



Communication Approach of Universitas Negeri Surabaya in Implementing RPL Collaboration to Enhance Teacher Competence

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Abstract

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at State University of Surabaya (UNESA) marks a pivotal advancement in accommodating non-formal and informal education to broaden higher education accessibility in Indonesia. This study investigates the strategic deployment of RPL at UNESA and examines its communication strategies with local government entities. It identifies both the challenges and efficiencies within organizational communication that influence the program's success. Employing qualitative research methods, such as interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), this analysis delves into the procedural intricacies and the necessity for collaborative endeavors to streamline the RPL process. The results reveal that although the program has been instrumental in promoting educational inclusivity and transparency, it encounters obstacles in maintaining consistent communication practices and integration standards. The conclusion emphasizes that systematic assessment procedures, effective communication strategies, and ongoing training are essential to improve service quality and achieve the RPL program's objectives. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on how educational institutions can effectively implement RPL by optimizing organizational communication and fostering collaboration with governmental agencies.

Keywords: *Communication Approach; RPL Collaboration; Higher Education Strategy; Teacher Competence*

Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an educational policy that acknowledges individuals' competencies acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning. Globally, RPL has emerged as a strategic tool for improving access to higher education, promoting lifelong learning, and creating equitable opportunities based on individuals' learning experiences (Baumeler et al., 2023). Regulations in

Indonesia support this policy by encouraging educational institutions to expand access, which aligns with national objectives to enhance the inclusivity of the education system (Mulyani, 2024). Despite its potential, the effective implementation of RPL requires a well-orchestrated interplay between institutions and stakeholders, particularly local government agencies.

As a pioneer in Indonesia's RPL initiative, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) launched its program in 2021 to provide individuals with non-formal and informal educational backgrounds opportunities to pursue higher education. The program has shown significant promise in its initial phase, with hundreds of applicants participating, although only a fraction advanced due to the rigorous selection process (Rohman et al., 2024). This underscores the need for an adaptive and systematic approach to implementing RPL, particularly in addressing the barriers underrepresented populations face.

In 2022, UNESA expanded its RPL program by collaborating with local governments to open educational access in rural areas. This initiative not only catered to local needs but also contributed to achieving village-level Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By aligning educational inclusivity with sustainable development, UNESA's RPL model highlights the potential of education as a catalyst for social and economic transformation (Baumeler et al., 2023). However, the program also exposed the inherent challenges in organizational communication, which often impede the effectiveness of such collaborations.

Studies have demonstrated that effective organizational communication is a critical determinant of success in RPL implementation. Recent research emphasizes the role of vertical organizational communication in successfully implementing strategies, highlighting the importance of communication credibility, feedback speed, and flexibility in ensuring implementation success (Chirwa & Boikanyo, 2022). Additionally, a study illustrates how effective communication during strategy implementation positively impacts organizational performance by aligning stakeholders and minimizing time lags (Miyawa & Mwasiagi, 2023).

The success of UNESA's RPL program partially stems from its promotion of structured communication with local governments. However, persistent challenges such as inconsistent communication practices and the integration of uniform standards highlight areas requiring further attention.

Despite these hurdles, UNESA has demonstrated resilience by strengthening collaborations with local governments in Surabaya and Magetan in 2023. These partnerships aim to support advanced education for teachers and public sector employees, underscoring the importance of harmonious synergy between educational institutions and local governments in building sustainable human resource development (Baumeler et al., 2023). This collaborative approach reflects best practices observed globally, where mutual understanding and shared objectives significantly impact program outcomes (Austin & Seitanidi, 2018).

The addition of these partnerships highlights a crucial evolution in the approach taken by UNESA, aiming not only at inclusivity but also at the professional development of current workforce sectors through RPL. This aspect of the initiative aligns with contemporary global trends where RPL not only serves academic pursuits but also enhances professional competencies in various sectors, thereby broadening the scope and impact of RPL frameworks (Smith et al., 2025).

