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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) from Posthumanist Perspective: A Higher Education Reconceptualization

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Abstract

This study explores Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) through a posthumanist perspective, highlighting its potential to reshape higher education by challenging traditional humanist paradigms of knowledge validation. RPL acknowledges non-linear, experiential, and technologically mediated learning, disrupting institutional authority and fostering decentralized accreditation systems. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), the study examines the integration of AI-driven assessments, blockchain credentialing, and decentralized verification networks in RPL frameworks. Findings indicate that while these innovations enhance educational accessibility and legitimacy, institutional resistance remains due to concerns over quality assurance, regulatory alignment, and epistemic authority. The study advocates for a hybrid validation model that integrates posthumanist methodologies, human oversight, and emerging technologies to ensure equitable and inclusive learning recognition. Future research should explore the ethical, operational, and policy implications of AI-driven assessments and decentralized educational frameworks.

Keywords: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Higher Education, Knowledge Validation, Hybrid Learning, Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program represents a fundamental shift in the way knowledge, learning, and competence are understood within contemporary education. Traditionally, education has been framed within humanist paradigms that prioritize institutional validation, standardized curricula, and formal learning environments. However, posthumanist perspectives challenge these rigid structures, advocating for a more fluid, networked, and technologically integrated approach to knowledge recognition (Braidotti, 2019). RPL emerges as a mechanism that disrupts the dominance of formal education by acknowledging diverse learning experiences—including those mediated by technology, professional environments, and embodied knowledge—thus decentering the privileged status of institutionalized learning (Cooper et al., 2017).

In this posthumanist reframing, learning is not solely the domain of the rational, self-contained individual but is instead distributed across multiple agents, including digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and socio-material environments (Bayne, 2015; Hayles, 2000). This perspective aligns with the reality of RPL, where knowledge is not exclusively gained through traditional academic instruction but is acquired through experiential, collective, and

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technologically mediated processes. For non-traditional learners—such as working professionals, migrants, or individuals trained through informal and digital platforms—RPL provides a legitimate space for the recognition of learning that occurs beyond humanist educational constructs. By destabilizing the conventional distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ learning, RPL challenges anthropocentric notions of education and opens possibilities for posthumanist epistemologies that emphasize hybridity, assemblages, and entangled learning networks (Snaza et al., 2014).

Furthermore, RPL necessitates a reconsideration of assessment and validation in ways that transcend traditional humanist metrics of competence. The reliance on portfolio-based assessments, AI-driven certification systems, and blockchain credentialing signals a move toward more-than-human processes of knowledge validation. These developments suggest that educational legitimacy is no longer confined to the judgments of human assessors but is increasingly co-constituted by technological infrastructures that document, verify, and recognize learning (Adams Becker et al., 2017). In this sense, RPL does not merely expand educational access but also transforms the very ontology of learning, moving it beyond individualistic, human-centered cognition toward distributed intelligence and posthumanist knowledge networks.

Despite its transformative potential, RPL continues to face resistance from institutions grounded in humanist traditions, where knowledge is still perceived as an individual, linear, and institutionally sanctioned process. The reluctance to fully integrate alternative knowledge validation frameworks, the persistence of institutional gatekeeping, and concerns over the ‘authenticity’ of non-formal learning indicate ongoing tensions between humanist and posthumanist paradigms in education (Han, 2017). Additionally, disparities in assessment consistency and technological adaptation suggest that RPL must navigate institutional inertia while simultaneously engaging with emerging posthumanist pedagogies that embrace fluid, interconnected, and machine-mediated learning processes (Bayne, 2015).

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to critically examine how RPL operates within this posthumanist educational landscape. By analyzing how technologies, alternative knowledge systems, and non-traditional learning pathways shape RPL effectiveness, the study seeks to offer strategic insights into how education can move beyond rigid institutional control toward a more inclusive, networked, and technologically-augmented model of learning recognition. The findings will contribute to rethinking learning validation beyond human-centered paradigms, advancing a vision of education that embraces multiplicity, hybridity, and posthuman relationality in knowledge recognition and credentialing.

