-tech products such as public relations.

4. Explain the term 'entrepreneurship':

This is a process whereby one should start a new business.

9/20

## SECTION B: WRITING

Write an Essay of not more than 150 words on the following topic:

Argue whether it is advisable for women to become State Presidents.


It is not advisable for women to become State Presidents;

Women are made out of men's rib, as a result they are more flexible than men, to be given a position of head of State does not need flexibility at all. Women are human beings who are always afraid to take a constant decision and taking a risk, women tend to go into lower risk.

State Presidents is a position who need a person which having a strong desire, plans and looking forward for the benefit of his/her nation. A person which can't be convinced easily, those characteristics are not in women human being. Women in most cases are sitting in close doors gossiping and whispering with one another which is totally against the job description of Head of State.

APPENDIX E: THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA MATURE AGE ENTRY  
QUESTION PAPER: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY. 2010/11.

POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA



SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION, LEGAL AND SECRETARIAL  
STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

ENGLISH MATURE AGE TEST 2010/11

QUESTION PAPER

TOTAL MARKS: 100

TIME: 2 ½ HOURS

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

Follow the instructions very carefully  
Attempt ALL questions.  
Use the lined sheet to write the Essay.  
Answer the remaining questions by making an X in the relevant boxes.  
**Please do not write or make any marks on the question paper.**  
Please return the question paper with the answer booklet.

Please DO NOT TURN OVER THE PAGE until the examiner gives instructions.

9. What matters are not how many employees Telecom has, but how many people are employed  
 A B C

in the telecom sector as a whole.  
 D

10. What is important is not the size of the government's share of profits from Telecom Namibia  
 A B

and MTC, but how much tax income could be generate from stronger economic growth.  
 C D

(Dr. Christian Stork, *Insight*, Sept 2004, p 26)

Choose the most suitable word or phrase to complete each sentence.

11. Sitting near a fountain is ..... to be good for your health.

A declared	B told	C said	D stated
------------	--------	--------	----------

12. My mother ... me to collect the tickets on the way home.

A remembered	B reminded	C repeated	D recommended
--------------	------------	------------	---------------

13. ... as she sat down to eat, the telephone rang.

A Hardly	B Immediately	C Just	D Soon
----------	---------------	--------	--------

14. That supermarket carries a wide ... of goods.

A range	B load	C series	D line
---------	--------	----------	--------

15. The water was ... by waste from the factory.

A decomposed	B decayed	C putrefied	D contaminated
--------------	-----------	-------------	----------------

16. They have a tennis ... at the bottom of their garden.

A court	B field	C ground	D pitch
---------	---------	----------	---------

17. As the chairman is ill, the meeting will have to be ... until next week.

A cancelled	B stopped	C postponed	D held up
-------------	-----------	-------------	-----------

18. The roar of the MGM lion ... the beginning of their film.

A renounces	B pronounces	C denounces	D announces
-------------	--------------	-------------	-------------

19. Peter was ... from hospital last Wednesday

A released	B discharged	C withdrawn	D dismissed
------------	--------------	-------------	-------------

20. That notice says there is no admission except to ... personnel

A legitimate	B authorised	C approved	D lawful
--------------	--------------	------------	----------

(10)

### Question 3 Comprehension

Read the paragraph below and answer the questions that follow.

In the second half of each year, many powerful storms are born in the tropical Atlantic and the Caribbean seas. Of these, only about a half a dozen generate strong, circling winds of 75 miles per hour or more that give them hurricane status, and several usually make their way to the coast. There they cause millions of dollars of damage, and bring death to large numbers of people.

The great storms that hit the coast start as innocent circling disturbances hundreds – even thousands – of miles out to the sea. As they travel aimlessly over water warmed by the summer sun, they are carried westward by the trade winds. When conditions are just right, warm, moist air flows in at the bottom of such a disturbance, moves upward through it and comes out at the top. In the process, the moisture in this warm air produces rain, and, with it, the heat that is converted to energy in the form of strong winds. As the heat increases, the young hurricane begins to swirl in a counter-clockwise motion.