Given this backdrop, this study raises several research questions. First, what organizational communication strategies does UNESA employ to collaborate effectively with local governments in implementing the RPL program? What are the communication barriers that UNESA encounters, and how do these challenges affect the effectiveness of the program? Third, how can UNESA optimize its communication strategies to improve collaboration with local governments? Fourth, to what extent does

organizational communication enhance transparency, selectivity, and sustainability in the RPL program? Finally, how does UNESA's approach foster mutual understanding of quality standards, learning outcomes, and assessment procedures with local governments?

This study aims to identify effective organizational communication strategies that support the implementation of RPL at UNESA. By leveraging appropriate communication approaches, this research contributes to the sustainability of the RPL program, enhances transparency and selectivity, and broadens academic understanding of organizational communication dynamics in the context of higher education in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study seeks to bridge theoretical insights and practical applications, emphasizing how targeted communication interventions can address systemic challenges in educational inclusivity and policy implementation.

Methods

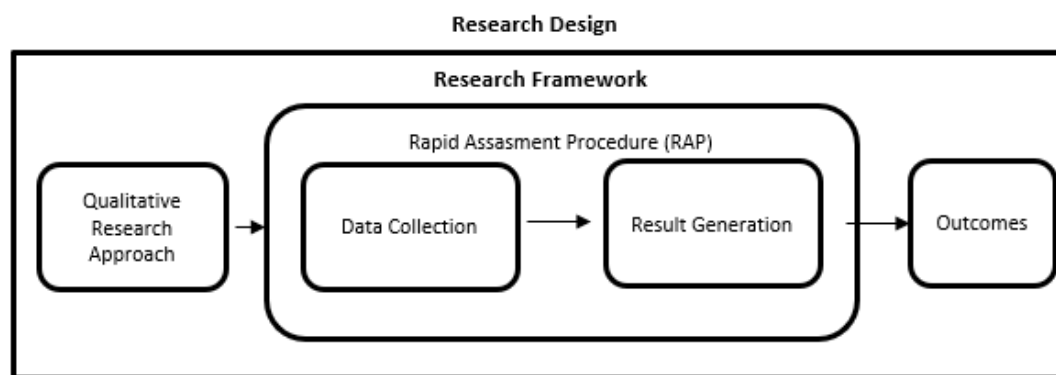


Figure 1. Research Framework

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Rapid Assessment Procedure (RAP) design to explore the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA). Renfro et al. (2021) chose RAP for its ability to generate prompt and contextually relevant results, which makes it perfect for decision-making and designing suitable interventions for program evaluation. We selected the qualitative approach due to its ability to capture deep insights into respondents' values, opinions, behaviors, and social context, all of which are crucial for evaluating the RPL program (Saryono & Anggraeni, 2010). RAP makes sure that findings are useful and applicable in the area by making it easy to quickly identify important parts of RPL implementation (Gale et al., 2019; Holdsworth et al., 2020).

Participants/ Sample

The study included 195 students who were enrolled in the RPL program within the Early Childhood Education Teacher Education (PG PAUD) program. These participants were active early childhood teachers pursuing further education through scholarships provided by the Surabaya City Education Office. The RPL program enabled them to have their prior learning and professional experiences recognized as part of their formal qualifications in the PG PAUD field.

Data Collection

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to ensure a rich and comprehensive perspective on the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA). To ensure a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including RPL program coordinators and representatives from local government agencies such as the Surabaya City Government and the East Java Provincial Education Office. These interviews provided detailed insights into stakeholders' perceptions and experiences (Hanbyul & Ro, 2019). Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving representatives from the RPL Center and local government collaborators were conducted to validate and enrich the interview data, fostering a collective understanding and enhancing the validity of findings through shared experiences (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Secondary data were obtained from observations and document reviews, assessing the alignment of interview and FGD data with actual practices observed during the socialization and promotion stages of the RPL program, and examining critical documents concerning funding, curriculum, learning design, and evaluation processes to ensure the reliability and relevance of the findings (Kern, 2018).