Theoretical Framework

Rethinking Human Capital Theory through a Posthumanist Lens

Educational researchers frequently adopt Human Capital Theory as a foundational framework for their studies (Eide & Showalter, 2010). This theory was first introduced into the field of education in the 1970s, primarily through the work of Theodore Schultz, an American economist and recipient of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Economics. Schultz asserted that education plays a crucial role in enhancing individuals' skills and productivity, thereby increasing their human capital value. He also emphasized the importance of investing in education as a means to foster both personal development and economic growth. Beyond Schultz, several other economists

have significantly contributed to the advancement of Human Capital Theory, including Gary Becker (Becker, 1993), Jacob Mincer (Mincer, 1981), and Michael Spence (Spence, 2002). They collectively argue that education serves as a key mechanism for improving individual competencies and productivity, ultimately strengthening human capital. Human Capital Theory traditionally conceptualizes education as an investment that enhances individual productivity and economic returns. This perspective has significantly influenced educational policies by reinforcing the notion that formal learning directly translates to labor market advantages.

However, from a posthumanist perspective, this framework is deeply anthropocentric, treating human learners as economic units whose value is determined primarily by their productivity (Braidotti, 2019; Snaza et al., 2014). It also assumes a linear progression of learning and success, disregarding distributed, non-linear, and multi-agent learning processes that involve human, technological, and socio-material assemblages (Ferrando, 2019; Hayles, 2000). In the context of RPL, Human Capital Theory must be critically re-examined beyond its human-centered focus.

Posthumanist Perspectives on Experiential Learning

In addition to human capital theory, there is Experiential Learning which is more popular in education because this theory explains in more detail that effective learning requires a more interactive and experience-based approach. This approach is claimed to be more effective in improving students' abilities and knowledge. This Experiential Learning Theory was introduced by David A. Kolb, an American psychologist, in 1984. Kolb developed this theory based on previous works by psychologists such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. Kolb defines Experiential Learning as a learning process that involves direct experience and reflection on that experience. He also developed an Experiential Learning model consisting of four stages: (1) Concrete Experience: Students experience situations or events directly; (2) Observation and Reflection: Students observe and reflect on their experiences; (3) Concept Development (Abstract Conceptualization): Students develop concepts or theories based on their experiences and reflections and (4) Application of Concepts (Active Experimentation): Students apply concepts or theories that have been developed in new situations.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) posits that knowledge is constructed through direct experiences, integrating reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation (Chavan, 2011; Ramburuth & Daniel, 2011). This theory has been instrumental in validating non-traditional learning pathways, particularly within RPL, as it acknowledges that skills are developed beyond formal education—through work, social interactions, and digital engagements. However, ELT remains grounded in humanist assumptions, emphasizing the autonomous subject as the locus of learning while largely ignoring the role of posthuman assemblages—technological, environmental, and non-human agents—in shaping knowledge acquisition.

Beyond Quality Assurance: A Posthumanist Approach to Educational Standards

Traditional quality assurance frameworks in higher education operate within human-centered paradigms that emphasize institutional control, standardization, and accountability. Models such as the 3P framework (Purpose, People, Process) seek to align institutional goals with educational quality, ensuring the legitimacy of assessment mechanisms in RPL. However, quality assurance mechanisms often reinforce hierarchical and exclusionary knowledge validation systems, prioritizing institutional authority over alternative, non-institutionalized learning pathways.

A posthumanist approach to quality assurance would challenge these assumptions by decentralizing institutional control and integrating multi-agent validation networks. Instead of relying solely on human-led accreditation bodies, RPL assessments could incorporate blockchain-verified micro-credentials, decentralized autonomous educational systems (DAES), and AI-driven knowledge recognition models. This would shift quality assurance from a top-down, anthropocentric process to a distributed, multi-agent, and technologically-augmented evaluation system, where knowledge is authenticated through networked intelligence rather than institutional authority alone.

In this regard, RPL serves as a disruptive force within traditional higher education quality frameworks, as it necessitates a broader recognition of posthumanist knowledge systems that integrate technological, non-human, and informal learning processes. The challenge remains in restructuring accreditation models to acknowledge fluid, non-linear, and hybrid learning ecologies, where human and non-human actors collaboratively shape educational legitimacy (Knox et al., 2020).

Methodology

Review protocol - PRISMA

The PRISMA framework is essential for conducting high-quality systematic literature reviews (Gabriele & Martins, 2023; Noeikham et al., 2024). By following its guidelines (Mishra & Mishra, 2023), researchers can ensure their reviews are transparent (Gao et al., 2021), reproducible (Moher et al., 2014), and valuable to the academic community. Continuous updates and extensions of PRISMA help address evolving research needs and improve reporting standards across various disciplines (Page et al., 2021).