The average life of a hurricane is only about nine days, but it contains more power than we can imagine. The energy in the heat released by a hurricane's rainfall in a single day would satisfy the entire electrical needs of the United States for more than six months. Water, not wind, is the main source of death and destruction in a hurricane. A typical hurricane brings 6- to 12- inch **downpours** resulting in sudden floods. Worst of all is the powerful movement of the sea – the mountains of water moving toward the low-pressure hurricane center. The water level rises as much as 15 feet above normal as it moves toward shore. \*

\* From E. Hughes, "Hurricane Warning," *Reader's Digest*, September 1969, p. 21.

31. Powerful storms originate \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. thousands of miles out to the sea
  - B. because of the powerful movement of the sea
  - C. in the tropical Atlantic and Caribbean seas
  - D. as the heat increases
32. When is an ordinary tropical storm called a hurricane?
  - A. When it begins in the Atlantic and Caribbean seas.
  - B. When it hits the coastline.
  - C. When it is more than 75 miles wide.
  - D. When its winds reach 75 miles per hour.
33. What is the worst thing about hurricanes?
  - A. The destructive effects of water.
  - B. The heat they release.
  - C. That they last about nine days on the average.
  - D. Their strong winds.
34. What happens to the warm, moist air that flows in at the bottom of the storm?
  - A. It converts to energy.
  - B. It forms dangerous waves.
  - C. It forms strong winds.
  - D. It brings about rain.

At the end of the 7 weeks, the step-test was again given to both groups of subjects, and their pulses taken. The post-exercise pulse rates of subjects in the experimental group were found to have decreased an average of 30 heart beats per minute, with the lowest decrease 28 and the highest decrease 46. The pulse rates of subjects in the control group remained the same or changed no more than 4 beats, with an average difference between the initial and final tests of zero.\*

\* From James E. Haney, "Health and Motor Behavior: Measuring Energy Expenditures." *Research News* 22, no. 5 (November 1971): 7.

41. How many people were in each group?
  - A. 100
  - B. 50
  - C. 25
  - D. 15
42. The step-test was given \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. after each exercise period
  - B. at the beginning and at the end of the seven week period
  - C. only once, at the beginning of the seven week period
  - D. twice to the men in Group A and once to the men in Group B
43. When were pulse rates taken?
  - A. After every exercise period.
  - B. Every day.
  - C. After the step-tests.
  - D. Every time the ratio of active riding was increased.
44. The exercise schedule was planned so that the amount of active riding \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. increased every few days
  - B. varied from day to day
  - C. increased until the third week and then was kept constant
  - D. increased every exercise period
45. What did Group A do in their program?
  - A. They stepped up and down on a bench each day.
  - B. They pushed and pulled on exercise handles every day.
  - C. They rode on an Exercycle every day.
  - D. They refrained from any exercise.
46. The post-exercise pulse rates of Group B were found on the average to have \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. not changed
  - B. gone down 28 beats per minute
  - C. gone down 30 beats per minute
  - D. gone down 4 beats per minute
47. The paragraph implies that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. most people do not get enough exercise
  - B. a high pulse rate is desirable
  - C. regular exercise can strengthen your heart
  - D. everyone should exercise 15 minutes a day