Data Analysis

To process the data collected for the study on the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), we followed a structured approach comprising several key steps: Firstly, we described informants to establish the context and relevance of their contributions. Secondly, all interviews were transcribed to ensure that detailed analysis could be performed. Thirdly, the transcribed data were meticulously organized into categories and themes, which facilitated a structured analysis. Fourthly, we summarized the data using transcript matrices to visually represent and streamline the analysis process. We employed content analysis as our primary analytical technique, allowing for a systematic and objective extraction and interpretation of meanings from the communication data. This method was crucial in identifying key message characteristics and developing conclusions that are directly aligned with the research focus, as demonstrated in the methodological guidelines for effective message characteristics in communication strategies (Makvandi & Farzin, 2022). Additionally, the role of key messages in strategic communication is emphasized as a critical component for achieving alignment and effective communication with target audiences (Husakovska & Voit, 2024).

Validity of Data

The triangulation of sources and methods strengthened the validity of the data. Source triangulation meant checking data from interviews, observations, and document reviews against each other to make sure it was consistent and complete from all points of view. Method triangulation, which combined in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches, enhanced the robustness of the findings (Campbell et al., 2018).

This methodological framework, grounded in a qualitative approach and supported by RAP, offers a comprehensive exploration of the RPL program at UNESA. By employing multiple data sources and rigorous analysis, the study ensures valid and actionable insights, contributing to a nuanced understanding of RPL implementation and its organizational dynamics.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings reveal several key themes related to the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA). These themes include transparency and selectivity in admissions, challenges in organizational communication, and strategies for fostering collaboration with local governments.

Transparency and Selectivity

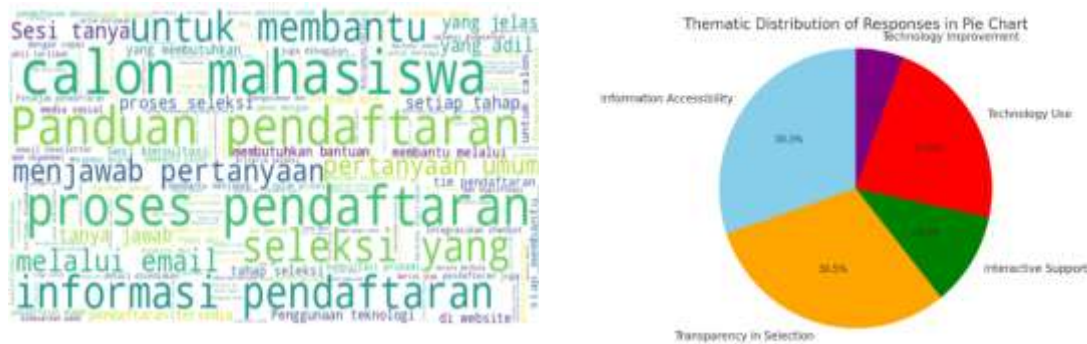


Figure 2. Frequency and Themes in Responses About UNESA RPL Center

UNESA's RPL program has demonstrated a strong commitment to transparency, as evidenced by 30.5% of participants emphasizing the clarity of the selection process. The establishment of expert panels and comprehensive assessments reinforced objectivity and minimized biases. Additionally, 30.3% of participants highlighted the accessibility of information through various communication channels, enabling prospective students to make informed decisions. This aligns with findings by Brenner et al. (2021), who argued that accessible and transparent processes increase trust and engagement in educational programs.

While some participants (5.7%) praised transparency and selectivity, they also indicated the need for continuous technological innovation, such as advanced notification systems, to further enhance efficiency. This finding echoes the work of Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018), who noted that integrating technology into administrative processes significantly improves user satisfaction and institutional credibility.

