
UNIT 11 ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

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11.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit-10, we have discussed how different contexts – social, structural and global – play crucial role in promoting lifelong learning among individuals. Further, you might have understood how education, work and leisure form integral components of an individual's life that determines his/her self-orientation towards lifelong learning.

There are diverse aspects and issues of assessment and evaluation of lifelong learning which needs to be understood in comprehensive manner. In Unit-11, we will therefore focus on assessment and evaluation in lifelong learning with special reference to recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning as well as equivalency programmes. In addition, we will also discuss the significance of open badges in the context of lifelong learning.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of recognition, validation, accreditation (RVA) of prior learning;
- Explain the significance of RVA of prior learning in lifelong learning;
- Discuss the meaning, context, principles, target groups, nature and delivery of equivalency programmes;
- Appreciate the significance of National Qualifications Framework in the context of lifelong learning; and
- Explain the meaning and characteristics of open badges and their relevance to education, industry and job-market.

11.3 ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING: BASIC PURPOSE AND ISSUES

Basic purpose of assessment and evaluation in lifelong learning is to ensure mobility of learners across the learning systems and job-market with parity of recognition of their knowledge, skills and competencies. Quite unlike assessment and evaluation in conventional system, there are many issues such as recognition, validation and assessment of prior learning, among other things, involved with assessment and evaluation in lifelong learning. All these require due consideration to ensure smooth progress of lifelong learners.

As we know, the community or society in which an individual works and lives forms an important resource for learning. This learning is quite different from the learning that takes place in the environment of the conventional education system. Various kinds of people, technologies and tools in diverse contexts of life at different times and places form the true teachers and facilitators, and all these play a significant role in contributing to an individual's lifelong learning. Such a learning that takes place in the life of individuals at different times needs

to be properly recognised, validated and accredited for systematic furtherance of education and learning although their lives. In many countries, such learning acquired through non-formal and informal systems is being recognised through programmes that are equivalent to those offered through the formal system of education. Further, the growth of technology has currently led to digital assessment and evaluation methods for recognition of the competencies of learners through the open badges system, among other things. All these aspects and issues are discussed below.

11.4 RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN LIFELONG LEARNING

In this section, we will discuss the concept, meaning and importance of prior learning and how it is recognised, validated and accredited for the purpose of promoting lifelong learning as well as social and market value of the individuals in the larger context of employment and livelihood.

11.4.1 Prior Learning: Meaning and Importance

As you are aware, learning is a dynamic process which takes place all through the life in different contexts. It need not be dependent upon a formal educational setup; there is a vast body of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes that are developed as a result of interacting with the environment and these form a rich part of one's learning experiences. Even if a person has not attended a formal school or college, yet the person can have a high level of knowledge and expertise. For instance, a carpenter who has never attended any formal carpentry class may be more skilled, without having any formal certificate or qualification in the carpentry craft and trade. It is thus seen that there is a lot of learning taking place among adults and children outside the traditional academic environment. Prior learning therefore is that knowledge and skills that a learner acquires based upon their own experiences and reflections in non-formal and informal contexts. Such learning may be experiential or acquired through guidance of an expert, observation or by self-learning and can form the foundation for further learning and progress in one's life.

You will agree that there are many skilled persons all over the world who are masters of their craft but due to lack of formal qualification they may be termed as 'unskilled'. Due to this lack of qualifications, such valuable resource often gets 'left out' from further employment opportunities. Thus, recognition of prior learning (RPL) is significant aspect of assessment that contributes to promotion of knowledge, skills and attitudes that have been acquired by persons in a non-formal or informal manner by recognizing and validating the same through a formal mechanism leading to qualification/certification that puts them on parity in the overall scheme of education. Such recognition becomes an integral part of lifelong learning as it provides for extension of the learning process. The RPL process is important as it is not only linked to better employment but is also a means for flexible mobility, improvement in self-esteem and for promotion of equity and social inclusion.

11.4.2 Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Prior Learning

Let us try to understand the terms recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of prior learning. According to *UNESCO Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning* (2012), these terms are explained as follows:

- **Recognition** is a process of granting official status to learning outcomes and/or competences, which can lead to the acknowledgement of their value in society.
- **Validation** is the confirmation by an officially approved body that learning outcomes or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed against reference points or standards through pre-defined assessment methodologies.
- **Accreditation** is a process by which an officially approved body, on the basis of assessment of learning outcomes and/or competences according to different purposes and methods, awards qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles), or grants equivalences, credit units or exemptions, or issues documents such as portfolios of competences. In some cases, the term accreditation applies to the evaluation of the quality of an institution or a programme as a whole.” (UIL, 2012).

The vision statement of UNESCO (UIL, 2012, p.5) states that RVA of prior learning outcomes “renders visible and gives value to the hidden and unrecognized competencies that individual has obtained in various contexts, through various means in different phases of their lives. Valuing and recognizing these learning outcomes may significantly improve individual’s self-esteem and well being, motivate them to further learning and strengthen their labour market opportunities. RVA may help to integrate broader sections of the population into an open and flexible education and training system and to build inclusive societies.”