Formulation of Research Questions

The research questions were formulated using the PICOS (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Study Design) framework. The research question for this study is “how does RPL operate in a posthumanist educational landscape?” Population (P): university RPL programs. Intervention (I): how technology, alternative knowledge systems, and non-traditional learning pathways shape the effectiveness of RPL. Comparison (C): Not applicable (observational synthesis). Outcomes (O): Quality of RPL outcomes. Study Design (S): Empirical studies, case studies, reviews, and qualitative analyses. This RQ is novel in that it considers a posthumanist approach where traditional humanist approaches are currently widely used. The urgency lies in the increasing adoption of RPL in various countries to accelerate higher education for experienced workers. The interest arises from the exploration of factors that contribute to the quality of graduates, both in terms of academic and work readiness.

Systematic Search Strategy

Identification

This stage includes the exploration of scientific articles in the online research database Scopus. URL: <https://scopus.com/> with provider Elsevier. Elsevier has access to journals in more than 100 developing countries (Hawkes, 2012), open access and hybrid journals, has consistent altmetrics and a complete database (Zahedi et al., 2014), credible visitability (Nundy & Kakar, 2023). To identify related articles, the search query and boolean operator used in this study are ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ OR ‘RPL’ OR ‘Prior Learning Assessment’ OR ‘PLA’.

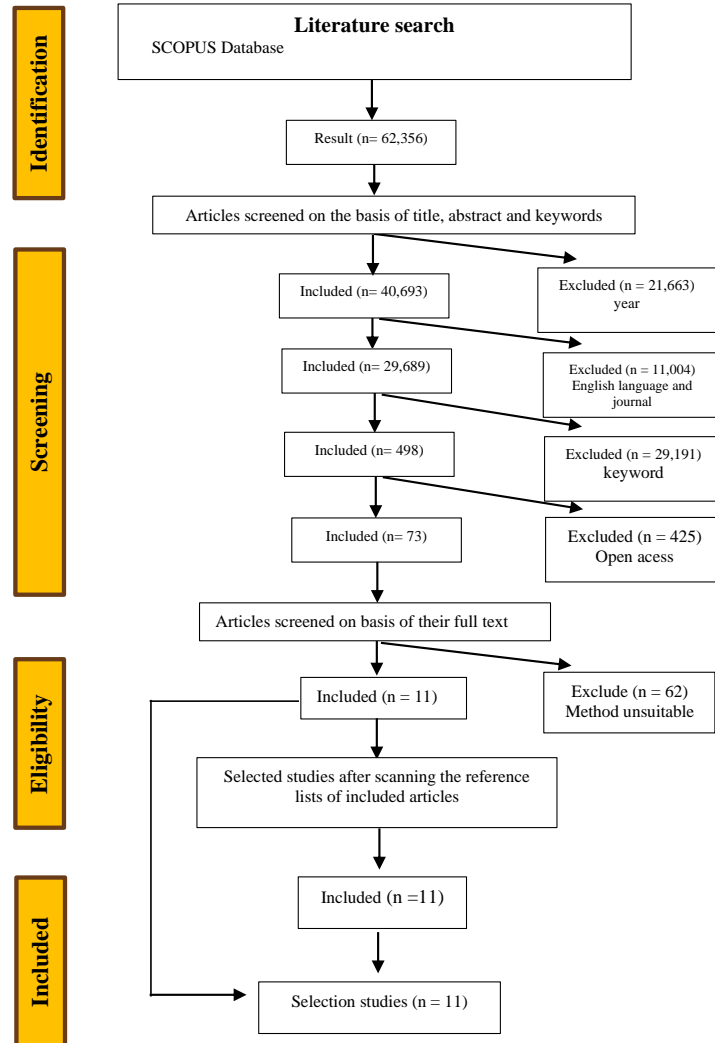
Screening

Screening aims to curate articles collected from databases. The process involves comprehensive filtering to eliminate potential redundancy from various databases and align articles with the researcher's objectives. Initially, 62,356 documents were successfully collected from the Scopus database using a predetermined search query and Boolean operator. However, this number was refined based on the year (2015-2025) to 40,693 documents. Only documents in the form of English language journals were used, resulting in 29,689 journals. The only keyword used was RPL, resulting in 498 journals. To make it easier for researchers to understand each journal, only 73 journals are open access.

Eligibility

Screened articles must be validated through comprehensive reading and full-text examination. If there are articles that do not meet the researcher's criteria (method), they must be excluded with the reasons for the exclusion to reduce potential bias. The discussion of this research focuses on developing countries, so developed countries are excluded. At this stage, there are 11 journals that are eligible to proceed to the next stage.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram



Quality Appraisal

The Quality Appraisal stage is very important in ensuring that the methodology and analysis in the study, especially those examining the factors that influence the quality of graduates from the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme, are carried out satisfactorily. The Mixed-Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) is often used to assess the quality of these studies by evaluating the suitability of research design, data collection, and analysis. This process is very important to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, which can provide valuable insights into the perspectives of users and educational institutions.

