RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN THE REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF THE JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN AREA

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A research report submitted to the Centre of Adult and Continuing Education, University of the Western Cape, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Magister Educationis in the Department of Education

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Key terms

- Implementation of the recognition of prior learning (RPL),
- Workplace experience,
- Recognition of Prior Learning,
- Informal Learning,
- Real Estate Industry,
- Real Estate Agents and Principals,
- Services SETA,
- EAAB,
- Access,
- Redress,
- Social justice
Abstract

This research paper investigates the extent to which the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is implemented in the Real Estate industry within the Johannesburg Metropolitan area. The Real Estate industry is an ideal industry to assess the prior learning of real estate agents since there is no doubt that such a workplace has been recognized as an effective and efficient learning environment which allows workers to take part in an ever-changing work environment (Le Clus, 2011).

Despite the availability of resources from different entities, i.e. the Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), RPL centres, Umalusi, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Estate Agency Affairs Board (EAAB), and so on (OECD, 2010) there seems to be incompatibility between the existing policy and the implementation of such policy in the Real Estate industry. Hence, to paraphrase a common theme within the literature (Cameron and Miller, 2004) there is a gap between the promise and rhetoric of RPL and the actual reality, and a disjunctire between policy formulation and implementation of RPL. Also, most research (Cameron and Miller, 2004) reveals that RPL has neither fulfilled its promised potential of encouraging the previously disadvantaged groups to access formal education and training, nor achieved its goal as a mechanism for social inclusion.

The two primary research questions for this research paper were:

- Why are potential RPL candidates not taking the RPL route to obtain their certification?
- What are the barriers that obstruct efficient RPL implementation within the Real Estate industry?

The research design was exploratory within a qualitative framework employing focus group interviewing, individual interviewing and the distribution of questionnaires that consisted of open-ended questions.

The research sample comprised nineteen participants that included eight estate agents, four principals, five RPL Centers’ representatives, one representative from the Services SETA and one representative from the Estate Agency Affairs Board.
The research findings show that there are serious issues with the implementation current RPL policy within the real estate industry. Many scholars (Colardyn and Bjørnaasvold, 2004; Bjørnaasvold, 2000) indicate that RPL comes with its challenges, for instance that of the role it can play and the extent to which it can address the twin goals of increasing educational level of participation and employment rates. RPL also takes much time, as Anderson, Fejes and Ahn (2004) stress, to transform non-formal and informal learning into more or less formal learning that is ratified in the form of officially acknowledged certificates. Elements such as lack of or insufficient learner support by advisors and language barriers, have contributed significantly to the dropping out of most candidates. The strength of RPL is that unaccredited knowledge and skills can be brought into the open for everyone to see and, in a sense, come into use (Berglund and Anderson, 2012). This was made evident by the candidates who made it through RPL. RPL has also contributed to social equity and redress by admitting candidates as recognised agents and principals who previously were about to be excluded from the industry due to lack of recognised qualifications.
Declaration

I declare that Recognition of prior learning in the real estate industry: a case study of the Johannesburg Metropolitan area is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Kabwe Zacharia Chanda

November 2013
Dedication

This is dedicated to my wife Loreen Shingirai Chanda, my daughters Naomie Never Chanda and Evelyn Sarah Shingirai Chanda
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This research paper was very much dependent on the guidance and assistance of a broad spectrum of individuals and groups since it began in February 2013. I would like to express my gratitude to some of them here:

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- Family and friends who remained patient and understanding throughout.

- Above all I would like to thank Jehovah my God for His Blessings.
List of acronyms

- APEL: Assessment of Prior Existing Learning
- CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
- EAAB: Estate Agency Affairs Board
- ETQA: Education and Training Quality Assurance
- NQF: National Qualifications Framework
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- PDE: Professional Designation Examination
- PDP: Previously Disadvantaged People
- PoE: Portfolio of Evidence
- RPL: Recognition of prior learning
- SAQA: South African Qualifications Authority
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale / background

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2008) stresses that recognising and validating the outcomes of prior learning from informal and non-formal learning pathways do not imply relevance only to education and training policies but also add value to job-creation, employment, social inclusion and poverty-reduction.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the practice of reviewing, evaluating and acknowledging the skills, the information and understanding that adult learners have acquired through experiential, informal and non-formal learning rather than through recognised formal education. RPL is therefore viewed as an inherent component of the lifelong learning concept.

This research explores RPL as an educational and assessment practice and strategy to accredit experienced estate agents and principals within the Real Estate sector and examines the necessary legislative, regulatory and operational environments that facilitate such implementation. Principals are those who are in a position to consider practice in a supervisory / managerial career in the Property and Real Estate Industry.

There are 28,000 estate agents and principals who are registered with the Estate Agency Affairs Board (EAAB) and work for the property industry in South Africa. However, very few of them have qualifications at levels 4 & 5 (EAAB Annual Report, 2012). Moreover, as per the latest legislative requirements to re-qualify on a professional level (Government Gazette No. 31125, 2008), only holders of these qualifications will be allowed to operate in the industry, and the deadline is set for the end of the year 2013. The majority of agents, who are mainly from the previously disadvantaged people (PDP), have accumulated knowledge, skills and experience through workplace tasks, life experience and unaccredited learning programs, and therefore qualify to be taken through RPL (http://www.property24.com).

The Real Estate industry, with its wide variety of opportunities such as real estate sales, brokerage and leasing, property management, institutional real estate investment, real estate consulting, real estate development, is defined on the SAQA website (www.saqa.org.za) as
a multi-million rand sector which requires professionals who are well-trained and knowledgeable to meet the housing needs of private citizens and the business community by providing office space and business premises.

This implies that a wide range of legislation has to be in place in order to regulate the industry system as well as its human capital. Agents need to understand the relevant legislation and most importantly be able to apply it in their execution of their work. The main tools available in the South African context to empower Agents are qualifications which strive to equip them to be able to operate effectively and efficiently in the Real Estate industry.

The Real Estate Qualification at level 4 ‘aims at enhancing the provision of entry-level service within the Property and Real Estate sector’ (www.saqa.org.za) and is the pre-requisite for admission to the Professional Designation Examination (PDE) for Estate Agents conducted by the Estate Agency Affairs Board (EAAB). If successfully completed, the candidate will be registered as a non-principal estate agent or most commonly known as ‘agent’ by the EAAB. Two streams of specialisation are made available at this level and these are Real Estate and Valuation.

The National Certificate in Real Estate at Level 5 has been designed for candidates who are already working in the field of Property and Real Estate and have previously obtained the Qualification at level 4. These candidates are said to be in a position to consider practice in a supervisory or managerial career in the Property and Real Estate Industry (www.saqa.org.za). The qualification at level 5 adds value to the understanding of the candidates in the sector and to their functioning in the workplace. It provides for consolidation of the broad knowledge, skills and values needed in the property and real estate industry. Three streams of specialisation are made available at this level: Property Management, Real Estate and Valuation.
SAQA (www.saqa.org.za) confirms that both qualifications at level 4 and level 5 facilitate access to, mobility within and progression along a learning path for learners who:

- Were previously disadvantaged or who were unable to complete their schooling and were therefore denied access to Further Education and Training
- Have worked in Real Estate for many years, but have no formal Qualification in real estate or property
- Wish to extend their range of skills and knowledge of the industry so that they can become competent workers in the property industry.

The structure of the contents of these two qualifications makes RPL possible and very much doable. Candidates and assessors are advised to decide on specific assessment methods to be utilised to determine prior learning and competence in the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

There is a set of policies and procedures clearly indicating that RPL is part of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) development and is designed with prior intention to open opportunities for those who have difficulties in accessing education and training in the past (OECD, 2010).

