

International Terms for Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Prior Learning: Comprehensive Reference Document

The Editors

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Preface:

The terminology for the recognition, assessment, validation, and credentialing of prior knowledge and skills has evolved as policies and practices have grown around the world.

Different regions, countries, and institutions have used various terms to describe the recognition, assessment, and validation of knowledge and skills acquired through informal, nonformal, and personal learning.

All these terms generally refer to the assessment and recognition of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through work experience, informal education, military service, community involvement, and self-study. Terminology always reflects fundamentally different philosophies, methodologies, and power structures for engaging with learners' experiences. The words we use also vary and continue to change by region and institution. Still, the underlying concept remains consistent: providing formal recognition to make visible skills and knowledge that have often gone unnoticed.

Core Terms:

Prior Learning

Knowledge and skills acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal means. It includes learning gained through a range of sources, e.g., work, community engagement, personal study, and life experiences.

Experiential Learning

Learning derived from direct experience rather than structured instruction. It refers to skills and knowledge developed through engagement in professional practice, community involvement, or personal projects.

Competencies

Measurable abilities combining knowledge, skills, and behaviors that enable successful performance according to occupational and academic standards.

Recognition

Formal acknowledgment of learning by an institution, authority, or employer.

Recognition may involve granting academic credit, professional licensing, or acceptance of qualifications.

Assessment

Systematic evaluation of learning in relationship to established standards or qualifications. Methods include portfolios, examinations, learning products, interviews, and/or performance demonstrations.

Validation

Confirmation that assessed learning meets specific criteria or standards and ensures that recognition decisions are based on fair, consistent, transparent, and quality-assured processes.

Accreditation

Formal approval of any institutions, programs, or assessment processes by an authoritative body based upon agreed-upon quality standards. In some contexts, "accreditation" refers to crediting an individual's learning.

Credential

An official document or designation, e.g., a degree, certificate, diploma, micro-credential, or license that signals achievement of specific learning outcomes or competencies

Comprehensive International Terms Table:

Term	Acronym	Origin
Acreditación de Aprendizaje Previo	AAP	Used in some Spanish-speaking countries
Accreditation of Prior Learning	APL	United Kingdom
Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning	APEL	United Kingdom
Anerkennung von Lernergebnisse	AvL	Germany
Anerkennung von Kompetenzen	AvK	Germany
Credit for Prior Learning	CPL	United States of America
Competency-Based Assessment	CBA	United States of America
Erkenning van Verworven Competenties	EVC	Netherlands, Flanders
Erkenning van Verworven Kwalificaties	EVK	Netherlands, Flanders
Prior Learning Assessment	PLA	United States of America
Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition	PLAR	Canada
Reconocimiento de Aprendizajes Previos	RAP	Chile (UNAB)

Term	Acronym Origin	
Reconocimiento y Certificación de Aprendizajes Previos para la Prosecución de Estudios	RCA	Chile
Reconocimiento, Evaluación y Acreditación de Competencias	REAC	Spain, Latin America (Spanish speaking countries)
Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning	RNFIL	UNESCO
Recognition of Prior Learning	RPL	United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa
Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes	RPLO	United Kingdom
Recognition, Validation and Accreditation	RVA	UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências	RVCC	Portugal, Brazil
Skills Recognition (for vocational training)		Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong
Validação da Aprendizagem Prévia	VAP	Brazil
Validación de Competencias	VdC	Bolivia
Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience	VAE	Africa (French speaking countries), France, Switzerland, Wallonia
Validation des Acquis Professionnels	VAP	France, Wallonia
Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning	VNIL	European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN)
Validation of Prior Learning	VPL	Universal: www.vplbiennale.com
Valuation of Prior Learning Experiences	VPLE	Universal: www.ec-vpl.nl
Validierung von Lernergebnissen	VvL	Austria

Terms by Geographic Region:

North America

- **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** – Common in the United States and Canada
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – Used in Canada
- **Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)** – Used in Canada
- **Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)** – Used in some U.S. institutions
- **Competency-Based Assessment (CBA)** – Used in competency-based education models

Europe

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – Common in United Kingdom, Ireland, and the European Union
- **Validation of Prior Learning (VPL)** – Used in Netherlands, France, and Scandinavian countries
- **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)** – Used in the United Kingdom
- **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** – UK term, emphasizing experiential learning

- **Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)** – France (Validation of Acquired Experience)
- **Validation des Acquis Professionnels (VAP)** – France, Wallonia
- **Anerkennung von Lernergebnissen (AvL)** – Germany
- **Anerkennung von Kompetenzen (AvK)** – Germany
- **Erkenning van Verworven Competenties (EVC)** – Netherlands, Flanders
- **Erkenning van Verworven Kwalificaties (EVK)** – Netherlands, Flanders
- **Validierung von Lernergebnissen (VvL)** – Austria

Australia & New Zealand

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – Common in Australia and New Zealand
- **Assessment of Prior Learning (APL)** – Used in some vocational and higher education contexts

Asia

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – Used in India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore
- **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** – Malaysia
- **Skills Recognition** – Used in Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong for vocational training

Africa

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – Used in South Africa and Namibia
- **Assessment of Prior Learning (APL)** – Used in some educational policies
- **Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE)** – French speaking countries

Latin America & the Caribbean

- **Reconocimiento de Aprendizajes Previos (RAP)** – (*Recognition of Prior Learning*) - Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Chile
- **Acreditación de Aprendizaje Previo (AAP)** – (*Accreditation of Prior Learning*) - Used in some Spanish-speaking countries
- **Reconhecimento de Aprendizagem Prévia (RAP)** – (*Recognition of Prior Learning*) - Brazil and Portuguese-speaking countries
- **Reconocimiento, Evaluación y Acreditación de Competencias (REAC)** – Spain, Latin America
- **Reconocimiento y Certificación de Aprendizajes Previos (RCA)** – Chile
- **Validação da Aprendizagem Prévia (VAP)** – Brazil
- **Validación de Competencias (VdC)** – Bolivia

International and Policy-Oriented Terms

- **Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA)** – Used by UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
- **Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (RNFIL)** – Used by UNESCO
- **Validation of Prior Learning (VPL)** – Used by OECD and EU frameworks
- **Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNIL)** – CEDEFOP, European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN)

- **Validation of Prior Learning (VPL)** – Universal: www.vplbiennale.com
- **Valuation of Prior Learning Experiences (VPLE)** – Universal: www.ec-vpl.nl