REPORT
ON
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Assessment
(Package No. SD-52)

Conducted by
Development Technical Consultants Pvt. Ltd.
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka-1212

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the system to assess, evaluate and formally recognize the skills and knowledge acquired through work and other life experiences without access to formal education and training. RPL is therefore a strong means to formally recognize and validate competencies gained outside the formal training system for the purpose of certification. The National Skills Development Policy 2011 has laid emphasis on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for bringing the thousands of skilled hands under a unified qualification framework and to provide them opportunities to enter formal training and enhance their skills. The Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) under DTE has BTEB affiliated 10 (ten) assessment centers approved for RPL assessment, where RPL activities have been run with the financial assistance of STEP for 3 days (2 days orientation and one day assessment) for a batch of 20 assesses of one occupation. STEP initiated the RPL program for the first time in Bangladesh as a pilot with 120 applicants (male: 89, female: 31) in September 2014 and included registration and issuance of certificates by Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB). Till February 2016 the number of skilled persons registered and assessed in the pilot was 9689, out of which 7744 were provided with ‘Competent Certificate’ for qualifying in all the Units of Competencies (UoC) while the rest 1945 were provided with ‘Statement of Achievement’ (‘Not Yet Competent’) certificate for the UoCs qualified. With the additional financing, additional 10 RPL assessment centers have also been approved for RPL assessment under the second revision of STEP that will be continued up to June 2019.

Objectives

The RPL assessment study was conducted considering the following objectives:

(a) To review the whole RPL process to identify strengths & challenges in the design, implementation and analyze and
(b) To evaluate the effectiveness and impact of RPL certification on the economic and social outcomes of RPL assesses after six months of their RPL assessment.
(c) To identify how relevant, effective, efficient, sustainable and participatory are the program intervention.
(d) To make recommendations for actions needed for better implementation and sustainable.

Methodology

For RPL assessment, data were collected from 600 competent, 200 partially competent (Not Yet Competent) assesses and 200 control respondents (who applied but not selected for RPL assessment) through face-to-face interview using structured questionnaire. The focus group discussions (FGD) with instructors of RPL assessment centers, Key Informant Interview (KII) with Directors/Principals/Heads of the respective RPL assessment centers, BTEB registered industry assessors involved in RPL assessment program, BTEB officials, and employers of the RPL assesses as well as review of secondary documents had been conducted for collecting qualitative data. The data of RPL assessment were collected from BTEB affiliated 10 RPL assessment centers to identify how RPL systems as well as mechanisms and tools can be made more user friendly and sustainable in reviewing and evaluating the whole process and to compare with competent, partially competent and control assesses and STEP identified RPL assessment centers as well as Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) statistics. In addition, data were collected regarding the age, sex, education, occupation, job title, assessment centre, and awareness about RPL etc using Questionnaire. The effectiveness and impacts of the RPL assessment and certification had also been evaluated through the collection of data from the assesses, instructors involved in RPL orientation program and management, interviews of head/director/principal
of the RPL centers, industry assessors involved in the RPL assessment program, BTEB officials, employers of the RPL assesses as well as review of the secondary documents regarding RPL assessment.

**Study findings**

- Out of 600, the highest 21.33% (128) competent were under Class VIII pass whereas out of 200, the highest 26% (52) partially competent assesses were under SSC pass. These findings also supported that literacy qualification provided in the RPL implementation guidelines.

- In case of work experience, the highest 32% (189) competent, 31% (62) partially competent assesses and 28% control respondents had 1 to 5 years experience in their respective field of work at the time of RPL assessment,

- The highest 27% competent and partially competent assesses as well as 24% control respondents were part-time wage employed in private companies, whereas 22% competent, 21% partially competent assesses and 19% control respondents were full-time wage employed in private companies.

- Mostly the competent assesses (85%), partially competent assesses (93%) and control respondents (79%) received the information about to participate in the RPL assessment through friends/relatives followed by notice board of the RPL assessment center. But the better way to publicity to attract the target group’s applicant for RPL assessment would be the local micking, poster/leaflets and broadcasting through TV.