According to SAQA’s guidelines, all qualifications listed on the NQF may either be obtained in whole or in part through RPL (www.saqa.org.za). The common assessment approaches used for RPL include but are not limited to the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), publications, references, testimonials and other evidence. The principles of assessment require that all assessments be fair, valid, reliable and practicable and go through three phases: planning and preparation with candidates, conducting assessment, and reporting the outcomes. It further requires that the Services SETA as the Education and Training Quality Assurance Body (ETQA) conduct external moderation for all RPL Centres after they have submitted their internal moderation reports for quality assurance purposes (CHE, 2010).
1.2 Problem statement

Given the current legal requirements in the real estate industry for possessing an NQF aligned qualification to exercise the functions of an agent (Government Gazette No. 31125, 2008); given the timeframe ending in December 2013 for complying with the legal aspect; given the existence of experience, skills and knowledge acquired informally and non-formally by a majority of agents, it was therefore feasible to investigate the key problems hindering a proper implementation of the recognition of prior learning as the *sine qua non*e route for obtaining the certificate that saves money and time, and empower the candidates.

In this regard the following questions were formulated:

- Why are potential RPL candidates not taking the RPL route to obtain their certification?
- What are the barriers that obstruct the efficient implementation of RPL within the Real Estate industry?

1.3 Objectives

This research report aims:

1.3.1 To investigate why potential RPL candidates are not making use of the available RPL services and the barriers that obstruct efficient RPL implementation within the Real Estate industry;

1.3.2 To contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Adult Education and Global Change; and

1.3.3 To inform the drafting of recommendations on best practice of RPL in the Real Estate industry through the responsible bodies, i.e. Services SETA, Department of Higher Education and Training, SAQA, etc.
1.4 Structure of the research paper

Chapter One provides an overall perspective of the research report and motivates the purpose of the study.

Chapter Two starts by presenting the literature gathered. It highlights the issues gathered from different academic authors and public documents on the issues under investigation.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology used in collecting the research data and analysing it. It covers the secondary and primary data used, questionnaires developed and used for the discussions and interviews conducted, the sample selection process and the data analysis methods.

Chapter Four presents key findings for all the key themes investigated.

Lastly, Chapter Five outlines the conclusions drawn from both the literature and the findings of the primary research, and recommendations for further research.

The appendices include examples of interview and survey questionnaires and letters sent out requesting participants to take part in this study.

1.5 Limitations of the study

This study presents a number of limitations and these include the following:

- Firstly, the focus of the research was on one municipal area which cannot be regarded as representative of all cities within the Republic of South Africa.
- Secondly, the size of the selected sample is small and the research outcomes cannot therefore be generalisable
- Thirdly, a case study is a subjective form of enquiry. The same case study may be used by a different researcher focusing on different data that will lead to different conclusions.
These limitations might give rise to ‘false coherence’ which is described by Millar (1983, p.121 – 122 cited by Hendricks, 2001) as follows:

In evaluation, as in other forms of enquiry, there is a danger of imposing a conceptual order upon an empirical chaos. If our evidence forces us to conclude that the field we are investigating is a confusion of conflicts and contradictions how are we to transcend the confusion? Are we writing in bad faith if we attempt to give a coherent account of a process, which is not coherent?

In recognising these limitations, this research attempts to use the implementation of RPL within the Real Estate Industry in the Johannesburg Metropolitan to investigate, examine and analyse the assumptions and claims made in the name of RPL, which may otherwise not be highlighted.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I critically review selected literature that examines the concepts of education/training, learning, workplace learning, lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning (RPL), and the relationship between experience, learning, and knowledge.

In a review of the literature, I was unsuccessful in my search to locate research that focuses on the implementation of RPL within the Real Estate industry at the internal level and specifically within the jurisdiction of the Johannesburg Municipality. I have thus concluded that currently no research has been conducted on the implementation of RPL specifically in the Real Estate industry within the Johannesburg Municipality. Accordingly, I undertook the journey to scrutinize to what extent RPL implementation targets in South Africa are met by fulfilling its promised potential of encouraging the previously disadvantaged groups to access formal education and training in this industry at both Levels 4 and 5 for the Real Estate Qualification (SAQA ID: 59097 and SAQA ID: 20188).

2.1 Education and experiential learning

Education and learning are frequently used synonymously; however the literature defines education as a planned learning intervention that is organised and structured for specific purposes. On the other hand, learning is defined as an ongoing process of adapting to change in one’s environment. Learning happens in a number of contexts and sites. However most learning is acquired accidentally, is not acquired as a part of a structured curriculum, and thus has an informal connotation. Formal educational provision, on the other hand, attempts to encourage learning for specific purposes. Learning acquired through formal educational institutions is normally accredited and acknowledged by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Guile and Young (1998) argue that workplace learning is often referred to as being ‘informal’. According to them, the term ‘informal’ is negative and unfair because the activities workers are involved in are activities that produce valuable products. Workers, who learn at work through workplace activities, do not necessarily learn as a result of formal educational interventions.
Rather within the workplace, workers learn from one another and through the activities they are involved in. In other words, they learn experientially.

It is through making sense from direct experience that experiential learning sources its ‘raison d’être’. Drawing on the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, the guru of experiential learning, Kolb (1984) emphasises that experiential learning is related to action learning, experiential education, adventure learning, free choice learning, cooperative learning and service learning. Experiential learning focuses much more on the individual learning process. Through experiential learning, the candidate is given opportunities to reflect and observe, and therefore granted the chance to determine what works and what does not.

Consistent with Guile and Young (1998), Fenwick (2001) points out that experiential learning is sometimes referred to as incidental or informal learning and is often not given the credit it deserves. She stresses that this negativity is because most people assume that valuable and ‘legitimate’ learning results from situations where there are formal teachers and/or formal pedagogic practices which are often absent in the case of learning at work. However, Fenwick (2001) confirms that most learning happens outside educational institutions where there are no formal teachers and didactic practices. Furthermore, learning at work results from participating, thinking and acting where there are goal-directed activities that are structured by workplace experiences and this is what happens within workplaces.

The purpose of RPL should therefore be seen as a way of making visible the scope of ‘informal and non-formal’ knowledge and experience held by an individual, irrespective of the context where the learning originally took place or how the individual acquired the knowledge.

Colardyn & Bjornavold (2004), and Fenwick (2001) arguments indicate that there is no need to draw lines between existing forms of learning as all learning are necessary in the socio-economic and political contexts. However the importance of acknowledging or accrediting learning is that the certification system ensures that formal, informal and non-formal forms of learning are assessed against the same qualifications standards. Such a requirement, as indicated earlier, is consistent with UNESCO’s assertions that all forms of learning should be considered equally (UNESCO, 1997).
2.2 Assumptions underpinning RPL

2.1.1 Learning and Workplace learning

Every-day learning usually attracts limited formal recognition. Human beings are constantly learning everywhere and at all times. Each single day leads to additional skills, knowledge and/or competences. This learning happens in both formal educational settings which are always organised and structured, and have clearly defined learning objectives, and in informal and non-formal settings which involve learning by experience or simply experience itself, and which have no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and are therefore seldom explicitly intentional from the learner’s standpoint.

It can be argued that informal learning contributes to the majority of the learning that takes place at work. It has been reported (Marsick and Watkins, 1990) that a significant amount of what employees learn is the result of the application of personal strategies including but not limited to questioning, listening, observing, reading and reflecting on their work environment. Marsick and Watkins (1990) estimate that close to 90 percent of workplace learning is acquired through informal means.

Unfortunately, learning that takes place outside the formal learning system is not well understood or made visible with the consequence that such learning is not appropriately valued (Werquin, 2010).

*Ceteris paribus* [all other things being equal or held constant], both types of learning allow visibility and portability of equal outcomes in the lifelong learning system, in the labour market or in the community. The second type of learning can be made visible or ‘brought’ into existence through a process called Recognition of Prior learning (RPL).