Result and Discussions

RPL as a Posthumanist Disruption in Educational Accessibility

Findings indicate that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) serves as a critical intervention in reconfiguring educational accessibility within a posthumanist landscape, particularly for non-traditional learners and decentralized knowledge systems. Unlike traditional education models that emphasize institutionalized knowledge acquisition, RPL validates alternative knowledge systems by acknowledging multi-source, distributed, and non-linear learning processes (Knox et al., 2020). The results highlight that RPL participants do not merely gain formal accreditation but also engage in a techno-human assemblage of knowledge validation (Braidotti, 2019), where human expertise, digital infrastructures, and AI-driven assessment models collaboratively redefine educational legitimacy.

Technology plays a fundamental role in shaping the effectiveness of RPL by expanding assessment methodologies beyond human-centered evaluation. AI-powered assessment tools enable the recognition of competencies acquired outside formal education, while blockchain-based credentialing enhances transparency and verifiability in accreditation. These innovations challenge anthropocentric knowledge validation and redistribute authority to decentralized, multi-agent networks. However, findings suggest that institutional adoption remains uneven, as many universities exhibit resistance to integrating machine-learning-assisted assessments and automated verification systems due to concerns over credibility, ethical risks, and regulatory alignment (Snaza et al., 2014).

Beyond technology, RPL fosters a decentralization of knowledge authority, legitimizing non-traditional learning pathways that emerge through experiential, indigenous, and community-based education. Findings suggest that posthumanist RPL frameworks dismantle Eurocentric and neoliberal knowledge hierarchies, allowing for epistemic plurality where diverse learning trajectories are recognized as legitimate (Bayne, 2015). This shift reframes learning as an entanglement between human cognition, digital mediation, and socio-material infrastructures, rather than a linear, instructor-driven process.

Despite its transformative potential, RPL's integration into institutional frameworks remains contested. Findings reveal that higher education institutions struggle to align posthumanist methodologies with accreditation standards, leading to inconsistencies in acceptance and implementation. This tension underscores the deep-seated reliance on traditional, human-centered validation mechanisms, limiting the full realization of RPL as a posthumanist educational model. However, when examined through a posthumanist lens, RPL emerges not as a mere tool for economic mobility, but as a site of epistemic decolonization, where alternative knowledge ecologies and non-traditional learning trajectories gain legitimacy.

Posthumanist Epistemologies and the Recognition of Hybrid Learning

Findings indicate that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) functions as a disruptive epistemological force, challenging traditional hierarchies of knowledge validation by integrating alternative knowledge systems and digitally mediated learning. Unlike conventional accreditation models that prioritize institutional archives and human memory, RPL within a posthumanist framework recognizes hybrid intelligence systems—a dynamic entanglement of human cognition, AI-driven analytics, digital databases, and collective intelligence networks (Ferrando, 2019). This shift redefines the locus of knowledge production, positioning RPL as a site where non-traditional learning pathways gain legitimacy through decentralized, multi-agent

A key finding is that technology expands RPL's epistemological reach, enabling the validation of experiential, data-driven, and AI-assisted learning. AI-augmented skill mapping, blockchain-based accreditation, and peer-to-peer digital assessment networks facilitate the recognition of competencies beyond institutional settings. This development is particularly impactful for marginalized and non-traditional learners, whose expertise—gained through professional experience, self-directed study, or open-source education—often lacks formal recognition. However, institutional reluctance to fully acknowledge non-human agencies as co-creators of knowledge continues to reinforce human-centered accreditation biases.

From a posthumanist standpoint, RPL does not merely function as a tool for credentialing prior experiences but serves as a site of epistemic decolonization, where non-formal, community-based, and technologically mediated knowledge systems are elevated alongside traditional academic learning. Findings suggest that experiential learning should not be seen as an isolated, cognitive endeavor but as a relational and distributed process emerging from human-technology-environment interactions (Braidotti, 2019). This perspective challenges anthropocentric models of expertise and calls for an expanded framework of RPL that legitimizes digitally archived learning, AI-assisted knowledge acquisition, and automated skill verification (Knox et al., 2020).

Despite these advancements, RPL's integration into formal accreditation structures remains constrained by institutional skepticism toward technology-mediated learning validation. Findings reveal that while AI-based learning portfolios, automated assessment systems, and mixed-reality simulations enhance the credibility of RPL, many universities hesitate to fully endorse machine-learning-assisted recognition models due to concerns over data security, bias in AI assessments, and misalignment with existing regulatory frameworks. This highlights the persistent tension between emerging posthumanist epistemologies and legacy accreditation mechanisms, signaling the need for structural transformations in educational policy and assessment methodologies.