RVA can also be a means for acknowledgement of values of skills and competencies through social recognition. RVA therefore is a means by which competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education are given recognition by the formal educational system as well as the job market, i.e. potential employers, stakeholders and systems for purposes of further education and training. The importance of RVA lies in that the competencies acquired by a person are recognized in a social framework and are validated by the market as well.

According to Singh (2015), RVA has three main aims: (i) RVA is a means for achieving official qualification; (ii) RVA acts as a means for entering the formal tertiary education institutions; and (iii) RVA is a means by which a person can make his/her competence and learning more visible. Thus, we see that RVA has a transformational impact upon the person’s social and economic value in the society.

11.4.3 Significance of RVA in Lifelong Learning

In the 21st century, lifelong learning is an integral part of living in a knowledge society. Lifelong learning has three principles namely 'lifelong learning' 'life-wide learning' and 'learning vis-a-vis education' (Schuetze & Casey, 2006). The first principle -- lifelong learning -- means that a person can learn at any time throughout his life, at any age and through any setting or system of education – formal, non-formal or informal. The second principle -- life-wide learning -- means that learning has a very broad context, i.e. it is not only the classroom teacher from whom a student learns but learning can take place in the family, community, society, work place or any other life situation. Learning is therefore integrated with living. The third principle -- Learning vis-a-vis education -- shows that learning is a much broader term than education. Education may be based on a fixed curriculum in a formal setting and may be related to award of a degree or qualification but learning can take place in a person of any age in any learning setting or context. Learning is much more personal in nature and may or may not be institutionalised. RVA is therefore viewed as an important component of lifelong learning as it helps to implement the large aim of lifelong and life-wide learning.

As per the Belém Framework for Action that was agreed upon during the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) held in 2009, lifelong learning implies the development of flexible learning pathways, i.e. there must be multiple options for flexible entry, exit and re-entry for all ages and at all levels of education. There is a need to identify the relevant competencies that would need to be achieved at each level. Such a change is aimed at developing a common framework for formal and non-formal education structures. The principles of lifelong learning advocate that the learning outcomes arrived at through flexible learning pathways of formal, non-formal and in-formal learning are recognised and validated. This change is a move from the hierarchical, structured and rigid form of education to a more flexible form, which may be non-formal or formal (UIL, 2010).

In 2012, UNESCO developed “*Guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and in-formal learning.*” (UIL, 2012). As a result, many countries initiated the development of a National Quality Framework (NQF) which was made up of multi-levelled frameworks that would help to recognize prior learning along with new acquired learning. A National Qualifications Framework (NQF), according to Singh (2015), “classifies and registers learning/skills according to a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria. Qualifications are provided once competencies or learning outcomes have been demonstrated based on these set standards.” The learning outcomes are measured in terms of knowledge, skills, competencies that a learner is expected to demonstrate upon completion of a programme.

The importance of the learning outcomes is seen in the fact that many countries have now developed their curriculum in terms of competencies defined as learning outcomes. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the importance of learning outcomes and the need for ensuring that learners at all levels of education are able to achieve the learning outcomes (GOI, 2020). The University Grants Commission (UGC) has developed the Learning

11.4.4 RVA in Select Countries

Many countries are using the concept of RVA though the terminology may differ from country to country. In the USA, RVA is called Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) whereas in the United Kingdom (UK), it is referred to by different names such as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL) and also as Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Similarly, other countries such as Canada use the terminology Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). In New Zealand, the RVA is known as Recognition of Current Competency (RCC). In Australia, it is known as Credit Transfer. Despite the differences in use of terms, in all countries the emphasis is on recognizing and validating all knowledge, skills and competencies that an individual possesses or has acquired outside the formal system, with a view to mainstreaming the same on the ground of parity of acquisition and utility for all practical purposes of furthering the individual's learning, education, employment and social status.

Box 11.1: RVA in India -- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The Government of India through the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) introduced the concept of RVA in 2015 using the term 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)', and incorporated it as a component of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY). The aim of this scheme is to enable persons to acquire industry relevant skill training that would help them to secure better livelihood. The RPL component refers to an assessment process used to evaluate a person's existing knowledge, skills, and experience gained either through formal, non-formal or in-formal learning.

The RPL has three objectives:

- To align the competencies of the unregulated work force to the standardized National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF).
- To enhance the employability opportunities of an individual or to provide alternate routes to higher education.
- To provide opportunities for reducing inequalities based on privileging certain forms of knowledge over others.