RPL, also referred to as Assessment of Prior Existing Learning (APEL) in the United Kingdom (UK), ‘Realkompetence – what you are capable of’ as well as ‘recognition of prior learning’ in Denmark (Danish Ministry of Education, 2005, p.3), validation in Sweden (Andersson and Fejes, 2005); prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) in Canada (Wihak, 2007); recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Australia (Misko, Beddie, and Smith, 2007) is the
practice of assessing and recognizing learning that adults have acquired outside the formal institutional education system, through their work or community involvements. RPL reduces the time and cost of completing a learning program (Aarts, Blower, Burke, Conlin, Lamarre, & McCrossan, 2003; Thomas, Collins, & Plett, 2002; Berglund and Andersson, 2012; Cameron, 2012).

RPL has reference to the ‘comparison of previous learning and experience’ of a learner, ‘howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance of such learning for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements’ (SAQA Regulation 452, No. 18787, March 1998, p. 5).

The National Standards Bodies Regulations (No 18787 of 28 March 1998, issued in terms of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995) and CHE (2011) define the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as follows:

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

From the above-mentioned definition derived four key points in terms of principles in developing and executing RPL. These are:

a. There are different formats of learning, i.e. formal, informal and non-formal;
b. There are existing specific learning standards which include entrance requirements for RPL for access [at a unit standard, skills program and qualification scale] against which the claimed experience, skills and knowledge are measured;
c. Credits can only be awarded in case the [unit standard, skills program and qualification] requirements are met; and
d. The process of assessment and provision of evidence substantiate the learning claims.
2.1.2 The relationship between experience and learning

While most discussions have not led to any agreement amongst theorists and RPL practitioners on the importance of experience and its correlation to learning and RPL, it is however acknowledged by some that experience remains at the centre of the RPL concept.

Experience is regarded as essential in the creation of knowledge. This view on learning and experience is supported by Challis (1993) who indicates that identification of learning arisen from past experience is the key component in recalling past experiences and not events themselves.

Paloniemi (2006, p.444) indicates that “competence and expertise are seen as one of the most valuable resources of individuals, organisations, and societies”. Some researchers (Kolb, 1984; Boud and Miller, 1996; Brookfield, 1996) have clearly indicated that experience gained in work practices is considered to be the main prerequisite to construct competence and develop expertise. They further highlight the significance of experience either as a foundation for learning or as a way of learning. This learning process starts necessarily with a noticeable discomfort and needs an intentional reflection.

The ‘analysing, reflecting and extracting learning from experience’ approach is not universally welcomed (Johnston and Usher, 1996; Michelson, 1996a; and Stuart, 1996 cited by Hendricks, 2001).

Michelson (1996, p.439 cited by Hendricks, 2001), for instance, perceives experience to be contaminated by ‘subjectivity, interestedness, bias and materiality’ and further indicates that there is no need to distance self from experience in order to bring closer objectivity and rationality as ‘reflection itself is neither an historical nor an individual process’.

Hendricks (2001) indicates that some learning theorists stress that experience is only a resource for learning and therefore it is the onus of the RPL candidate, during the reflective activity process on experience, to identify learning that has taken place. It is through this reflective journey that the metamorphosis of experience into learning takes place. We should therefore acknowledge that this phase is the most important in the RPL process (Evans, 1992 cited in Hendricks, 2001).
On the other hand, the reflection on learning has been underestimated by some researchers such as Boud (2005, p. 99) who stresses that little weight should be put on the role reflection plays in terms of workplace learning, and indicates that ‘learning in the workplace has more to do with learning when experiencing’. This might include the application of personal experience to; for instance, solve practical problems encountered or performing specific tasks at work. Boud (2005, p.49) further makes it clear by saying that ‘experience and learning in the workplace can be understood as embedded in and accumulated during practical doing’. This point of view assumes the integration of work and learning. Boud (2000, p.151) stresses the invaluable importance of taking ‘learning as a lifelong project where individuals need to learn to identify and verify their own learning achievements throughout life, including in the workplace’.

2.3 Social purposes of RPL

It is the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) and the White Paper on Higher Education (Department of Higher Education, White Paper 3 of 1997) that promoted the RPL practice. In the South African context this is seen as one of the means whereby equity and redress for past social injustices and inequalities can be facilitated and promoted.

Social justice and economic expediency have been the main ideology and drivers related to RPL (Scott, 2007). From its inception, groups of previously disadvantaged who did not have any chance to take part in ‘post compulsory education and training’ were promised to have ‘their work and life experiences recognised’ (Cameron and Miller, 2004, p.1). RPL is therefore a strategic mechanism assisting the nation that embraced it to maintain its competitive edge and economic success, as it assists learners to gain credit for learning achievement and provides access to higher educational levels in greater numbers.

Research has revealed that while drafting an RPL model, it is important to take into account the cultural aspects of the community being served. For instance, for the South African context, Underwood (cited in Jooste and Jasper, 2010, p.705) stresses that there is no ‘single model from elsewhere in the world that can adequately address the conditions in South Africa from the legacy of the apartheid era and political environment of the recent past’.
RPL represents a second chance for those who were structurally prevented from obtaining a quality education under the apartheid regime (Jooste and Jasper, 2010). The OECD (2010, p.13) report highlight two main fears related to RPL that “the system may not be totally fair and that (RPL) recognition is an overly technical approach too unrelated to the individual and the context”. It further stresses the issue of protecting integrity and recognising diversity by ensuring that the focus is on only what the candidate knows. This approach will give an opportunity to many young people who have left school very early for so many reasons including but not limited to motherhood, financial restrictions, adolescents supporting their family, serious illness, or because school is too far from home.

The power of RPL is that ‘unaccredited knowledge and skills can be brought into the open for everyone to see’ and, in a sense, come into use (Berglund and Anderson, 2012). This is where the challenge starts.

**2.4 Key debates concerning RPL implementation in South Africa and beyond**

Knowledge and skills developed in the workplace are rarely documented or officially acknowledged. While there is enough evidence that RPL is well known among South African ‘industries, municipalities, companies and other employers, it remains under-used as a way to articulate the knowledge and skills of employees’ (Berglund, 2010, p.13). Many reasons behind the reluctance of employers to implement RPL have been identified. These include, among others, the high risk taken by employers to invest in education/learning and assessment which is likely to backfire when employees leave the organisation after their skills have been made visible and tangible. Competence that has long stayed in the dark is brought to light through recognition and assessment. This might be the reason for employee unions and employees themselves to demand increases in their wages. The recognition, as indicated by some researchers (Weber, 1978; Beetham, 1991; Nordhaug, 1993) impacts positively on the production and the ‘legitimacy of the organisation’. Two dilemmas come to light. The one is that of employers who are willing to make employees’ competence visible and thereafter controlled. The other is that of employees who ‘develop valuable knowledge and skills, which, without acknowledgement, remains contextually trapped within the organisation’. Research and experience both show that RPL can
make ‘an important contribution to both the companies’ need for competence and the individual’s need for employability’ (Berglund and Andersson, 2012, p.74).

Romaniuk and Snart (2000) indicate that there are underlying assumptions in lifelong learning and in RPL that informal and non-formal learning can be assessed to acquire the same status as formal learning. This prompts huge challenges because both non-formal and informal learning tend to be seen as ‘by definition as lower status negative pole of formal learning’ (Bjornavold, 2000). Moreover, informal learning can remain unarticulated and tacit.

2.5 Barriers to implementation of RPL

The following are the generic issues, which may hamper a successful RPL implementation (NQF Support Link / SAQA, 2009):

- Funding and costs;
- Portfolio-based RPL models are said to be a barrier for some candidates as they experience difficulties in compiling evidence. Portfolio-based RPL assumes the ability to compile evidence, thereby making it a skill over and above the main competence that is being assessed. Also candidates have problem in getting hold of the historical evidence or documentary proof required;
- Inadequate support for RPL candidates may make RPL more difficult than the learning programme to which it is meant to provide access
- Time issue:
  Candidates who are working full-time are required to be involved in the production process (as usual), while at the same time they have to dedicate some time to compile their Portfolio of Evidence (PoE).
- Confusing language:
- RPL comes with new concepts (i.e. recognition of current competencies, fast-track assessment, accelerated learning, evidence, qualification framework, unit standard, credit transfer etc.). These concepts are new to the candidates.
• Complex processes:
RPL implementation has a tendency to include lengthy and heavy administration processes. The whole RPL process requires communication skills that are gained through academic learning, which mostly candidates lack.