53. The boatman was willing to take Robin across the river because \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. he wanted to make extra money  
 B. he saw that Robin was young and rich  
 C. he was going to row across the river anyway  
 D. he felt sorry for him because Robin looked poor
54. The stockings that Robin wore were obviously \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. well worn  
 B. very expensive  
 C. handmade  
 D. much too big
55. From the way he looked, it was evident that Robin was a \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. wealthy merchant's son  
 B. country boy  
 C. soldier  
 D. foreigner
56. Robin was apparently going to town \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. to buy new clothes  
 B. for the first time  
 C. for the first time in several years  
 D. on one of his regular trips there
57. How did Robin appear as he walked into town?  
 A. He was cheerful and excited.  
 B. He was tired.  
 C. He seemed very sad.  
 D. He seemed frightened by his strange surroundings.
58. Robin paid close attention to his surroundings because he \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. had to do a survey there  
 B. was scared  
 C. wanted to see as much of it as possible  
 D. did not want to get lost
59. Looking at Robin, the ferryman thought that he \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. would not survive there  
 B. was too young to travel alone  
 C. was wearing strange clothes  
 D. was a fine young man
60. Robin's leather bag was packed in such a way that \_\_\_\_\_.  
 A. it hung heavily from his shoulder  
 B. it would not be too heavy to carry  
 C. the content would not break  
 D. it looked lighter than it really was

(10)

TOTAL: [30]



Subject	MATURE AGE ENTRY EXAMINATION	
Subject Area	NUMERACY TEST	
Date	September 2011	
Duration	2 HOURS	Marks: 100

SURNAME:

NAME(S):

STUDENT NO.:

RECEIVED

CENTRE: .....

(1) Write only the correct answer  
(2) Calculators are allowed  
(3) Round answers to one decimal place where needed

**SECTION A****JUST CIRCLE THE CORRECT ANSWER****1. Determine:**1.1  $\frac{1}{4}$  km - 195m - 200cm - 3000mm

- (a) 350 cm      (b) 250 cm      (c) 50 m      (d) 51,8m      (e) 50 cm

1.2  $\frac{1}{2}$  kg - 375g - 500mg

- (a) 1245 mg      (b) 120 g      (c) 124,5 g      (d) 0,025 kg      (e) 1245 g

2. How many minutes in one-tenth of a day?

- (a) 8640      (b) 1440      (c) 144      (d) 84      (e) 10

3. How many seconds in  $\frac{2}{3}$  of an hour?

- (a) 40      (b) 67      (c) 667      (d) 2400      (e) 3600

4. How many centuries in a million years?

- (a) 10      (b) 100      (c) 1000      (d) 10 000      (e) 100 000

5. How many decades in  $4\frac{1}{2}$  centuries?

- (a) 45 000      (b) 4 500      (c) 450      (d) 45      (e) 4,5

6. What is the time  $5\frac{1}{2}$  hours before 02:15?

- (a) 20:55      (b) 20:45      (c) 19:45      (d) 8:45      (e) 7:45

7. A  $2\frac{1}{4}$  hour examination started at 09:55. If Susan left 35 minutes early, when did she leave?

- (a) 11:45      (b) 11:35      (c) 11:30      (d) 10:35      (e) 9:20

8. How many days in this month start with the letter "t"?

- (a) 10      (b) 9      (c) 8      (d) 5      (e) 4

9. How many days of this year will be finish by the end of this day?

- (a) 260      (b) 261      (c) 262      (d) 263      (e) 264

10. Below are John's scores in four tests, which one was his best?

- (a)  $\frac{80}{120}$       (b)  $\frac{99}{150}$       (c)  $\frac{91}{140}$       (d)  $\frac{124}{200}$       (e)  $\frac{93}{155}$