Source: Compendium of Guidelines for RPL under PMKVY (2016-2020), Govt. of India https://www.pmkvyofficial.org/App_Documents/News/Compendium-of-Guidelines-and-amendments-for-RPL.pdf

11.4.5 RVA and National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

Let us now look at the relationship between RVA and the concept of equivalency of curriculum. It is seen that the formal education system continues to be regarded as the reference point of all accepted qualifications. The curriculum is prepared and implemented for formal education and other modes of

education have to prepare curriculum such that it is 'equivalent' to the formal education. The purpose of equivalence is that, all curricula needs to have the same status and equal acceptance both by the market and the institutions of higher education. The significance of RVA lies in that it serves as a means by which an official measurement of the qualifications of non-formal and informal learning can be conducted and an evaluation done to ensure that their curricula promote equivalent learning. The role of learning outcomes now is therefore very important as all systems of education need to have equivalent learning outcomes even when they follow different curricula and modes for achieving them.

Many countries have developed National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a means for ensuring quality assurance of all modes of education. According to UNESCO (2012), "National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a classification of qualifications relating to a set of nationally agreed standards/criteria developed by competent public authorities. NQFs recognise learning outcomes and competences from all forms of learning."

In many countries, such equivalency qualification frameworks have been developed so that academic competencies in the form of measurable learning outcomes are identified to serve as the means for recognition and validation of academic programmes. Such a framework also allows transfer of credits acquired by a student studying in one institution to be transferred when he/she takes admission in another institution. In many developing countries, RVA has been adopted to measure the learning proficiencies of vocational programmes. Here, RVA has been used for creating different levels of skills and knowledge for different occupations especially those that belong to the informal sector. Thus, it is seen that many countries have competence-based National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF).

11.4.6 National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in India

The policy planners have always emphasized the need to close the gap between education and employment and to identify competencies across systems of learning. The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) is an outcome of this need and was notified on 27th Dec, 2013 by the Government of India. According to the NSQF, "Recognition of Prior Learning" or "RPL" is the process of recognising previous learning, often experiential, towards gaining a qualification." (GoI, 2013). The NSQF is a competency-based framework wherein knowledge, skills and aptitude have been graded at different levels of qualifications. There are 10 such levels, which define the learning outcomes that a learner must achieve at each level to be able to acquire a particular qualification, irrespective of whether he/she is acquiring them through formal, non-formal or informal systems. Each level of qualification is supported by National Occupational Standards (NOS) which contain statements of the skills, knowledge and understanding that a person must demonstrate to be able to effectively perform at that level. In addition to this, there is also a Qualification Pack (QP) which lays down the curriculum for each job role at each level. Thus, it is seen that each level comprises learning outcomes, along with NOS and QPs

which are prepared for every level and validate the qualification of that level irrespective of the mode(s) by which it is acquired by a person. Each level comprises *five domains* which are described as follows:

- i) Process -- This is related to the summary of the below mentioned four domains.
- ii) Professional knowledge -- This is related to what the learner should know about the subject.
- iii) Professional skill -- This is related to the skill that he/she should be able to demonstrate.
- iv) Core skill -- This is related to basic skills, i.e. use of methods, materials, tools and instruments for the task.
- v) Responsibility -- This is related to accountability for the task.

The qualification descriptors of the 10 levels of NSQF in India are as shown in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1: NSQF in India

Level	Process	Professional knowledge	Professional skill	Core skill	Responsibility
1	Prepares person to carry out processes that are repetitive, on regular basis, require no previous practice	Familiar with common trade terminology, instructional words, meanings and understanding	Routine and repetitive, takes safety and security measures.	Reading and writing; addition, subtraction; personal financing; familiarity with social and religious diversity, hygiene and environment.	No responsibility; always works under continuous instruction and close supervision.
2	Prepares person to carry out processes that are repetitive, on a regular basis, with little application of understanding, more of practice	Material, tools and applications in a limited context, understands context of work and qualification	Limited service skills used in limited context; select and apply tools; assist in professional works with no variables; differentiate good and bad quality.	Receive and transmit written and oral messages, basic arithmetic, personal financing, understanding of social, political, and religious diversity, hygiene and environment.	No responsibility; works under instruction and close supervision.

3	Person may carry out a job which may require limited range of activities, routine and predictable.	Basic facts, process and principle applied in trade or employment	Recall and demonstrate practical skill, routine and repetitive in narrow range of application	Communication, written and oral, with minimum required clarity, skill of basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, personal banking, basic understanding of social and natural environment	Works under close supervision. Some responsibility for own work within defined limit
4	Work in familiar, predictable, routine, situation of clear choice.	Factual knowledge of field of knowledge or study.	Recall and demonstrate practical skill, routine and repetitive, in narrow range of application, using appropriate rule and tool, using quality concepts	Language to communicate, written or oral, with required clarity, skill of basic arithmetic and algebraic principles, basic understanding of social political and natural environment.	Responsibility for own work and learning
5	Job that requires well developed skill, with clear choice of procedures in familiar context.	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information.	Desired mathematical skill; understanding of social, political; and some skill of collecting and organising information, communication.	Responsibility for own work and learning, and some responsibility for others' works and learning.