• Awareness and perception:
RPL as a learning option is poorly marketed by stakeholders (RPL centers, unions, employers, etc.) and its image is referred to as an ‘easy option’, which makes most employers not value it.

The above points are even worsened by what Wheelahan, Dennis, Firth, Miller, Newton, Pascoe, and Veenker (2003, p. 31) call the RPL paradox. This paradox of RPL “is that it is assessing an individual’s learning that has occurred mostly outside formal education and training, but it requires high levels of knowledge of these formal education and training contexts and the structure of qualifications and language used in education, to prepare a successful RPL application”.

To these selected hindrances, the Queensland DET (2003) and Bowman et al., (2003) recommend the following:

• Obtain buy-in from all stakeholders or a greater collaboration between assessors, evidence collection facilitator, internal moderator / evaluator, RPL candidates and staff responsible for equity support, ETQA, employer and professional body;

• Develop and promote RPL practical case study examples and strategies to encourage more learners to engage with RPL processes

• Client-friendly, less paper-based processes. Use alternatives to portfolios which take a more holistic approach to assessment

• Use more observation, general questioning & third parties for verification
Deller (2007) in her PhD thesis indicates that “one of the main reasons for the widespread rejection of RPL in favour of traditional classroom training is simply that the RPL models available do not cater for the working adult in a working environment”. This is one of the issues this study is examining.

### 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the content of selected literature, which the researcher has found relevant and foundational to this research. The next chapter describes the research methodology and research design.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This research is a qualitative study and is associated with the critical theory approach. The researcher’s aim here has been to gather an in-depth understanding of the behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior of potential RPL candidates in the real estate industry who despite availability of opportunities to enrol and obtain certificate in order to meet the industry requirements do not. Qualitative research methodology is much used to investigate disciplines in social sciences (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) as it helps to understand and explore the meaning that people give to a social problem (Creswell, 2009). It scrutinizes the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of a social experience (Jepson, Mandava, Ring & Ritchie, 2010). Qualitative research distinguishes itself from quantitative methods in using open-ended questions to gather information and being framed in words rather than numbers and closed questions (Creswell, 2009). What makes it more popular in social sciences is that it enables the researcher to obtain information on certain elusive issues as well as on the human side of an issue (Guest, Mack, MacQueen, Namey & Woodsong, 2005).

According to critical theorist Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School, a theory is critical in so far as it seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” and is aimed at change and emancipation through enlightenment (Horkheimer 1982, p.244). Here the problem is epistemological in the sense that there is no consideration of the scientist but the knowing individual. Critical theory combines practical and normative thinking in order to explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify actors to change it, and provide clear norms for criticism and practical goals for the future. I use this approach to focus on the practice of RPL in a specific context or circumstances and on the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature based on RPL.

Within this chapter the research design of the study is discussed through elaboration on the data sampling and collection methods. It also provides an overview of data management and analysis, and concludes by stressing issues of ethics in qualitative research.
3.2 Research design

The research design is nothing else than the plan that the researcher uses to conduct their research exercise (Mouton & Marais, 1990). Johnson and Christensen (2004) indicate that there are three research designs: quantitative research, qualitative research and mixed methods research that combines the first two. They further define quantitative research as that which allows the collection of numerical data to test the theory and hypotheses, and qualitative research as that which emphasizes understanding people in their social settings and focuses on understanding of the social scenario, the reason why it happens and how participants perceive it (Gay, Mills and Airasian, 2006). Mixed methods combine both qualitative and quantitative methods, each covering one aspect of the study (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). This study’s focus on understanding the implementation of RPL in the real estate industry required that the research design be a qualitative one.

Guest, Mack, MacQueen, Namey, and Woodsong (2005) highlight the advantages of using qualitative research. These advantages include, among others, the use of open-ended questionnaires that grant the opportunity to the participating population to answer in their own words as opposed to the more restrictive responses elicited by quantitative research, and the chance given to the researcher to ask the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in order to understand the social scenario. Given these reasons, the researcher conducted focus group and individual interviews where ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions were used.

There are different types of qualitative research which include but not limited to exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research. The exploratory type focuses on describing the variables in the selected study. The descriptive type provides a description of the status of the situation while the explanatory one tests the theories that explain how and why a phenomenon functions the way it does (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, the exploratory research method was selected due to its potential for generating ideas in order to understand the phenomenon.
The researcher conducted focus group and individual interviews at the participants’ premises where he played an instrumental role in gathering data and where participants expressed clearly their points of view on the matter under investigation.

A process of organising, coding and interpreting the data was followed by the researcher while establishing the themes for the study under investigation.

The researcher’s own understanding of RPL processes and procedures, and the experience gained over the past ten years spent working on RPL projects as assessor, moderator, evidence collection facilitator and project manager played a pivotal role in the research design. This means that key concepts such as assessment, evaluation, documentation and recognition were used as reference points for developing an understanding of how knowledge and skills were recognised within the organisations through the implementation of RPL within the real estate industry in the Johannesburg metropolitan.

### 3.3 Sampling strategy

Johnson and Christensen (2004) indicate that there is no way that a study can be conducted on the entire population; however, researchers conduct their study on a selected subset known as a sample in order to make statements on the entire population from which the sample was drawn.

There are various sampling techniques ranging from random to non-random. For the purpose of this research the researcher used a non-probability sampling method to identify participants who took part in this research and met the requirements of the study. This process is described by Zikmund (2003) as a sampling technique in which sample units are selected based on personal judgment or convenience.

The researcher used data from five estate agencies with a total sample of eight Estate agents, four Estate Principals operating in different geographical points, five RPL representatives, the Services SETA with one representative and the EAAB with one representative. All these
organisations are located within the Johannesburg metropolitan area. In total 19 interviewees took part in this study.

The first round of interviews was conducted with RPL candidates who were well aware of their organisation’s strategic planning for the development and recruitment of knowledge and skills. The Services SETA’s and EAAB’s representatives were interviewed next regarding the implementation of RPL within the real estate industry and ‘the practice of developing, articulating and putting knowledge and skills to work in the organisation’ (Berglund and Andersson, 2012).

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that certain thematic questions were prepared in advance but the approach was characterised by an openness and willingness to follow unexpected and seemingly interesting leads. The interviews lasted between one hour and one and a half hours and were conducted at each respective workplace.

3.4 Data collection

In order to answer the research question(s), empirical evidence known as data is to be gathered by the researcher following the rules of the research design. Given (2008) indicates that quantitative research refers to the systematic empirical investigation of social phenomena through statistical, mathematical or numerical data or computational techniques. He further states that qualitative methods, on their turn, produce information only on the particular cases studied, and any more general conclusions are only hypotheses.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used triangulation using focus group interviewing, individual interviewing and use of open-ended questionnaires. The rationale behind the combination and use of this multi-method during the data collection is to ensure cross-checking of the information and conclusions in an investigation of the same phenomenon (Berg, 2004:5; Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p.250) and therefore allowing the researcher to have a more complex picture of the phenomenon under investigation.
3.4.1 Methods of data collection

Guest et al. (2005) indicate that specific tools to collect the data are known as data collection instruments. The common ones include but are not limited to questionnaires (closed and open), both individual and focus group interviews, observation, tests and secondary data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the following instruments to collect the data:

3.4.1.1 Focus group interviewing

Guest et al (2005) indicate that a focus group interviewing method is an effective and efficient data collection tool that necessitates a meeting to be held between the researcher and a small group of selected participants, acceptably six (Patton, 2002), in order to discuss the topic of study.

For the purposes of this study the focus group participants consisted of seven participants that included six estate agents and one principal.