11. The smallest fraction?  
 (a)  $\frac{3}{4}$  (b)  $\frac{1}{4}$  (c)  $\frac{1}{2}$  (d)  $\frac{3}{8}$  (e)  $\frac{5}{8}$
12. Felicity buys a car marked N\$88200. She pays a 25% deposit and will repay the balance over  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years in equal monthly installments. What is the installment?  
 (a) 2450 (b) 2100 (c) 1950 (d) 1680 (e) 1575
13. The number of hours from Wednesday 10:30 p.m. to Friday 07:30 a.m.  
 (a) 9 (b) 21 (c) 29 (d) 33 (e) 45
14. Simon pays N\$91 for 14 packets of nails in a hardware store. At a "20% less" sale, what will he pay for 35 packets?  
 (a) 228 (b) 217 (c) 195 (d) 182 (e) 179
15. If a 10c-coin weighs 8 g, what is the total value (in N\$) of the coins in 2 kilograms.  
 (a) 25 (b) 250 (c) 2500 (d) 125 (e) 1250
16. There are 24 slices in a loaf of bread. If Joseph ate  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the bread and his brother  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the rest, how many slices are left?  
 (a) 2 (b) 4 (c) 6 (d) 8 (e) 12
17. A farm is in the form of a rectangle where the length is triple the width. If the distance around the farm is 28 km, what is the length in km?  
 (a) 3,5 (b) 5 (c) 8,5 (d) 7,5 (e) 10,5
18. Sarah has N\$21 in the form of 10c and 50c coins. If the 10c-coins are double the 50c-coins; how many 10c-coins are there?  
 (a) 10 (b) 20 (c) 30 (d) 50 (e) 60
19. If the speed of light is 300 000 km/sec and it takes light from the sun 8 min to reach us, how far is the sun from us (in km)?  
 (a) 2,4 mill (b) 4,8 mill (c) 48 mill (d) 96 mill (e) 144 mill
20. To bake a cake Ms Smith uses 3 parts flour; 2 parts milk and 1 part sugar.
- 20.1 If a typical cake weighs 1,5 kg, what is the mass of the flour in grams.  
 (a) 250 (b) 500 (c) 650 (d) 750 (e) 850
- 20.2 If she has to bake 35 such cakes for a function, how many 2,5 kg bags of flour does she have to buy?  
 (a) 5 (b) 6 (c) 10 (d) 11 (e) 12

21. A normal duck has two legs; a lame duck one leg and a sitting duck no legs. There are 30 ducks with 25 legs and the sitting ducks are double the lame ducks. How many normal ducks are there?
- (a) 9 (b) 8 (c) 7 (d) 6 (e) 5

22. A clothing shop uses a mark-up of 50% and also add 15% VAT on top of this. They have a "20% less" sale today. They paid N\$80 for a shirt at a factory.

- 22.1 What is the selling price including VAT?
- (a) N\$138 (b) N\$135 (c) N\$120 (d) N\$110,40 (e) N\$96

- 22.2 What is the cash price after discount?
- (a) N\$96 (b) N\$110,40 (c) N\$112,40 (d) N\$120 (e) N\$73,60

- 22.3 How much profit do they make on this transaction?
- (a) N\$30,40 (b) N\$12,40 (c) N\$16 (d) N\$40 (e) N\$55

23. It is given that 5 miles = 8 kilometer.

- 23.1 How many metres in a mile?
- (a) 1750 (b) 1600 (c) 1500 (d) 1200 (e) 625

- 23.2 If John runs the mile in 4 min, what is his speed in metres/min?
- (a) 438 (b) 400 (c) 375 (d) 300 (e) 156

- 23.3 What is this speed in km/h?
- (a) 24 (b) 25 (c) 26 (d) 28 (e) 30

- 23.4 If he runs the 1500 m race at the same speed, what will be his time in minutes?
- (a)  $3\frac{1}{4}$  (b)  $3\frac{3}{4}$  (c)  $3\frac{1}{2}$  (d)  $3\frac{1}{3}$  (e) 3

24. A cool drink manufacturer fill their 2,25 ℓ bottles from a kiloliter container.

- 24.1 How many bottles can be filled from this container?
- (a) 44 (b) 45 (c) 420 (d) 444 (e) 445

- 24.2 How many standard 330 mℓ tins can be filled from a 2,25ℓ bottle?
- (a) 3 (b) 4 (c) 5 (d) 6 (e) 7

- 24.3 How much (mℓ) will be left over?
- (a) 81 (b) 82 (c) 250 (d) 270 (e) 310

28. Anna spends  $\frac{1}{3}$  of her monthly salary on rent,  $\frac{1}{4}$  on food;  $\frac{1}{6}$  on travelling and  $\frac{1}{12}$  on clothes. She has only N\$1250 left.