6	Demands a wide range of specialised technical skill, clarity of knowledge and practice in broad range of activity involving standard and non-standard practices.	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Reasonably good in mathematical calculation, understanding of social and political, and reasonably good in data collecting organising information, and logical communication	Responsibility for own work and learning and full responsibility of other's works and learning.
7	Requires a command of wide-ranging specialised theoretical and practical skills, involving variable, routine and non-routine contexts	Wide-ranging factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	Wide range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.	Good logical and mathematical skill, understanding of social, political and natural environment, and organising information, communication and presentation skill.	Full responsibility for output of group and development.
8	Comprehensive, cognitive, theoretical knowledge and practical skills to develop creative solutions to abstract problems. Undertakes self-study; demonstrates intellectual independence, analytical rigour and good communication.			Exercise management and supervision in the context of work/study having unpredictable changes; responsible for the work of others.	
9	Advanced knowledge and skill. Critical understanding of the subject, demonstrating mastery and innovation, completion of substantial research and dissertation			Responsible for decision making in complex technical activities involving unpredictable work/ study situations.	
10	Highly specialised knowledge and problem solving skill to provide original contribution to knowledge through research and scholarship.			Responsible for strategic decisions in unpredictable complex situations of work/ study.	

Source: NSQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS.pdf (ncvet.gov.in)

In Section 11.5 that follows, we will discuss the equivalency programmes.

Check Your Progress

- Notes: a) Write the answer in the space given below the question.
 b) Check your answer with the one given under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions” of this Unit.

1) Define the terms recognition, validation and accreditation.

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2) Explain the significance of RVA of prior learning in promotion of lifelong learning.

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11.5 EQUIVALENCY PROGRAMMES

Prior to discussing the equivalency programmes in more meaningful manner, let us refresh our understanding of some essential differences in features of formal, non-formal and informal systems of education.

11.5.1 Important Differences among Formal, Non-formal and Informal Systems of Education

The concept of lifelong learning is built around the continuous need of every individual to acquire learning through any system -- formal, non-formal and informal. It is also accepted that the three systems have their differences in terms of age of the clientele group, duration of study, learning pathways, teaching-learning methodologies, and assessment and evaluation. Let us note below some of these differences among the three systems.

Table 11.2: Important Differences among Formal, Non-formal and Informal Systems of Education

Feature	Formal education	Non-formal education	Informal education

Age	Fixed age for joining school and then progressively moving up the class wise ladder	No fixed age for entering education system.	No fixed age, learning can take place any time from 'cradle to grave'
Duration	Fixed and closed duration with concept of 'Pass and Fail'	Flexible duration of programmes	Learning throughout life
Learning pathways	Hierarchical educational pathways	Multiple-entry and exit pathways	Learning through different pathways
Teaching-learning methodologies	Predominantly face-to-face interaction in traditional classroom setup.	Diverse, flexible, face-to-face, mass media-based as well as open and distance education that includes off-line and online technology-based teaching and learning	All forms of methodologies for learning
Assessment and Evaluation	Rigid examination system with system of Pass and Fail	Flexible examination with system of credit accumulation and freedom to choose examination time	Informal assessment and appreciation including through digital badges system

Lifelong learning integrates all these systems and modes, and now the emphasis is on anytime, anywhere learning taking place through any form or system of learning, whether formal, non-formal or informal. Let us look at some examples of learning through these three different systems (See Box 11.2).

Box 11.2: Examples of learners and their systems

Rose is 11 years old. She is studying in class V in a local government school. She attends classes everyday where every subject is taught in a separate period based upon a time table. The teacher uses blackboard and chalk. There are unit tests and annual examinations in the school.

Shivender is 25 years old. He works in an office and wants to appear for the Bank Services examination. Due to his family's financial difficulties, he could not complete his BA through a regular college. He is now studying through Open University to complete his BA programme. He studies at night after his office hours. Besides his course material, he learns through videos and online programmes. He will appear for his examination when he feels he is ready.

Sabina is working in a technology company where she is a software developer. The company regularly conducts training programs for its employees and also encourages them to work in teams. Sabina says that she learns many new things from the training as well as through collaborative activities done along with her co-workers.

As we can notice, there is learning taking place in all the above three cases: While Rose is studying in a formal school, Shivender is studying in a non-formal institution and Sabina is learning in an informal way. Therefore, their systems of learning are different and they are studying or learning at different levels and through different modes.

On the other hand, if the learners of different systems are to be put on par at a particular level of study, it calls for different approach. The growth of lifelong learning through different systems has thus necessitated the need for establishing equivalence between the learners of these systems of education. This can be done by recognizing and validating the outcomes of learning achieved by them through different systems.

Let us now study the meaning, nature and certain aspects of Equivalency Programmes.

11.5.2 Equivalency Programmes: Meaning and Context

Dictionary meaning of the word 'equivalent' is 'being equal to' i.e. one thing has the same value or measure or force as another thing. They are identical in terms of their value. When we talk of 'equivalency programmes' in education we refer to two programmes that are equal in value in terms of their outcomes. Such programmes may belong to two different systems of education, i.e. formal and non-formal systems but they are recognized as being of the same standard.