A series of open-ended questions are used by the interviewer who leads the discussion (Guest et al., 2005). The process is guided by the interview guide taken for a framework that covers all relevant items that need to be addressed (Patton, 2002). For the purpose of this investigation, eight questions were composed after thorough analysis of the existing literature on RPL practice (appendices A and B).

Patton (2002) states that the acceptable duration of a focus group interview ranges between one and two hours. The focus group for this research lasted one hour and forty five minutes. The discussion was held in the boardroom at the participants’ offices. As required by the ethical guidelines, the researcher read the content of the consent form that was signed by all participants as a means of agreeing to take part in the research.

Data from this group discussion included a tape recording, a transcript of the recording, notes from the discussion and notes from the debriefing session held after the focus group interview.
3.4.1.2 In-depth interviews

The individual interview was conducted face to face by the researcher to collect information from a participant on the research topic (Guest et al., 2005). The interview is considered to be one of the powerful tools in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In this two-way interaction, the researcher fulfils the role of the ‘learner’ and the interviewee is considered to be the ‘expert’. The whole process is guided by an existing interview guide or schedule.

Not only was enough information collected through the verbal communication, the interaction with participants allowed extra non-verbal communication information through the participants’ responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) such as the motions they made while responding, facial expressions, gestures, etc. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ offices and lasted between thirty minutes to one hour (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Transcription took place soon after recording of interviews. The nature and the reason to conduct this study were explained to the participants in order to ensure that the researcher adheres to ethical aspects. A consent form (Appendix C) was signed by each of them to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. Also the researcher kept on reminding them that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

3.4.1.3 Open-ended questionnaires

An open-ended questionnaire is mostly used when interviewing participants is not convenient. The aim of it is to source the thoughts, feelings and opinions from participants. This type of questionnaire allows the participant to express his thoughts as much as he can and is used in explanatory research (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).

An open-ended questionnaire (Appendices A and B) was sent by email to those candidates who could not make it for the interview due to various factors including time constraints related to their work schedules. The questions in the questionnaire were compiled in accordance with the study objectives and the language used was straightforward.
Both questionnaire and consent forms (Appendices A, B and C) were sent via email to three RPL candidates, seven RPL Centre representatives, one representative of the Services SETA and one representatives of the EAAB. Two representatives, one from the Services SETA and the other one from the EEAB and six RPL Centres representatives were able to return the questionnaire.

3.5 Data management

Data management and data analysis are processes that run concurrently which makes it difficult to draw the line between the two stages (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Guest et al. (2005) state that data management has an impact on data analysis and therefore keeping it safe, organised and in a systematic way are indispensable requirements for successful research.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher did not use any existing qualitative software program to manage the data; however, he personally interacted with it in managing it directly.

Data collected for individual and focus group interviews was taped and transcribed by the researcher himself. The tape was kept in a locked filing cabinet throughout the study journey and access to the cabinet was limited to the researcher only. The transcribed interviews were thereafter saved on the researcher’s personal laptop that is password protected using an individual numbering system for easy identification. All consent forms and completed questionnaires from participants to be interviewed were kept as well in the filing cabinet. Due to confidentiality issues, all raw data will be destroyed six months after the study has been successfully completed.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is known as a process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data with the aim of highlighting useful information in ways that help the researcher to detect patterns or problems so as to explore associations that exist in the data. This phase’s aim is mostly reducing the ‘large corpus of information’ (Bryman, 2013, p.13) gathered by researcher in order to make sense of it.
There are five steps that form the data analysis strategy (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p.209):

a. Organising the data: To make the collected data manageable and easy to be retrieved, note cards were used by the researcher as advised by Marshall and Rossman (2011, p.210). The researcher transcribed the individual as well as the focus group interviews.

b. Becoming immersed in the data: At this stage the research familiarised himself with the collected data through a repeated reading exercise in order to allocate codes and identify themes (Marshall & Rossman 2011).

c. Coding the data known also as indexing: Bryman (2012, p.565) stresses that “qualitative data deriving from interviews mostly takes the form of a large corpus of unstructured textual material, […] and is therefore cumbersome because of its reliance on prose in the form of such media as field notes, interview transcripts, or documents”.

d. At this stage, the researcher identified themes, recurring ideas and patterns of belief that emerged into categories (Hanrahan, 2010, p.32).

It is through the coding process that the large amount of data is condensed into a simpler and manageable data packet to go through analysis (ibid.). For the purpose of this research, major codes were generated from the gathered data by the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p.508).

e. Generating categories and themes: After coding, the research grouped the codes in categories of commonalities. To illustrate key findings, the researcher identified verbatim quotes from the data.

f. Interpreting the data: Marshall and Rossman (2011, p.219) state that it is at this particular phase that the researcher is required to “tell the story” of what he learnt
from the entire research journey. The researcher needs to make sense of the findings by bringing forward a meaningful explanation, making inferences and drawing consistent conclusions. The findings of this research are displayed in a narrative format.

For the purpose of this study, the research followed the above analytical process although Patton (2002, p.432) indicates that there is not a unique or specific formula with regard to the process of data analysis.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues during the collection and the analysis of data phases were seriously considered by the researcher. These issues included four main areas (Diener and Crandall 1978 -Cited in Bryman, 2012 p135; Denzin& Lincoln, 2005, p.144): informed consent, invasion of privacy, deception and harm to participants. It is further indicated that (Patton 2002 p. 405 and 407) during the interview process most interviewees end up telling the researcher things they never intended to tell. Subsequent to this, confidentiality and obtaining informed consent of participants is necessary.

All participants in this research were informed of the aim of the study and were requested to fill in and sign the consent form (Appendix C).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology and design used to execute this research. After careful consideration, a qualitative method was selected out of the three methods including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods to investigate the implementation of RPL in the real estate industry within the Johannesburg Metro. The selection of qualitative method as the research methodology guided the key decisions of sample selection and data collection techniques. The research sample, data collection methods and management of the data analysis processes were discussed preparing therefore the platform for a discussion of the research findings covered in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from selected participants in order to understand the implementation of RPL in the real estate industry within the Johannesburg Metropolitan area. The report of the findings will give answers to the main questions listed in chapter one under the problem statement section, which are as follows:

- Why are potential RPL candidates not taking the RPL route to obtain their certification?
- What are the barriers that obstruct efficient RPL implemented within the Real Estate industry?

The findings in terms of the potential barriers that obstruct efficient RPL implementation within the real estate industry are detailed and discussed in the sections below.

4.2 Research Methods Snapshot

This research was a qualitative study in which data were collected through focus group interview, open-ended questionnaires and individual interview. The purpose of focus group interview, open-ended questionnaires and individual interview of candidates that have gone through RPL process, Services SETA and RPL Centres’ representatives was to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of RPL in the real estate industry within the Johannesburg Metropolitan area. These data collection methods assisted the researcher to identify the key hindrances of the implementation of RPL in the real estate industry.

Breakdown of study participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants role in RPL</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agents</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPL Representatives</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services SETA’s representatives</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAAB representatives</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a. Eight candidates who qualified as agents and five as principals last year through RPL were selected as participants in this study. They all work for well-known estate agencies in Johannesburg and their experience ranges from seven to eleven years with successful track records in concluding property deals. They were all black males between the ages of 31 and 64 years. Twenty per cent (20%) of the candidates possess a Matric Certificate; 40% went up to grade 9 and 10; and 40% quitted at primary school level.

b. All these candidates were granted bursaries through the Services SETA [through a mandatory grant as their employers are levy payers]. They all have had a chance to attend workshops organised by the property professional bodies such as the South African Property Owners Association (SAPOA), the Institute of Estate Agents of South Africa (IEASA); and they wrote the Professional Designation Examination (PDE) organised by the EAAB that grant successful candidates a Fidelity Certificate. All candidates confirmed that they have supervised interns that were placed in their agencies.

c. Five representatives of four different Services SETA accredited RPL centres. Two of these institutions have been operating in the skills and development industry for the past 14 years (they were accredited in 2003); one for 11 years (it was accredited in 2005) and the last one for eight years (it was accredited in 2008). They have provided 122; 89; 68 and 51 candidates with qualifications through the RPL procedures, respectively, since their accreditation as RPL centres. These figures, compared to those of candidates that exited the same qualification through the provision of training, are much less due to reasons that will be discussed in the subsequent sections. The staff involved in implementing RPL included experienced and constituent assessors and moderators [accredited by the Services SETA], evidence collection facilitators [with considerable years of experience] and administrators. All assessors and moderators have a National Diploma in Real Estate and have worked as professional valuers, quantity surveyors, principals and agents. They are all governed by the RPL centers’ Quality Management Systems that guide them in terms of facilitation, assessment and moderation with regard to preparation of candidates, collection of evidence, and assessment of submitted
Portfolios of Evidence (POEs), assessment feedback, conducting internal moderation and giving feedback to assessors as well as keeping the records.