28.1 What is her salary?

- (a) 6000 (b) 6500 (c) 7000 (d) 7500 (e) 8000

28.2 How much does she spend on travelling?

- (a) 1875 (b) 1675 (c) 1500 (d) 1250 (e) 1000

$$45 \times 2 = [90]$$

### SECTION B

Fill in the correct measure from this list:

km; m; cm; mm; kg; g; kℓ; ℓ; mℓ; ha

1. Mass of a brick: 3 kg
2. Height of a small boy: 125 cm
3. Capacity of a full farm dam: 45 mℓ
4. Mass of a coin: 7 g
5. Size of a farm: 5000 ha
6. Capacity of a glass: 250 mℓ
7. Mass of a man: 72 kg
8. Length of a pencil: 8 cm
9. Length of a car: 4 km
10. Diameter of a coin: 35 mm

[10]

\*\*\*\*\*

## APPENDIX G: THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA MATURE AGE ENTRY

QUESTION PAPER: NUMERACY TEST. SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER, 2010

# POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

## OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

### EXAMINATION QUESTION PAPER

DEPARTMENT	Student Records and Admission
SUBJECT	Mature Age Entry Test ( <b>Numeracy</b> )
DATE	September/October 2010
DURATION	2 Hours
TOTAL MARKS	68

#### INSTRUCTIONS/INFORMATION

1. DO NOT OPEN this booklet until you are told to do so.
2. This question paper contains 20 compulsory questions.
3. Answer all questions in the spaces provided in this booklet.
4. Where necessary, do your rough work in the spaces underneath each question.
5. Hand in your question paper at the end of the examination.

#### CANDIDATE'S PARTICULARS

Surname	
First Names	
ID / Passport Number	
Signature / Date	



11. In which of the following can the knowledge of arithmetic help you in managing your household finances? Write **YES** or **NO** in the appropriate box. (You earn 1 mark for each correct answer and -1 mark for an incorrect answer. If you are not sure, leave the box empty so that you score a zero for that question.)

11.1	Drawing up our monthly budget	<input type="text"/>
11.2	Reading and understanding municipal bills	<input type="text"/>
11.3	Counting how many persons are in the house	<input type="text"/>
11.4	Writing down the names of our debtors	<input type="text"/>
11.5	Memorising the telephone numbers of our beloved ones	<input type="text"/>
11.6	Planning how much bread to buy for the week	<input type="text"/>
11.7	Determining the number of litres of paint to paint your sitting room.	<input type="text"/>

(7)

#### SECTION B: NUMERACY (41 marks)

12. Below are four cards with their scores. What are the maximum and the minimum possible scores you will get if you draw two cards at random?

<input type="text" value="-5"/>	<input type="text" value="-9"/>	<input type="text" value="-2"/>	<input type="text" value="-15"/>
---------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------	----------------------------------

Answer: Minimum = \_\_\_\_\_; Maximum = \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

13. The cost of making a telephone call on Network A is a fixed 35 cents plus 35 cents for each minute. The cost of making a telephone call on Network B is 40 cents per minute.

- 13.1 Which of these networks is cheaper to make a call for five minutes?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ (3)

- 13.2 Which network is cheaper for a call of fifteen minutes?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ (3)

16.3  $3 + 6 \times 8 - 5$

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

17. Twelve lines make one inch  
Twelve inches make one foot  
Three feet make one yard

17.1 How many lines make one yard?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

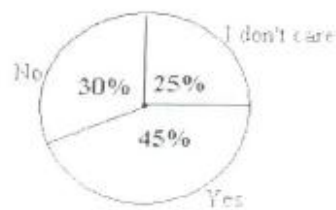
17.2 How many inches will you get from 72 lines?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

17.3 Express 1992 lines in yards, feet and inches

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ yards, \_\_\_\_\_ feet, \_\_\_\_\_ inches (3)

18. The following pie chart represents the opinions of 400 persons that spoke on a burning political issue last week.



18.1 How many persons said "I don't care"?

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_ persons (2)

## APPENDIX H: THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA MATURE AGE ENTRY

QUESTION PAPER: GENERAL PAPER 2010

**UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA**

Mature Age Entry

**GENERAL PAPER**

2010

SURNAME: _____	NAME: _____
Candidate Number: _____	DURATION: 1 Hour

**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES:** Answer ONLY ONE of the following questions on not more than the given pages included.