- RPL assessment and NTVQF skills certificate has been introduced for the official and formal recognition of job knowledge and skills of the workers. The findings of study also supported targeted objectives of the RPL assessment. From the findings it was revealed that most of the competent (81%), partially competent (84%) assesses and control (68%) respondents necessitated RPL assessment and certification essential for recognition of work and better status in job.

- Majority of the cases, competent assesses (57%) faced difficulties to get leave permission from employers to participate in the RPL assessment program, whereas majority of the partially competent assesses (59%) and control respondents (54%) faced difficulties to collect evidence documents of work experience. But as per RPL implementation guidelines, the evidence documents of job experience are the requirements for the candidates to submit their application to participate in the RPL assessment. Therefore, the motivational workshop/seminar to be arranged by STEP for employers would be the best solution to overcome these kinds of difficulties. Spot selection of candidates for RPL assessment in the working places would also be the solution.

- In line with the guidelines, written, oral and skills tests were arranged for the selection of candidates for RPL assement, From the study findings it was also revealed that majority (68%) of competent, 88% partially competent and 83% control respondents informed that skill test was necessary to select the candidates for RPL assessment. They also reported that written test was the most problematic areas of selection process.

- As per RPL implementation guidelines, submission of evidences of job experience with application form was one of the important requirement but majority (63%) of the control respondents had been disqualified in the selection process of RPL assessment due to lack of evidence documents of work experience. Most (82%) of the disqualified applicants were interested to participate further in the RPL assessment program.

- More than 66 to 96% competent and partially competent assesses reported that orientation about assessment tools, role of assessors practices on job skills were mainly addressed in the orientation program, where the issues addressed in the orientation program were relevant with the RPL assessment as asserted by most of the competent (93%) and partially competent (49%) assesses. They also reported that topics addressed
in the orientation program were easy to follow as stated by 85% competent and 54% partially competent assesses.

- Majority (54%) of the competent and partially competent assesses were highly satisfied with the topics addressed in the orientation program of RPL assessment.
- In line with the objectives of the assignment, the effectiveness of the existing orientation program of RPL assessment was evaluated. From the findings it was revealed that majority of competent (87%) and partially competent (85%) assesses expressed that orientation program was effective for RPL assessment and the majority competent (88%) and partially competent (74%) assesses reported that 2 days orientation program was not sufficient to get well preparation of the candidates for RPL assessment. Where the instructors as well as Head of RPL assessment centers reported that 2-days orientation program was sufficient enough and they reported that it was no need to increase the duration of orientation program due to involment of additional remuneration for assesses as well as for instructors. Considering the long term sustainability of the RPL assessment in Bangladesh, the duration of 3 days assessment was not cost effective in absence of any financial assistance for the candidates.
- Majority of competent (70%) and partially competent (75%) reported that RPL assessment procedure was easy to follow; whereas 74% competent and 92% partially competent assesses reported that the RPL assessment was relevant with the practical field of work. Majority of the competent (86%) and partially competent (82%) assesses reported that the assessment environment was friendly for the assesses.
- Most of the competent (83%) and partially competent (84%) assesses reported that the raw materials supplied for demonstration of job skills were sufficient enough. Whereas the instructors of the RPL assessment centers reported that the raw materials supplied for demonstration of job skills were not sufficient enough particularly for welding as well as electrical installation and maintenance occupations.
- Majority of the competent (80%) and partially competent (68%) assesses reported that all the tools supplied for RPL assessment were suitable and sufficient. They also reported that assessment tools were easy as compared with respondents' skills level as stated by 57% competent and 45% partially competent assesses.
- The measurement of job skills of assesses through existing RPL assessment system was appropriate as reported by 71% competent and 53% partially competent assesses. The reasons for less appropriateness of the measurement were English version which created difficulty to understand for the less literate candidates as reported by 95% competen and 51% partially competen assesses. Whereas the the instructors of the RPL assessment centers reported that the English version tools itself was the difficulty to less literate assesses for understanding and answering the questions.
- The attitude of assessors during assessment was very much helpful as reported by 49% competent assesses, whereas majority (60%) of partially competent assesses reported that the attitude of assessors were as usual.
- The CBT&A trained instructors of the RPL center were not involvement as assessors in the RPL assessment program though they were more efficient, experienced and effective in some cases than industry assessors. Therefore, the experienced and skilled CBT&A trained instructors of the RPL center disappointed.
- RPL assessment creates the opportunities of skills workers to participate in higher level vocation and technical training and education as well as upscale the work force. From this study findings it was also revealed that majority of the competent (55%) and partially competent (71%) assesses asserted that they were interest to participate further for higher level RPL assessment. The reasons for interest to participate further in higher level RPL assessment to develop their better career as well as to get better opportunity for searching better job.
As per RPL implementation guidelines, the assessment results have to be declared immediately after RPL assessment. From this study also revealed that all (100%) of the competent and partially competent assesses were informed about the assessment results immediately after assessment in the RPL center and most of the competent (89%) and partially competent (83%) assesses were satisfied on their assessment results.