According to UNESCO (2006), "Equivalency programmes (EPs) are alternative education programmes equivalent to the formal system not only in terms of curriculum and certification, but also in regard to policy support mechanisms, mode of delivery, staff training, and support activities such as monitoring, evaluation and the assessment of learning."

According to Singh (2015), "Equivalency programmes are alternative educational programmes that provide learning that is supposed to be equivalent to the formal system, and provide skills and competences that are recognized as being equivalent to those acquired through the formal system. Equivalency programmes are often delivered through non-formal education (NFE) systems separate from formal education system."

One of the main features of equivalency programmes offered through non-formal system is that such programmes are basically aimed at widening the access of education to persons of all ages and at different education levels. According to Priyadarshini (2018), “the changing demands and needs of society and economy have necessitated the need for a lifelong education.” This is clearly reflected in policy statements on education for all and lifelong learning. The Jomtein World Declaration on Education For All (1990) called for “an expanded vision and a renewed commitment” to basic education. It was recognized that the educational needs of persons outside the formal system also needed to be addressed. This included not just out-of-school children but also those who had been ‘pushed out of the system’ and could no longer re-enter it due to the existing restrictions of age and other criteria which were imposed by the formal education system. The World Education Forum held at Dakar, Senegal in 2000 led to the framing of The Dakar Framework for Action contained 06 Goals for achievement of Education for All. Goal 4 called for “achieving a fifty percent improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”. The need for inclusive and equitable education has also been reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (2015). SDG 4 aims “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. Thus, the importance of lifelong learning opportunities for all makes it necessary to promote systems that are flexible, having multiple learning pathways for acquisition of knowledge and skills. Hence, equivalency programmes are being promoted by nations across the globe.

11.5.3 Equivalency Programmes in Different Countries

Equivalency programmes are being conducted in many countries of the world. However, each country has its own equivalency standard for the programme. In Indonesia, the equivalency education programme was set up in 1970 as a part of the non-formal education system. It consists of package A, package B and package C, which are equivalent to six years of primary certification for persons above the age of 15. Equivalency programmes are also conducted in Thailand school, three years of junior secondary school and three years of senior secondary school respectively. In the Philippines, the equivalency programmes are implemented by the Department of Education. The NFE Accreditation and Equivalency (A & E) system provides alternate education in different countries -- Vietnam, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Mongolia, countries of the West Indies, and India.

Box 11.3: Equivalency Programmes in India for Basic Education

In India, the programme is called the Open Basic Education (OBE) and is on offer for both children in the 6-14 age-group and out-of-school adults in the 15+ age-group. This programme has three levels, A, B, and C, which are equivalent to class 3, 5, and 8 respectively of the formal education system. The programme is implemented at the national level through the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and at state level by the different State Open Schools (SOSs) across the country.

In 2002, the Government of India accorded equivalence to the pass-outs of this OBE programme and thereby gave them parity with the formal education system for their further education as well as employment. The equivalency programme in India was also a component of the Scheme of Continuing Education (1995) launched by the National Literacy Mission. One of the objectives of the Saakshar Bharat programme (2009) of the Government of India was ‘to enable the new literate adults to continue their learning beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalency to the formal educational system.’ (Priyadarshini, 2018).

11.5.4 Principles of Equivalency Programmes

The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Guide to Equivalency Programmes (UNESCO, 2012) identifies the following principles to be kept in mind while designing and developing equivalency programmes (EPs).

- *Equity and Access* -- EPs should aim at providing equity and access to all target groups.
- *Relevance* – EPs should be relevant and responsive to national goals and policies, and local and individual needs.
- *Inclusion and Participation* – Development of EPs should have wide participation of experts, stakeholders as well as persons having local wisdom so that the curriculum is appropriate to the learners’ needs and is learner-centred.
- *Culture and Gender Sensitivity* – EPs should take into account the local culture and practices. They should also ensure that there is gender sensitivity.
- *Good Citizenship* -- It is important that these programmes should promote national values and help the people to become good and responsible.
- *Comparability* – EPs must be equivalent to formal education curricula in every aspect, i.e. content areas, forms of teaching-learning, learning outcomes, and evaluation and certification.
- *Credit transfer* – Knowledge, skills and learning experiences of EPs should be transferable to formal education as well as non-formal education programmes.
- *Flexibility* – Flexibility must be reflected in content, learning and teaching approaches, duration of the programme and evaluation.
- *Lifelong learning* -- EPs should promote lifelong learning through large number of programmes which would meet the diverse needs and interests of the learners.

Therefore, besides basic education, there must be programmes of skill training, income generation, life skills and other areas of interests for lifelong learning.