4.3 How RPL works in the real estate industry

The end of the year 2013 has been set as the deadline for all estate agents and principals operating within the Republic of South Africa to meet the educational requirement of holding a NQF aligned qualification in order to be recognised by the EAAB as competent estate agents or principals in the industry. The majority of the so called agents does not have such qualifications and have worked for several years in the industry and have therefore acquired relevant knowledge, skills and experience. RPL has been seen as the *sine qua none* for this population to acquire their certificate in order to meet the legal requirements stated in the Government Gazette No. 31125, 2008. The credits gained through RPL would enable the candidates to pursue their learning at institutions of higher learning.

The custodian of the real estate qualification at both level 4 and level 5 is SAQA, which has mandated the Services SETA as the quality assurance body to oversee the implementation of such programs. Public as well as private learning institutions have to register with the Services SETA as RPL centres in order to conduct RPL assessments. Employers can, therefore, assist their potential agents who have acquired experience and are in need of certificates by identifying a suitable RPL centre and enroll them. In most cases, real estate agencies that are levy payers are entitled to apply for grants (Pivotal, discretionary or mandatory) through the Services SETA to pay for their employees’ fees. Soon after the candidates have met the minimum requirements, the RPL centre allocates an RPL advisor that will take the candidate through the content of the qualification, the learning journey with detailed dates of submission of tasks and assignments, the type of evidence that need to be submission for evaluation, the RPL centre’s assessment and moderation policies, the appeal policy and so on. Three days are set aside to assist the candidates in compiling their portfolio of evidence (PoE). The RPL advisor will play the role of mentor as well during the course of the RPL process. The PoEs will thereafter be submitted to a constituent assessor registered with the Services SETA to assess, give feedback and re-assess where necessary. A constituent moderator accredited by the Services SETA who is at the services of the RPL Centre will thereafter internally moderate the assessment outcomes. The internal
Moderation outcomes in a form of standard report will be forwarded to the Services SETA together with the assessment results for external evaluation. During a site visit by the external moderator, the assessment outcomes, moderated by an internal moderator, will either be upheld if these meet the requirement and sent for certification or be rejected if these lack evidence and advice for rectification will be given in a form of a report (Skills Development Act 97 of 1998; Higher Education Act 101 of 1997; National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008).

4.4 Discussion of findings

As indicated in section 3.6.a, eight themes emerged that are discussed below. Verbatim excerpts from the interviews and open questionnaires authenticate findings. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity of participants, their responses wherever used are numbered as I1 to I19.

4.4.1 Assessment instruments as a barrier to effective RPL implementation

External moderators identified specific gaps in the collection of RPL evidence. To close the gaps identified by external moderators, some RPL centres added interviews as an additional assessment instrument, in addition to the portfolio of evidence (POE).

All selected RPL centres, in this study, were using the existing assessment tool that was designed by the Services SETA’s designers. RPL centres were urged to customize the tool for their needs or that of their clients.

The assessments conducted at both level 4 and level 5 were portfolio based and written assignments. Candidates were required to complete the portfolio activities on their own time, using real life projects in their workplace environment in preparing evidence towards their learning claims.

A final summative assessment (FSA) was conducted on each exit level outcomes per learning unit, as well as on the overall qualification. Candidates were required to write three FSA at level 4 and five FSA at level 5 in the form of a test/examination.
As part of the assessment strategy at both levels, the following were covered:

1. Knowledge Assignment
2. Practical/Research Assignment
3. CCFO/Simulated Case Studies
4. Portfolio of Natural Occurring Evidence
5. Final Summative Assessment

The qualification at level 4 is divided into three skills programs of which two are core and compulsory [Real Estate Platform, Real Estate Legislation and Real Estate Practice with two streams forming the electives components, Real Estate and Valuation].

Source: Services SETA – Real Estate Level 4, 1999

At level 5, the qualification is divided into five skills programs with modular sub-division for the elective component based on the exit level outcomes and related assessment criteria [Real estate Management, Marketing and Business Management, Human Resource Management, Financial Management and Specialisation Module]. It emerged that the tool had some loopholes that the providers had to fill in.
It was clear from the interviews that most participants (assessors) highlighted the fact that the guidelines of the assessment instruments are not sufficiently clear. P7 indicated that “this makes the whole process cumbersome and reduces the interest of the learners in the RPL process and lead to a high number of candidates dropping out”.

From the perspective of the RPL candidates I was argued that the support provided was inconsistent and insufficient: P9 expressed the perspective that “there is no consistent support in the process that outlines the qualifications against which the candidate is supposed to be RPLed against…and how to read and understand the contents of the unit standards and also how to prepare evidence that go in the PoE and show competency in the qualification”.

Inconsistency was also evident amongst RPL Centres according to respondents. A common concern amongst RPL representatives was the lack of consistency and uniformity of the instruments used by different RPL Centres. Such inconsistencies may have the negative consequence for the estate industry. Since, according to P6 the inconsistency in RPL application “affects the outputs [the qualified practitioner] that go in the real estate industry as some candidates are taken through easiest tools while others are taken through complicated tools”.

Source: Services SETA – Real Estate Level 5, 1999
On the other hand, the majority of the respondents pointed out some of the strengths that the current assessment tools have. The assessment tools allow for the translation of informal learning into formal learning that might lead to the acquisition of certificates. P7 explained that “It is inclusive in the sense that it accommodates different levels of knowledge and experience and does not exclude content. It also allows effectiveness of assessment and moderation”.

However, this perspective was contradicted since most external moderation reports (outcomes of the evaluators’ site visits) indicated that the assessment tools failed the validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency principles. There is thus a need for SAQA and/or the SETA to come up with standards that are applicable to all RPL centres as it is with the training provision. Much details and guidance are given to the designers of the curriculum and learning materials. This should be applicable to the designers of RPL assessment tools as well. Also the tools should allow the four sets, as determined by Anderson and Harris (2006): challenge processes; nationally standardized examinations; portfolio development and practices which draw on other approaches such as interviews.

The providers seem to be imposing the assessment approach/method to be used. A better strategy would have been to allow the assessor and the candidate to negotiate the best method/s to be used for the RPL assessment in each specific instance.

Last but not least, the majority of the respondents insisted that the English language is a barrier in implementing RPL in the real estate industry as the majority of real estate agents that do not hold a recognised certificate are not speakers of English as their mother tongue. RPL assessment tools are designed in English and do not cater for other South African official languages; i.e. Zulu, Xhosa, iTshivenda, Sepedi, etc. English, therefore, has been regarded as the exclusive language of learning to the exclusion of other languages. “This needs to be addressed in future as there are so many PDP that have knowledge, experience and skills in the industry but cannot express themselves properly in English”, said P11. P3 said if ever he was given a chance to compile his PoE in his mother tongue (isiZulu) – he should have excelled. “I knew all the answers in Zulu but translating them in English took me time and I didn’t have the best luck to translate them perfectly”.