Challenges in Organizational Communication



Figure 3. Frequency and Themes in Challenges Faced by UNESA RPL Center

Despite the program's successes, challenges persist in the form of inconsistent communication practices between UNESA and local government agencies. Approximately 24.5% of respondents pointed to the lack of standardized procedures for validating competencies, while 19.2% raised concerns about data security and policy coherence. These findings are consistent with (Chirwa & Boikanyo, 2022), who emphasized that fragmented communication frameworks can undermine program sustainability.

Moreover, 27.6% of respondents identified the need for capacity building among staff. This reflects similar challenges reported by Garnett and Cavaye (2015), who stressed the importance of training and professional development in ensuring consistent quality in RPL programs.

UNESA RPL Center's Strategy in Forming Strategic Partnerships with Local Government Agencies



Figure 4. Frequency and Themes in Forming Strategic Partnerships with Local Government Agencies

From the interviews conducted with early childhood education teachers, the strategies of the UNESA RPL Center in forging strategic partnerships with local government agencies emphasize a mutually beneficial collaborative approach. According to the data gathered, an interactive approach and the provision of educational materials account for 36.86% of the responses, highlighting the importance of workshops and training sessions to enhance understanding of collaboration. Resource sharing and joint program development, considered essential by 30.89% of respondents, are viewed as crucial for enhancing synergy and benefiting both parties and the broader community.

Furthermore, effective communication and networking, which constitute 11.65% of the responses, are deemed crucial for maintaining openness and active participation from all stakeholders. The use of online platforms and participation in events, each attracting 10.30% of responses, demonstrate the role of technology in facilitating coordination and strengthening ongoing relationships. Teachers also emphasized the importance of interactive presentation materials in increasing engagement and enhancing local governments' understanding of the collaboration objectives. Overall, the approach taken by the UNESA RPL Center in establishing partnerships is regarded as not only strengthening inter-institutional relationships but also bringing qualitative improvements to the services provided to the community.

Effectiveness of the Quality Assurance System Implemented by the UNESA RPL Center



Figure 5. Frequency and Themes in Quality Assurance Implemented by the UNESA RPL Center

In the realm of quality assurance, the UNESA RPL Center has adopted focused strategies on external audits and transparency to uphold and monitor service standards effectively. Transparency and external audits, representing 27.43% of the feedback, are pivotal in ensuring the objectivity and integrity

of the quality measures in place. This rigorous approach not only enhances the credibility of the RPL Center but also guarantees the application of consistent and enduring quality standards across all procedures.

Moreover, enhancing the competence of staff through structured training is viewed as essential, echoed by 22.64% of the responses. This training is crucial for improving the quality of services that the RPL Center offers. Regular evaluations and monitoring, emphasized by 21.94% of the teachers, are integral to maintaining high service quality. These include using quality management software that helps in aligning daily operations with established quality benchmarks, thereby fostering a transparent, accountable, and effective service environment that strengthens stakeholder relationships.