- Write neatly and legibly

TOTAL MARKS: 25

FINAL MARK IN % .....

(Choose ONLY ONE of the following questions)

**Question 1**

Corporal Punishment is the only solution for children who are not disciplined.  
Discuss the above statement and illustrate your answer with clear examples  
[25 Marks]

**Question 2**

In your opinion, what are the main causes of child abuse in Namibia? Discuss the strategies which can be used to protect children from abusers.  
[25 Marks]

[END]

## APPENDIX I: THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA MATURE AGE ENTRY

QUESTION PAPER: GENERAL PAPER 2011.

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA  
MATURE AGE ENTRY EXAMINATION  
GENERAL PAPER  
2011



INSTRUCTION: Answer ONLY ONE of the following questions on not more than the given pages included.

Surname: .....

First Name: .....

Student Number: .....

DURATION: 1 HOUR

TOTAL MARKS: 25

Final Marks in % 18. ....

(Instructions: Choose **ONLY ONE** of the following questions)

### Question 1

Write an essay on the different steps the Ministry of Education can take in order to improve learners' performance in schools Namibia. Your discussion should include:

a). **Five** current problems which affect the learners' performance in schools.

**[10 marks]**

b). **Three** suggestions with examples on how to improve learners' performance in schools. **[15 marks]**

### Question 2

a). Discuss with examples the **five** main causes of baby dumping in Namibia? **[10 marks]**

b). In your opinion, explain **three mechanism** which can be used to address the problem. **[15 Marks]**

[END]

## APPENDIX J: ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM UNAM

**UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA**

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: HUMAN RESOURCES

**Mr. Reginald L. Izaks**Private Bag 13301, 340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneerspark, Windhoek, Namibia  
☎ (+264 61) 206-3449, Fax: (+264 61) 206 3496, E-mail: [rizaks@unam.na](mailto:rizaks@unam.na)

14 September 2010

Ms L Shaketenge

Faculty of Education

Department of Adult &amp; Continuing Education

**Re: Permission to interview staff members**

Your request to interview certain members for your PhD studies, has reference.

Authorization is herewith granted, but you are also kindly requested to liaise with the Assistant Registrar and Registrar on the times to interview the staff in order to allow for the normal office operations to continue as far as possible with minimal disruption.

Thank you.

All the best wishes for your PhD studies.

Reginald L Izaks

Director: Human Resources

## APPENDIX K: ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM PoN



## POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA

### OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

Private Bag 13388 • 13 Storch Street • Windhoek, NAMIBIA  
 Tel: (+264-61) 207-2008/2118 • Fax: (+264-61) 207-2113 • E-mail: registrar@polytechnic.edu.na

6 September 2010

Ms. Lydia L Shaketange  
 PhD Student  
 University of Namibia  
 Windhoek

Dear Ms. Shaketange

#### APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Your letter dated 1 September 2010 has reference.

Approval is hereby granted for you to conduct the research on RPL in the Polytechnic of Namibia. Any information gathered during the research is to be used for the purpose of the study only and must be treated as confidential. The results of the study should be shared with the Polytechnic. Individual assessment results of students will not be made available, nor will biographical information of students will be made available in such a way that individual students can be identified.

The Polytechnic does not conduct a fully fledged RPL system for admission into the institution, although it can be said that the Mature Age Entry Scheme contains elements of such a system. However, the Polytechnic does conduct a RPL system for recognition of non-certified learning for registered students.