11.5.5 Levels of Equivalency Programmes

Equivalency programmes have been designed at different levels which vary from country to country. However, the common levels are as specified below:

- 1) *Literacy and Post-Literacy Level* -- In many countries this initial level provides equivalency for achieving functional capability in the three Rs -- reading, writing and arithmetic.
- 2) *Primary Education* - In India, the programme is called the Open Basic Education and offered for both children in the 6-14 age-group as well as out-of-school adults and neo-literates in the 15+ age-group. This programme has three levels, A, B, and C, which are equivalent to class 3, 5, and 8 respectively of the formal education system.
- 3) *Secondary Level* -- At this level, the programme is offered depending upon the equivalent formal education programme. In India, the existing system of schooling is 10+2 with grade 10 being the secondary and grade 12 being the senior secondary qualification. These two qualifications are offered through national and state open schools and these qualifications are equivalent to the national and state examination boards. (Note: However, under National Education Policy 2020, there is no such distinction, and both are combined into only one level – Secondary). The qualifications are recognized for entry into the university system as well as the world of work. The same equivalence is also accorded in different countries as per their own formal systems.
- 4) *Vocational Education* -- In order to promote skill development, a number of vocational subjects are offered through the non-formal as well as open and distance learning system. These programmes may be offered as standalone or in combination with academic subjects. Thus, there is much more flexibility in such vocational programmes and learners have the freedom to choose their learning package depending upon their areas of interests and employment prospects.
- 5) *Degree level programmes* -- Many countries have a well-established system of university education through open and distance learning system. India has one national open university and fifteen state open universities which offer programmes in different areas, which are all recognized as equivalent to the programmes offered in the conventional face-to-face mode. The major advantage of such programmes is that they are based on the principle of flexibility, with option of multiple entry and exit as well as freedom of choice of courses and place of learning, and transfer of credits for courses. Many countries of Asia, Australia, Europe and Africa also offer programmes through open and distance learning that are based on the philosophy of openness and flexibility.

11.5.6 Target Groups of Equivalency Programmes

The basic objective of equivalency programmes is to provide access for diverse and disadvantaged sections of the society through an alternate education which is of equivalent standards. However, with the growth of technology and the need for learning and re-learning, the scope of equivalency programmes has widened considerably. Therefore, the target groups have also grown

accordingly. The common target groups for equivalency programmes include children and adolescents, young adults, adult neo-literates, persons belonging to disadvantaged groups, persons living in geographically inaccessible areas including rural and remote areas, persons living in urban slums, persons living under poverty line, minorities, ex-servicemen, defense personnel, street children, differently-abled persons, trans-genders, those in jails, and others. In addition to these groups, there are also persons who are employed and those girls and women who cannot or do not like to attend regular conventional classes but are equally inclined towards alternate systems of education.

11.5.7 Delivery of Equivalency Programmes

There are different modes of delivery for equivalency programmes at different levels. Literacy, post-literacy and pre-secondary level programmes are delivered in some countries through the Directorate of Non-Formal Education. There is also a full-fledged open and distance learning facility available for such learners, which offers them the opportunity to avail secondary and senior secondary education through open schooling and higher education through open university systems. In many countries of Asia, this flexible system is centered around the community which plays an important role in running the Continuing Education Centres (CECs). There are also Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that function as study centres / non-formal learning centres. The CEC is the focus point of teaching and learning as well as other activities of the community. The delivery is also done through the use of technology which could be in the form of radio, television, computers, and mobile phones. In recent times, blended approach is being followed wherein both face-to-face teaching and online/distance learning are combined.

11.5.8 Assessment and Evaluation

The most important aspect of equivalency programmes is assessment and evaluation, as equivalence is finally and essentially established by this component. This implies that the scheme of evaluation is formulated in such manner that the learning outcomes of each level are equivalent with those of formal education. The evaluation may be both formative and summative. The nature of the evaluation may be based on paper and pen tests, or computer-based tests, or portfolios and projects. Due to the equivalence of this flexible evaluation system, there is a provision for credits to be accumulated and also transferred from formal to non-formal system. This means that a learner who has passed in a subject from a formal system can transfer this “pass” credit to the non-formal system, provided there is a formalized official arrangement between the two systems for such credit transfer.

The examination delivery is unique as it is based on flexibility. A learner can appear for one, two or more subjects depending upon his/her state of preparedness or preparation. Multiple chances are provided for appearing in the examination and thus the evaluation can also be done at two or more times in a year. An important role is played by the certifying agency in this flexible system as it has to ensure the reliability and credibility of the system. The recognition of the certificate by the industry, for employment as well as for

promotion is another important feature of flexible examination.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write the answer in the space given below the question.

b) Check your answer with the one given under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions” of this Unit.

3) Explain the meaning of equivalency programmes.

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4) What are the principles of designing and developing equivalency programmes?

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5) What are the different levels of equivalency programmes?

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11.6 OPEN BADGES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

In the preceding section, we have discussed various aspects of equivalency programmes. You might have noticed or understood that the learners obtain certificates of equivalent programmes from the concerned institutions offering the relevant programmes or by the agency that assesses and evaluates the learning outcomes on the basis of equivalency of curriculum at specified levels. But the certificates are usually issued to the learner in printed paper form or hard copy form. These certificates are recognised as ‘equal’ by the industry for employment and for promotion on one hand, and by the formal and non-formal educational institutions equally for facilitating or promoting their further studies. In this section, let us study about the open badge system, a digital system with emphasis on how open badges are obtained, their relevance, significance and utility in the context of lifelong learning.