4.4.2 Existing processes as a barrier to effective RPL implementation
The RPL process is attached as Appendix D. The RPL process from inception till the closing phase includes the distribution of the empty PoE to candidates; the submission of PoEs by candidates; the collection of PoEs by the RPL Centre’s representatives; and the distribution of the assessment feedback in the format of reports that include assessors and moderators’ signatures to the candidates. The responses of the participants in extenso were: P6: “returning the PoEs and giving assessment outcomes to candidates just take the providers forever because of many hands on, accountability and responsibility. The processes are too cumbersome because of segregation of stages”. P1 said: “The training providers or private Further Education and Training Colleges should not have been experiencing delays in terms of giving assessment feedback to candidates as this diminishes their momentum. They should have been expediting the process to allow those candidates who have to collect more evidence or do reassessment to prepare themselves accordingly”.

Another problem identified is that constituent assessors have got less knowledge on the RPL process and tend to do things similarly to the training process; and also those called “RPL advisor or Evidence Collection Facilitator” have poor knowledge in terms of the nature of RPL and or its processes.

From the perspective of the RPL candidates, it was felt the RPL process and requirements result in them taking too long to submit their PoEs. This was contrary to their expectations. Candidates, before enrolling in the RPL, were told that RPL is the simplest route to obtain a certificate. However, once they enrolled as RPL candidates the language changes and they experienced the process as confusing and demanding.

Most candidates complain that they have little time to compile their PoE. Providers should keep in mind that these candidates are workers and ‘breadwinners’ in their respective families. Therefore they need sufficient time to put together the requested evidence.

4.4.3 Assessment and moderation policies and procedures as a barrier to effective RPL implementation

P8 strongly believed that “the assessment policies and procedures are still relevant, the processes are clear and the quality management systems are good; however the efficiency of the process is poor in terms of time, the excessive number of stages and repetitive evidence that are
required from the candidate”. He further indicated that “there are no standards that are followed by providers in terms of outputs as compared to the training intervention where the standards are clear, i.e. NQF qualification on SAQA website where standards are clearly outlined”.

The external moderation that needs to take place in order to quality assure the assessment outcomes take long to happen as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) has to set up a date in most cases two to three months from the time a confirmation email is sent to the providers. This is one of the major complaints providers have as candidates will keep on calling to find out when they will get their assessment outcomes. P1 indicated that after completing her PoE she had to wait for four years to get a certification of competence and in the mean time she lost many employment opportunities as employers needed someone with an accredited certificate. She said: “I completely lost faith in RPL as I could see opportunities leaving me because of the certificate that was taking forever. I hated at that time RPL and wished I went through the normal training. I was completely lost and disappointed.” The ETQAs should be making sure that they cut down on the time between the submission of the candidates’ achievements and the external moderation site visit as this has negative implications for candidates. P4 echoed the previous informant: “I thought the RPL process, in terms of assessment and moderation processes, were shorter as the training sessions were totally excluded. But it is just the opposite. It seems like the certificates of candidates that go through the training process are printed and processed urgently. It is completely unacceptable as the assessment and moderation policies are not talking to the reality”. The ETQA should also ensure that Quality Management Systems are working accordingly in the RPL Centres. The QMS indicate easy flows of implementation but the reality is something else. This shows that the problem is with people who are implementing the systems and not necessarily the systems themselves.

4.4.4 Experience of participants with regard to RPL in the real estate industry

RPL is always considered to be the easiest and shortest assessment route to obtain a certificate; however with the current experience in the real estate industry it is just the opposite. Most candidates that have gone through the RPL process wish they should have gone through the training approach as RPL has numerous demands.
P4 indicated that “there is no efficiency with regard to the process from providers – there is lack of uniformity in terms of implementation and the process is not that much clear and effective. It is losing credibility. Something needs to be done before the whole system collapses”.

4.4.5 Further barriers

Besides the barriers indicated in the literature, participants were able to highlight new ones that are detailed at this point. P7 insinuated that “RPL is too dependent on people who are running it at the time of assessment and this makes the system to be not reliant.” P9 explained that: “the rules of the game are undefined.” Unlike in the training process, RPL still has grey areas in terms of the minimum requirements for candidates to be declared competent, the type of evidence, the duration of the RPL as a process, etc. This needs to be clarified to make it easier for constituent assessors to decide on the assessment methods and outcomes. P4 stated that: “the processes that are designed for training provision are also used in implementing RPL which is unacceptable”. RPL centres must be able to draw the line between the training provision and RPL implementation as the tools might differ though the outputs are due to be the same. In doing so, RPL candidates are asked to do the formative assessments that are supposed to be conducted in class in order to confirm that learners have understood the content of the learning program. P1 indicated that “there is no visible impact of RPL in the industry as compared to learners that go through the normal training”. RPL produces a small number of agents as compared to those who come from the training provision. It shows that it has a minimal impact on the industry. Very few agents enrol through RPL of which the majority drops out along the way due to some difficulties highlighted the previous sections.

Most candidates felt there was less support during the RPL process as they only had two days and half to talk to the Evidence Collection Facilitator. And when they had to call the centre for clarification on some matters related to the evidence to be submitted, the administrator did not know anything. “This was really frustrating. I felt like I was just dumped by people who were supposed to keep me going. There was not support at all.” said P6.

4.4.6 Further guidelines and advice to candidates

The following were some of the guidelines participants suggested for improving the effectiveness of RPL implementation in the real estate industry:
P8 indicated that there is a need of having “clear outputs guidelines/standards in RPL as it is defined in the training provision; and the moderation and assessment results need to follow the level of qualifications. Also a cut-of time needs to be stipulated in the guidelines in terms of administration services, finalizing the assessment and moderation processes, acquisition of results.” P3 added saying: “The focus must be industry-wide not on people who run the system”. P(1), P(3) and P(4) indicated that they were not aware of RPL opportunities in the real estate industry otherwise they should have enrolled some years ago.

Staff working in the RPL Centres (Administrators, assessors and internal moderators) needs to have expertise in the industry and understand the RPL processes in-depth and be taken through relevant training. Staff needs to be conversant with RPL processes, policies and procedures. “They need to be familiar with RPL practices otherwise it is a failure” (P4). The administrators who are at the ‘door step’ of the RPL process needs to have enough knowledge of RPL and be able to explain it in detail to any RPL candidate. Evidence Collection Facilitators who hold workshops that take candidates through the RPL journey also need experience and in-depth understanding of the RPL process and reality of the real estate industry. Assessors and internal moderators have to have experience in various assessment approaches in order to collect relevant, appropriate and sufficient evidence and assess these accordingly.

The industry should initiate a RPL marketing and advocacy programme to promote the provision of RPL opportunities within the industry as potential candidates in the real estate industry are unaware of what RPL has to offer.

P10 indicated that “Working knowledge, experience and sufficient understanding of the requested assessment, the RPL process and the ability of knowing the outcome of the RPL and how it works” are key elements in the RPL process. Most of the candidates that embark on the RPL journey do not understand what is expected from them as they are not inducted accordingly. These are people who have left school a long time before and do have sufficient knowledge of the formal educational system/s. They still need to get used to the language and understand the system and the way it works. Collecting the right evidence and putting them in a Portfolio is a skill on its own that candidates need to acquire or be advised on.
Criticizing the existing evidence if they meet the minimum requirements is another skill. So giving two days for induction is not enough. Candidates might end up submitting files that are poor in terms of the content [evidence] which obviously will be returned to them for extra evidence.

Candidates should have a minimum understanding in terms of verbal and written communication as well as in mathematics at level 4. If not they should be taken through a short program that will improve their skills level in these areas.

4.4.7 The ‘good’ of RPL in the real estate industry

The aim of RPL is met in the real estate industry but in small number and the impact is therefore minimal. P5 believed that with time and with changes in the processes the impact will improve significantly. There are RPL centres that have tried their best to implement RPL following the rules and procedures. Candidates who enrolled through them received their certificate of competence and statement of results in time as expected – but these centres are few.