You are advised to contact the Deputy Registrar, Mr. Gerard Vries and the Faculty officers, to compile a list of possible respondents to your data collection instrument. It is my view that these respondents should include both faculty officers who administer the system and academic staff who act as RPL advisers and assessors.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

Corneels H Jafta

Cc: All Deans  
 Deputy Registrar  
 All Faculty Officers  
 Vice Rector: Academic Affairs and Research



## APPENDIX L: PILOT STUDY - ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM NQA



Private Bag 13247  
WINDHOEK  
Namibia

Tel.: + 264 61 384100  
Fax.: + 264 61 384114  
E-mail: [info@namqa.org](mailto:info@namqa.org)

13 September 2010

Ms. Lydia L. Shaketange  
P O Box 21373  
University of Namibia  
WINDHOEK

Dear Ms Shaketange

**PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW STAFF MEMBERS OF THE NAMIBIA  
QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

Thank you for your letter of introduction dated September 09, 2010 by way of which permission is sought to interview NQA staff members re your studies in Recognition of Prior learning.

Permission is granted to interview the following persons:

Name	Position	Telephone number	E-mail address

Kindly liaise with them to schedule the interviews.


I wish you well with your studies.

Yours sincerely

2010-09-13  
**Franz E. Gertze**  
 Director: Namibia Qualifications Authority

Nqa/623/2010

## APPENDIX M: PILOT STUDY - ACCEPTANCE LETTER FROM IUM

	<p align="center"><b>THE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT</b>  <b>WINDHOEK—NAMIBIA</b>          TEL: +264-61-245150/84 FAX: +264-61-248112 E-MAIL: <a href="mailto:vicechancellor@ium.edu.na">vicechancellor@ium.edu.na</a>          GLOBAL HUB FOR MANAGEMENT SCIENCE AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</p> <hr/> <p align="center"><b>OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR</b></p>
<p>Ms. Lydia Shaketange          Department of Lifelong and Community Education          University of Namibia</p>	
<p align="right">22 February 2010</p>	
<p>Dear Ms. Shaketange,</p>	
<p align="center"><b>REQUEST TO PILOT A RESEARCH INSTRUMENT          (QUESTIONNAIRE) IN YOUR INSTITUTION</b></p>	
<p>Sorry for the delay in response, it was rather beyond my control.</p>	
<p>Be advised that if you are still interested to pilot your research at IUM your request is granted.</p>	
<p>Yours Sincerely</p>	
<p>Dr. David R. Namwandi  <b>VICE CHANCELLOR</b></p>	
<p><b>WINDHOEK MAIN CAMPUS</b>          59 Bahnhof Street          Private Bag 14005, Bachiberechi          Tel: 061-245150/84          Fax: 061-248112          E-mail: <a href="mailto:ium@ium.edu.na">ium@ium.edu.na</a></p>	<p><b>WALVIS BAY CAMPUS</b>          Social Security Building          P.O. Box 346, Walvis Bay          Tel: 064-206647          Fax: 064-206647          E-mail: <a href="mailto:adm.wbay@ium.edu.na">adm.wbay@ium.edu.na</a></p>
<p><b>SWAKOPMUND CAMPUS</b>          Haus Meeresruh Complex          P.O. Box 3303, Vineta          Tel: 064-400106          Fax: 064-400106          E-mail: <a href="mailto:adm.swk@ium.edu.na">adm.swk@ium.edu.na</a></p>	<p><b>ONGWEDIYA CAMPUS</b>          P.O. Box 2775,          Oshakati          Tel: 065-230145/230149          Fax: 065-230159          E-mail: <a href="mailto:adm.ong@ium.edu.na">adm.ong@ium.edu.na</a></p>
<p>Website: <a href="http://www.ium.edu.na">www.ium.edu.na</a></p>	
<p align="center">NB: Correspondence Invalid Without IUM Seal.</p>	