11.6.1 Open Badges – Meaning and Relevance

The growth of technology has led to new forms by which individuals can store information about themselves. Earlier, a student used to carry folder containing his/her certificates and awards. Now, it is much easier to convert these into a digital format and also carry them easily. This use of digitalization moved one step further with the use of open badges. According to UNESCO (2020), open badges are defined as “visual digital tokens of achievements, affiliation, authorisation or some other trust relationship sharable across the web.” The open badges system is aimed at building methods by which new skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal methods, in addition to formal learning, is recognised and validated through the use of technology. The concept of open badges is closely related to the philosophy of open learning system, as it aims to use technology to increase flexibility, inclusion and also improve access and equity in education. Open badges thus is an important part of lifelong learning.

Digital badges and Open badges: There is a subtle difference between digital badges and open badges. *Digital badges* may be defined as online representation of skills and achievements of an individual. Digital badges can be awarded for different types of achievements and they have different values. For instance, a badge can be acquired for being a member of a particular community of practitioners. A badge can also be a symbol which denotes a person’s interest or visible recognition in a particular area. Digital badges, thus, are usually designed as visible symbols, which when awarded can be used by the recipients to display their achievement.

On the other hand, *open badges* are used to demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in a particular area and therefore serve as an online formal certification by educational institutions or professional bodies. *Open digital badges* are specialised type of badges which are verified ‘through creditable organisations’ and the information about acquired skills and achievements is attached to the badge image file and includes the meta-data about a person for future access and review. These badges act as evidence of demonstrable skills and knowledge as they are awarded for achievements attained by a person. This implies that open badges contain verifiable credential in a digital format which also is recognised and validated. Open badges are therefore a form of digital representation of credentials that are sharable in a digital world.

11.6.2 Characteristics of Open Badges

Open badges have certain features that make them easy to use and also facilitate the acquisition and recognition of digital credentials. Open badges display the following features:

- **Easy Recognition:** The award of a digital badge mix is easily recognisable and adds value to the visibility of the person who acquires it. It validates the knowledge and skills that a person has acquired after pursuing a particular programme.
- **Transferable and Stackable:** There are many platforms that offer

badges. Therefore a person can collect badges from different sources online and build their own portfolio of badges. This type of portfolio would display the achievement levels of the person and can be stacked one upon the other to display learning levels that have been acquired by the person. This stack of badges would be useful for evaluators and employers.

- **Portable:** Digital badges are portable across badges and a person can share badges containing their meta-data. This portability feature makes badges easy to use and transfer.
- **Evidence-based:** Open badges contain meta-data and other evidence related to the level and quality of knowledge and skills that a person has acquired in order to obtain the badge. The badge also contains the details of the authority that has issued, which gives credibility to the badge.
- **Free and Open Software:** Open badges are offered by different platforms and this software can be used by different organizations to create their own specific digital badges.
- **Easy Accessibility:** Open badges are easily accessible and can be used by persons to display their skills and knowledge. They can also be used to build a profile of the abilities of a person.

11.6.3 Open Badges for Education and Industry

Open badges are a means for verifying the credentials of a learner and have great potential for being used in various types of educational institutions, in flexible learning systems as well as in industry. In addition to discipline knowledge, such badges also serve as a means for assessing competencies such as those of logical thinking, problem-solving, higher order skills and other such competencies. The significance of open badges lies in that they can be used along with the traditional credentials and can co-exist with them. Such badges provide a means for assessing competency-based learning by both higher education institutions as well as potential employers in industry.

Open badges is a means by which educational institutions can provide legitimization of such skills and competencies even if there is no traditional evaluation of these attributes. The awarding of such open badges qualifications provide a sense of motivation and self-worth to learners and therefore promotes learning of new skills and competencies. It also provides opportunities for social inclusion as it helps disadvantaged groups such as refugees, migrants, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, trans-genders and others with unequal access to acquire through a more equal digital platform.

Open badges also is a step forward in block-chain technology in education and industry as it provides a verifiable system through a digital ledger that contains the records of the person. In a sense, such digital records through open badges represent the authentic achievement of a person, which are of immense use in both education and industry.

Check Your Progress

- Notes:** a) Write the answer in the space given below the question.
b) Check your answer with the one given under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions” of this Unit.
- 6) Explain the difference between open badges and digital badges.

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- 7) What are the characteristics of open badges?

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

In lifelong learning, assessment and evaluation is a crucial component. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is significant aspect of it. Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) is a means by which knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies acquired by a person through non-formal and informal education are streamlined procedurally into the formal educational system as well as the job market. Many countries are using the concept of RVA, though their actual terminology differs from country to country. RVA promotes the acceptance of flexible learning pathways. Many countries have developed National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a means of quality assurance of all modes of education. India has developed a National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) which is a competency-based framework wherein knowledge, skills, competencies, etc are graded at 10 different levels of qualifications. All these aspects have been discussed in this unit, which, we expect, might have given you a comprehensive picture of assessment and evaluation in lifelong learning.