RPL has assisted candidates from the world of work to translate their experience into accredited learning, leading to them obtain full or partial real estate qualifications. Some of those who obtained their full qualifications have used their qualification to enroll at a High Learning Institutions (HLI) to further their education in real estate. P2 indicated that after obtaining his certificate and enrolling in HLI he felt so confident that he joined a number of real estate professional bodies. For him, RPL was “out of this world – it is something that gives you opportunities and endless chances” (P2).

RPL also strengthens knowledge acquired in the workplace as most of the evidence is sourced in the workplace. Candidates get credits from the experience acquired in the workplace that is tested through various assessment tools. “By the way, whatever has been confirmed by the assessors and moderators has been meeting the requirements from the workplace and has to be brought back to the workplace with much confidence” said P13.
The next chapter concludes this study.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further study. The researcher presents in this chapter a summary of the conclusions reached in his analysis of the implementation of RPL in the real estate industry while referring to the key points extracted from the literature review. He also brings in some recommendations on further research, which may bring light to some grey areas left behind.

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the qualitative data analysed, the respondents pointed at the assessment instruments which are not clear and simple enough as a barrier to the effective implementation of RPL in the real estate industry. Lack of consistency and uniformity of the assessment instruments are also key issues which were looked at leading to poor level in terms of validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency principles. This is mostly due to the fact that the guidelines are not also clear as opposed to the NQF qualifications’ ones and standards are not adhered to by RPL Centres. On the other hand respondents pointed at some positive facts that the instruments bring out and these include the translation of informal and non-formal learning into formal learning leading to the award of a certificate of competency.

The other issue was that of lack of knowledge and experience of people managing the implementation of RPL and high dependency on them. Administrators, Evidence Collection Facilitators, Assessors and Internal moderators need to attend RPL workshops in order to ensure that their understanding of RPL is consistent and of high level. Also RPL awareness workshops need to be planned and implemented as the majority of potential candidates in the real estate industry are not aware of this opportunity.

The need to increase the “induction” or “RPL workshop” number of days mostly set for two days and half; to allow candidates to use other South African official languages to express themselves during the examination process; and to cut down the paper work that is cumbersome as well as
the time spent during assessment and moderation phases before assessment outcomes are given to candidates.

SAQA (2004) determines the following six steps and core criteria as key aspects in effectively implementing RPL in any industry:

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

The above strategic framework cannot work at the macro level alone but needs the effort of all stakeholders involved in the RPL process including but not limited to RPL Centres, assessors, moderators, evidence collection facilitators, ETQAs, workplaces and education and training practitioners. The existence of a policy does not mean there is an efficient system in place.

5.2 Recommendations

Below are some recommendations from the researcher, the RPL Centres, the Services SETA and the EAAB:

a. RPL instrument / timeframe: There is a need to change the duration of RPL implementation. Most of the RPL Centres confirmed that they were allocating only two and half days to the RPL workshop which covered the induction and discussions of the type of evidence to be submitted. The number of days needs to be adjusted to allow enough time to candidates to understand what they are getting into and what is expected from them.

b. Candidates need to be allowed to express themselves in one of the South African official languages during the examination

c. RPL awareness workshop: most of potential candidates in the real estate industry are not aware of RPL. There is a need of planning and implementing such workshops

d. Assessment methods used and revision of existing curriculum to fully accommodate RPL
e. For RPL to be successfully and efficiently implemented, there is a need of developing the new and upskilling existing institutional capacity
f. Matching the theory to practice
g. Increasing funding incentives to both RPL Centres and RPL candidates
h. Address legislative incoherence

5.3 Suggestions for further studies

The following suggestions are made for further research:

- Potential researchers should focus on studying the failure to implement effectively the Quality Management Systems in the RPL Centres and on implementing RPL in other industries in South Africa such as the banking industry, the retail industry, insurance industry, etc.
- Potential researchers should focus on studying the effectiveness and worthiness of RPL as a tool for redressing the previous educational and learning imbalances in different industries.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) - SERVICES SETA, EAAB REPRESENTATIVES AND RPL CENTRE REPRESENTATIVES

Please complete the following questions:

1. Looking at the assessment instruments used to assess the real estate candidates that have applied to be RPLed, what would you say are the strengths and weaknesses?
2. Looking at the entire RPL process in the real estate industry, from the inception phase to the delivery of the assessment outcomes, what would say are the strengths and the weaknesses?
3. How relevant are the RPL assessment and moderation policies and procedures in the real estate industry?
4. Briefly describe your experience with regards to the practice of RPL in the real estate industry?
5. What are the major hindrances and successes in practising RPL in the real estate industry?
6. Looking at the existing RPL guidelines that are applicable to the real estate industry, what would you suggest as additional or changes in order to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of RPL?
7. What are your expectations of the RPL students?
8. From your experience with the implementation of RPL implementation in the real estate industry, do you think RPL is worth continuing?

I thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
APPENDIX B: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE - INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE AGENTS AND PRINCIPALS

1. What was the main motive that pushed you to enroll for RPL and not attend the formal training?
2. How did you find the whole RPL process [from its inception till the time you receive the assessment outcomes]? 
3. How relevant are the current RPL assessment procedures? If not, suggest the way they should be conducted.
4. What are the positive points you have seen in the RPL process?
5. Please describe your experience with regard to the implementation of RPL within the real estate industry.
6. In your experience, what are the barriers in implementing the RPL process?
7. What guidelines can be developed for the effective implementation of RPL in the real estate industry?
8. What needs to be done to ensure an efficient and effective RPL assessment and thus an effective functioning of RPL?

I thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM
Dear Sir, / Madam,

I am currently involved in a Master’s research at the University of Western Cape/Department of Education [Centre for Adult and Continuing Education] focusing on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). My supervisor is Natheem Hendricks who may be contacted at 021 959 3002 or at mnhendricks@uwc.ac.za.

The key question of my research is: *Why are potential RPL candidates within the estate industry not taking the RPL route, in greater numbers, to obtain their certification?* I will also look into the barriers that obstruct efficient RPL implemented within the Real Estate industry. Your participation will be of immense value.

I would appreciate it if I could interview you or if you could please complete the attached questionnaire and email it back to mwapkabq@gmail.com or fax it to 086 208 1182 so that I can obtain data for my research.

Research agreement between researcher and participant:

- I will ensure that your personal details are kept confidential by using pseudonyms to protect your identity.
- I will restrict access to all collected information by safe storage, in a locked room where only I will have access to the room.
- The information will be completely destroyed after a period of six months after successful completion of the research.
- You are free to not participate in this research or to withdraw from this study without giving any explanation.

The above information has been explained to me and I understand it. My name will not be disclosed.

I allow my information to be used in a confidential manner that will not harm me and my private life in any way and I am also aware that the thesis might be published in the future by the above mentioned University.

____________________  _______________________   _______________
Signature of participant        Place                                            Date
APPENDIX D: RPL PROCESS

THE PURPOSE

ADVISE

THE STAGES

Orientate to Unit Standards

THE PROCESS

Compile Portfolio

Portfolio Compilation:
- Candidates details
- Education & Training History
- Non-formal Training/development
- Employment History
- Discuss Claims
- Evidence

Orientate Candidate to
- Qualification and relevant Unit Standards
- Orientation Check Sheet

Match Claims
- Complete match claims sheet per candidate per occupation

Claim Validation
- Complete Q & A

Match Claims

Evaluate claims
- against Unit Standards using instruments provided

Assist / support candidate to the next stage
- Discuss learning & career options
- Plan assessment or learning development

Brief & support candidate on RPL, gathering evidence & compiling portfolio
- Process & benefits

Discuss
- exit level outcomes
- assessment criteria
- competency evaluation & outcomes

Discuss

Plan Progression

Compile Portfolio

Portfolio Compilation:

Orientate Candidate to

Match Claims

Evaluate claims

Assist / support candidate to the next stage