Most (90%) of the competent assesses and most (87%) of them received their RPL certificates from their respective RPL assessment centers, but none (0%) of the partially competent assesses collected their RPL certificates. The BTEB officials reported that activities for printing and issue of Statement of Achievement (SoA) certificates for partially competent certificates are in process. It was also revealed that the certificates for competent assesses were not provided timely.

As per provision the STEP is providing fees to BTEB for issuance of Competency and SoA certificates. But no SoA certificate has yet been issued to any partially competent assesses. This is an audit issue to take corrective actions for the authorities concerned.

According to the guidelines, BTEB issue skills certificates for competent assesses and BTEB adopted the design of RPL certificate as like as Australian certificate, but no title was mentioned on the top of the skills certificate assigned for competent assesses, whereas the title such as “Statement of Achievement” was mentioned on the top of the certificate assigned for partially competent assesses. Therefore, the value of skills certificates for competent assesses seems to be lesser than the Statement of Achievement certificates assigned for partially competent assesses.

Another important issue observed on the skills certificate that there is validity duration of 5 years mentioned at the bottom left corner of the competency certificate, which reduced the significance of the NTVQF certificates. Conversely, no validity duration was mentioned on the SoA for partially competent certificates.

The on-line NTVQF certification available to assesses for downloading and using it for employment does not bear the signature of any authority. Certificates without authorized signature are of no value.

Opportunity for re-assessment was not provided of partially competent assesses by the all RPL assessment center, but assesses felt to participate in the re-assessment process. Among the partially competent assesses 45% of them interested to participate in the re-assessment with own expenses.

Considering the comparison before and after RPL assessment for nature and type of job of competent and partially competent assesses as well as control respondents, the significant increase was observed for both competent and partially competent assess in respect of full-time and part time wage employment in public and private entity after RPL assessment than that of before assessment. Whereas the significant decrease was observed for these two categories of assesses in terms of self employment, unemployment and student/trainees. On the other hand, the proportion of full-time and part time wage employment in public and private entity for control respondents was decreased after assessment than that of before assessment. Conversely, the proportion of self employment and unemployment for control respondents was increased at the time of study than that of before assessment. From chi squared value it was revealed that there was significant difference found between before and after RPL assessment in terms of responses on the nature and types of occupation. But no significant differences found between before and after RPL assessment for both partially competent assesses and control group respondents.

Considering the job title/position of the respondents, the highest proportion of competent (35.17% and 30.33%) and partially competent (34.5% and 26.0%) assesses as well as control respondents (40.0% and 36.5%) at the time of assessment (before RPL assessment) and during study period (after RPL assessment) hold the job position Assistant technician.
Considering the before and after impact of RPL assessment on job title/position of respondents, in case of competent and partially competent assesses, the proportion of responses was decreased after RPL assessment for apprentice (2.33% and 14.0%, respectively) and assistant technician (30.33% and 26.0%) than that of before RPL assessment for apprentice (16.33% and 19.5%, respectively) and assistant technician (35.17% and 34.5%, respectively). Whereas slight increase (18.0%) of responses was observed for the position of apprentice of control respondent after RPL assessment than that of before assessment (17.0%) but slight increase was observed for the position of assistant technician. On the other hand, the proportion of responses for the position of Technician for both competent and partially competent assesses had been increased (27.17% and 24.0%, respectively) after RPL assessment than that of before RPL assessment (21.17% and 18.0%, respectively), whereas the proportion was decreased for control respondents after RPL assessment (17.5%) than that of before assessment (19.5%). From the chi squared value it was revealed that there was significant difference found between before and after RPL assessment in terms of responses on the job title/position. On the other hand, there was no significant differences found between before and after RPL assessment for both partially competent assesses and control group respondents.