In summary, RPL within a posthumanist framework not only disrupts traditional knowledge hierarchies but also redefines learning as an entangled, multi-agent process. By embracing technological mediation, alternative epistemologies, and non-traditional learning pathways, RPL has the potential to bridge hybrid learning through formal and informal knowledge systems, making education more inclusive, adaptive, and decentralized in the posthumanist era.

RPL and the Reconfiguration of Quality Assurance in a Posthumanist Framework

Findings suggest that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) challenges traditional quality assurance models by decentralizing assessment authority and integrating multi-agent validation networks. Unlike conventional quality frameworks that rely on standardization, human-centered assessment, and institutional gatekeeping, RPL—when examined through a posthumanist lens—demonstrates a shift toward technologically mediated, networked knowledge validation.

Empirical data highlights that blockchain-based credentialing, AI-driven knowledge recognition, and decentralized verification models are emerging as alternatives to traditional, human-led accreditation processes. Blockchain-verified micro-credentials allow learners to receive tamper-proof recognition of their competencies, while AI-assisted assessment models evaluate prior knowledge based on pattern recognition, skill-mapping algorithms, and machine-learning analytics. Findings indicate that such systems enhance transparency and accessibility,

as knowledge validation is no longer confined to institutional oversight but distributed across interconnected technological networks.

Additionally, the implementation of Decentralized Autonomous Educational Systems (DAES) has introduced new self-regulating, non-hierarchical assessment structures. In contrast to human-led committees, these AI-driven systems autonomously verify learning outcomes through peer-to-peer validation, data-driven assessments, and adaptive learning analytics. However, institutional reluctance toward adopting automated and decentralized accreditation models remains a significant barrier, reflecting ongoing tensions between legacy academic hierarchies and emerging posthumanist epistemologies.

Despite its potential to democratize educational quality assurance, findings reveal significant institutional resistance to RPL's posthumanist disruption. University administrators express concerns over:

1. **Loss of Institutional Authority.** AI-driven and decentralized systems challenge human-led expertise in accreditation, leading to skepticism regarding the legitimacy of machine-generated assessments.
2. **Variability in Quality Control.** While distributed networks ensure accessibility, they also introduce inconsistencies in evaluative criteria, raising concerns about standardization and academic rigor.
3. **Ethical and Regulatory Ambiguities.** The lack of established frameworks for AI-driven accreditation raises questions regarding bias, data privacy, and ethical accountability in machine-learning assessments.

Findings suggest that a hybrid approach—blending technological mediation with adaptive human oversight—may offer a viable pathway for integrating posthumanist quality assurance into higher education. Instead of viewing AI and decentralized technologies as threats, institutions could co-evolve with these innovations, leveraging automated assessment models as complementary tools to human expertise rather than outright replacements.

Ultimately, RPL's intersection with posthumanist quality assurance signals a paradigm shift in higher education, where knowledge legitimacy is no longer dictated by institutional control alone but emerges from the dynamic interplay of human and non-human evaluators. As universities grapple with these transformations, the redefinition of quality assurance as a multi-agent, technologically mediated process becomes critical for the future of accreditation and educational equity.

Conclusion

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) framework, when viewed through a posthumanist lens, disrupts traditional human-centered education by integrating alternative learning pathways, decentralized accreditation models, and technology-assisted validation systems. Unlike conventional education, which privileges institutional authority and linear learning progressions, RPL acknowledges hybrid, experiential, and technologically mediated knowledge acquisition.

Findings highlight that AI-powered assessment tools, blockchain credentialing, and decentralized verification models enhance the credibility, accessibility, and transparency of RPL. However, institutional adoption remains uneven due to skepticism regarding machine-

learning assessments, standardization inconsistencies, and ethical concerns. Despite these barriers, RPL challenges anthropocentric notions of expertise, shifting knowledge validation toward distributed intelligence and posthumanist epistemologies.

To fully realize the potential of RPL in a posthumanist educational paradigm, institutions must restructure accreditation models to accommodate non-traditional learning trajectories, AI-mediated evaluations, and multi-agent validation systems. This transition requires rethinking quality assurance, balancing human expertise with technological mediation, and ensuring regulatory frameworks evolve alongside decentralized educational innovations. By embracing hybrid validation methodologies, RPL can serve as a transformative force in higher education, fostering an inclusive, adaptive, and posthumanist approach to knowledge recognition.

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