11.8 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

- 1) UNESCO Guidelines for RVA (2012), explained the terms Recognition, Validation and Accreditation as follows:
- *Recognition* is a process of granting official status to learning outcomes and/or competences, which can lead to the acknowledgement of their value in society.

- *Validation* is the confirmation by an officially approved body that learning outcomes or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed against reference points or standards through pre-defined assessment methodologies.
 - *Accreditation* is a process by which an officially approved body, on the basis of assessment of learning outcomes and/or competences according to different purposes and methods, awards qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles), or grants equivalences, credit units or exemptions, or issues documents such as portfolios of competences.
- 2) RVA has lot of significance in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning has three principles namely 'lifelong learning', 'life-wide learning' and 'learning vis-a-vis education' Learning is much more personal in nature and may or may not be institutionalised. Lifelong learning is an integral part of living and working in a knowledge society. But, for learning to become more meaningful and lifelong learning activity, RVA of prior learning is very essential. Therefore, RVA of learning is viewed as an important component of lifelong learning as it helps to implement the larger aim of lifelong and life wide learning.
- 3) According to UNESCO (2006) document titled *Equivalency Programmes (EPs) for promoting lifelong learning*, "Equivalency programmes (EPs) are alternative education programmes equivalent to the formal system not only in terms of curriculum and certification, but also in regard to policy support mechanisms, mode of delivery, staff training, and support activities such as monitoring, evaluation and the assessment of learning."
- 4) The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Guide to Equivalency Programmes identified the following principles for designing and developing equivalency programmes (EPs) .
- *Equity and Access* -- of all EPs to all target groups.
 - *Relevance* of EPs -- to national goals and policies, and local and individual needs.
 - *Inclusion and Participation* – of experts, stakeholders as well as persons having local wisdom in development of need-based and learner-centred curriculum.
 - *Culture and Gender Sensitivity* – EPs should take into account the local culture and practices. They should also ensure that there is gender sensitivity.
 - *Good Citizenship* – EPs should promote national values and help the people to become good and responsible citizens.
 - *Comparability* – of curricula in every aspect, i.e. content areas, forms of teaching-learning, learning outcomes, evaluation and certification.
 - *Credit transfer* – Knowledge, skills and learning experiences of EPs should be transferable to formal education as well as other non-formal education programmes.
 - *Flexibility* – in content, learning and teaching approaches, duration of

the programme and evaluation.

- *Lifelong learning* -- EPs should meet the diverse needs and interests of the learners.
- 5) Equivalency programmes are designed at different levels, which vary from country to country. However some common levels of EPs are:
- Literacy and Post-Literacy Level
 - Primary Education level
 - Secondary Education Level
 - Vocational Education level
 - Degree level
- 6) There is a subtle difference between digital badges and open badges. Digital badges are defined as ‘online representation of skills and achievements of an individual’. Digital badges are awarded for different types of achievements, which carry different values. Digital badges are usually designed as visible symbols, which when awarded can be used by the recipient to display their achievement. On the other hand, open badges are used to demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in a particular area and serve as online formal certification by educational institutions or professional bodies. Open digital badges are those badges which are verified ‘through credible organisations’ and the information about acquired skills and achievements is attached to the badge image file along with the meta-data about the person for future access and review. This implies that open badges contain verifiable credential in a digital format which also is recognised and validated.
- 7) Open badges display the following features:
- *Easy Recognition*: The award of a digital badge mix is easily recognisable.
 - *Transferable and Stackable*: A person can collect badges from different sources online and build their own portfolio of badges, which can be stacked one upon the other.
 - *Portable*: Digital badges are portable, which makes badges easy to use and transfer.
 - *Evidence-based*: Open badges contain meta-data and other evidence related to the level and quality of knowledge and skills that a person has acquired in order to obtain the badge. The badge also contains the details of the authority that has issued it, which gives credibility to the badge.
 - *Free and Open Software*: Open badges are offered by different platforms and this software can be used by different organizations to create their own specific digital badges.
 - *Easy Accessibility*: Open badges are easily accessible and can be used by persons to display their skills and knowledge.

11.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Suggested Readings

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11.10 UNIT-END EXERCISE

In your own interest, you may prepare the answers to the following questions which may be useful as a part of your preparation for your term-end examinations.

- 1) Discuss how ‘recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of prior learning’ is used or practised in different countries.
- 2) Describe the concept of Equivalency Programmes. How can such programmes help in the upward educational mobility of adult neo-literates?

11.11 UNIT-END ACTIVITY

If you like to further enhance your interest, you may attempt to perform the following activity.

Reflect upon various ways by which informal learning is taking place in your environment, and identify some examples of such learning from your family, immediate neighbourhood, workplace, friends and others.