Most of the competent (77%) and partially competent (91%) assesses reported that they were benefitted through social recognition. Majority of the competent (63%) assesses reported that the real benefit was the increase of opportunity for higher level of RPL and 73% partially competent assesses reported that real benefit was recognition by colleagues and friends.

The minimum, maximum and average monthly salary/income of wage employed assesses had been found much higher after RPL assessment (3000, 30000 and 13228 taka, respectively) than before assessment (1500, 18000 and 6226 taka, respectively) for competent assesses. Similarly the minimum, maximum and average monthly salary/income of wage employed assesses had also been found much higher after RPL assessment (2500, 28000 and 11967 taka, respectively) than before assessment (1500, 17000 and 6163 taka, respectively) for partially competent assesses. The rate of monthly salary/income of wage employed assesses was 212% for competent assesses and 193% for partially competent assesses. This increase might be happened either due impact of RPL assessment and skills certification or it might be increased due to price inflation and wage increase over the period.

The positive impact of RPL assessment on monthly income of self employed assesses before and after (during study period) had also been found. The minimum, maximum and average monthly income of self employed assesses had been found much higher after RPL assessment (15000, 45000 and 18983 taka, respectively) than before assessment (9000, 25000 and 14183 taka, respectively) for competent assesses. Similarly, the minimum, maximum and average monthly income of self employed assesses had also been found much higher after RPL assessment (15000, 40000 and 15990 taka, respectively) than before assessment (9000, 25000 and 12170 taka, respectively) for partially competent assesses. The rate of monthly income of self employed assesses was 134% for competent assesses and 131% for partially competent assesses. This increase might be happened either due impact of RPL assessment and skills certification or it might be increased due to price inflation and wage increase over the period.

The highest 36% competent assesses and 52% partially competent assesses reported that the introduction and value of RPL assessment and certification was somewhat known to the employer and society.

As per provision of STEP provided financial assistance, the RPL assessment centers provided 3540 taka for each competent and partially competent assesse. This amount of remuneration was provided for travel, DA and snacks for each assesse for 3 days.
• The highest 46% competent and 51% partially competent assesses reported that they did not know about the STEP provided financial assistance before applying for RPL assessment. A large group of assesses (more than 60%) participated in the RPL assessment only for certification, but not for financial assistance.

• The majority 42% competent and 43% partially competent assesses were interested to participate further in RPL assessment without financial assistance.

• The minimum amount of money willing to pay for participating in higher level RPL assessment by both competent and partially competent assesses was 1000 taka, whereas the maximum amount of money willing to pay was 1500 taka. On the other hand, the average amount of money to pay for participating in higher level RPL assessment was 1293 taka for competent and 1178 taka for partially competent assesses.

• Most of the competent (81%) and partially competent (82%) assesses were interested to receive financial assistance from financial institution/bank to develop technical entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

• In addition of traditional Newspaper advertisement, alternative ways of advertisement should be considered to attract the target candidate for participation in the RPL assessment program such as
  (i) broadcasting through TV (particularly BTV) and Radio,
  (ii) circulation of poster and leaflets in industrial areas,
  (iii) scroll news on local level Cable TV Channel,
  (iv) awareness should be created among the employers about the necessity and benefits of RPL assessment and certification.

• The user friendly ways of application procedure for RPL assessment would be
  (i) Besides the evidences of work experience, ID card provided by the employers should be granted as alternative of easy evidence;
  (ii) In case a candidate is unable to collect the evidence documents as per Operational Guidelines for the RPL, direct job test should be considered for the candidate;
  (iii) The Bangla version should also be considered along with English version in the application form.

• The candidate selection process for RPL assessment should be as simple as possible and that can be ensured by the ID card provided employers and skill test as alternative of the evidence of work experience;

• The duration of 2 days orientation was also effective and good enough for existing RPL assessment program. Therefore, no need to increase the existing duration of 2 days orientation program.

• Sufficient raw materials to use in the practices of job skills should be provided for increase the effectiveness of the orientation program of the RPL assessment system.

• The budget for raw materials particularly for welding as well as electrical installation and maintenance occupations should be increased;

• The Bangla version for assessment tools should be used in the assessment process for ease understand and answer by the candidates along with English version tools.

• More emphasis should be given on the demonstration of job skills rather than written test for more user friendly for the minimum literacy candidates.

• The sufficient raw materials should be supplied for demonstration of job skills during assessment session of the RPL program.

• The opportunity for partially competent assess should be ensured for re-assessment by charging additional fees and that should be ensured by the STEP.
- The definite direction by STEP/BTEB to the RPL assessment centers should be provided about the fees charges for re-assessment of partially competent assesses. At least 1000 taka fees may be deducted or charged from the remuneration provided for assesses by the assurance of interest for participation in the re-assessment.
- The industry assessors must provide proper time in assessment session with due sincerity;
- The assessors should strictly be guided by BTEB official as well as by the head of the respective RPL center;
- The opportunity for CBT&A trained instructors of one RPL center as assessors should be provided by BTEB and STEP for assessment in another RPL center to avoid biasness to the assesses;
- The RPL certificate (Statement of Achievement) for partially competent assesses should be ensured by the BTEB;
- STEP is providing fees to BTEB for issuance of Competency and SoA certificates. But no SoA certificate has yet been issued to any partially competent assesses. This is an audit issue and therefore, corrective actions should be taken by the authorities concerned.
- Certificates for both competent and partially competent assesses should be issued and distributed through the RPL center within a month of the completion of assessment without any bothering for the assesses;
- The title of the certificate like “Competent Certificate” for competent assesses should be mentioned on the appropriate position of the certificate like “Statement of Achievement (SoA)” that has been mentioned on the top of the certificate for partially competent assesses.
- The on-line NTVQF certification available to assesses for downloading and using it for employment does not bear the signature of any authority. Certificates without authorized signature are of no value. Therefore, the signature of authority concerned should be mandatory on the on-line version of NTVQF skills certificates.
- There is validity duration of 5 years mentioned at the bottom left corner of the competency certificate, which reduced the significance of the NTVQF certificates. Conversely, no validity duration was mentioned on the SoA for partially competent certificates. Therefore, the validity duration should be omitted from the Skills certificates.
- The awareness should be increased among the employers by the arrangement of motivational workshop/seminar with the participation of employers, their associations such ISC (Industry Skill Council)/NSDC (National Skill Development Council), Chamber of Commerce like BGMEA (particularly for garments occupation) etc.
- The Skills certificates provided for the assesses should be cross matched with their National IDs to restrict the forgery of the certificates.
- Stronger monitoring and supervision should be ensured for RPL assessment program by the STEP as well as BTEB for better and meaning implementation of the program.
- Considering the new introduction of RPL assessment in Bangladesh, the 3-days assessment duration (2 days orientation and 1 day assessment) is appropriate, but considering the long term sustainability of the RPL program, the duration of assessment process should be reduced in one day or even half a day. In-line with this concept, on-site assessment of the skilled workers in the cluster areas (industrial areas) should be adopted through mobile assessment team through which skills certificate can be provided within half a day. This concept of on-site assessment can also reduce the cost of assessment that will be feasible for long term sustainability.
- In absence of financial assistance, the present cost which is more than 10,000 taka for 3 days would be a burden for each assessee to continue it with self-finance. Therefore, program need to be reduced in a day with a provision of web-based registration and job
test in a half-day. This will reduce the cost of RPL assessment which will be within limit of assesses’ financial capacity.

- In addition, web-based tutorial in Bangla can be designed, so that assesses can understand the pathway of skills certificate.
- NTVQF Skills Certificate would be given preference by Public and Private sector for employment and promotion of the skilled workers.
- Considering the long time job experience of skilled workers, the Pre Voc 2 level of RPL should not be justified. Instead of Pre Voc 2, the Level 1 of RPL assessment should be started.
- Different levels of RPL assessment should be recognized with formal education level such as Level 1 should be recognized with Class VIII pass certificate.
- An important requirement for RPL sustainability is its institutionalization. Therefore, Government should take initiative as regular activities on RPL assessment within the jurisdiction of DTE and BTEB.