Effectiveness of Facilitating Competence Recognition

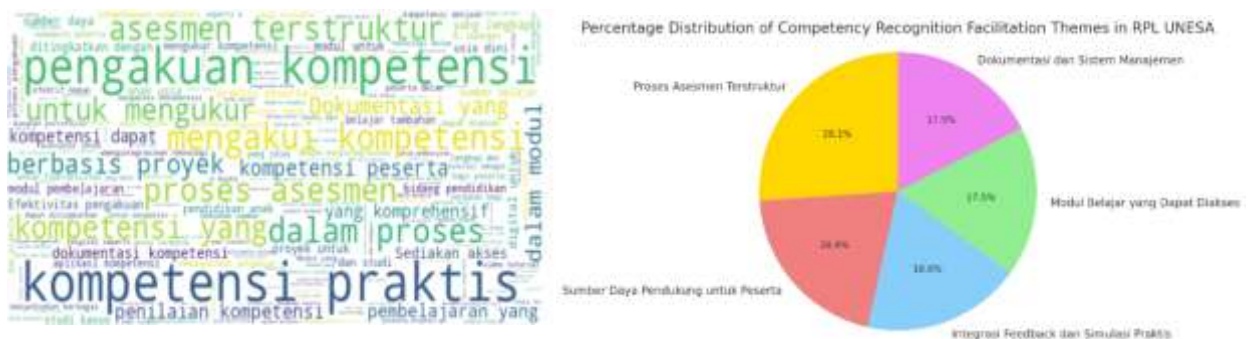


Figure 6. Frequency and Themes in Facilitating Competence Recognition

The RPL program at UNESA is acknowledged for its efficacy in facilitating the recognition of competencies, which relies significantly on structured and supportive assessment processes. According to 26.1% of early childhood education teachers, structured assessments that include both theoretical and practical evaluations are crucial. These assessments ensure that the recognition of competencies is fair and reflective of the true skills and knowledge participants possess. Assessment-based projects have proven effective in providing a more comprehensive understanding of participants' capabilities.

In addition to rigorous assessments, the support resources available to participants, such as access to online tutors and e-books—valued by 20.4% of respondents—play a critical role in preparing individuals for these assessments. The integration of feedback and practical simulations enhances the accuracy of the evaluations and helps participants grasp the practical aspects of their competencies. Learning modules that are accessible and a well-organized management system facilitate participant readiness and the efficient documentation and management of competency data, ultimately reinforcing the trust and credibility of the RPL process at UNESA.

Discussion

UNESA's Organizational Communication Approach in the RPL Program

The organizational communication approach adopted by Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) to forge partnerships with local government agencies in the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program is centered around transparency, accessibility, and technology integration. Transparency in the RPL process fosters a mutual understanding between prospective students and the institution, enhancing trust in the institution's processes. As emphasized by Sandberg and Andersson (2011), an open process is instrumental in building prospective students' trust, critical for the success of the RPL program.

Furthermore, the use of technology, such as digital platforms and web-based applications, plays a crucial role in expediting information delivery and reducing administrative barriers. Brenner et al. (2021) highlight the efficiency of digital solutions in streamlining communication, thereby facilitating a smoother transition for candidates through the RPL process. This technological approach not only speeds up the procedure but also ensures that information is accessible and administrative obstacles are minimized, making the RPL program more user-friendly and effective.

In addition to technological facilitation, UNESA's RPL program emphasizes interactive support through proactive communication with RPL staff, assisting prospective students in overcoming potential challenges. This strategy mirrors the findings of Halttunen and Koivisto (2014), who noted that the professionalism of staff enhances the credibility of the institution. At the UNESA RPL Center, the synergy of transparency, technology, and interactive support ensures an inclusive and efficient process. This approach supports the broader objective of collaborating with local government agencies to enhance higher education inclusivity, making the educational landscape more accessible to diverse populations. Through these strategic communications and collaborations, UNESA not only strengthens its relationship with local governments but also reinforces its commitment to expanding educational opportunities through the RPL program.

Communication Barriers in the Implementation of the RPL Program UNESA

The implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) encounters several communication barriers, including evaluator competency gaps, standard validation, and administrative complexity. Kistan (2002) discusses how the lack of sufficient training for evaluators can lead to inconsistencies in competency assessments, subsequently diminishing the credibility of the program. To address this issue, implementing training programs and standardizing assessment procedures are crucial steps that can help ensure the reliability and uniformity of evaluations.

Another significant barrier is the bureaucratic red tape that slows down the competency recognition process. Stephens (2022) points out that the integration of technology can greatly reduce the time and complexity involved in administrative processes, thereby enhancing communication efficiency. At UNESA, the adoption of technology is specifically aimed at simplifying administrative workflows and enhancing information access for prospective students. This technological integration facilitates a more effective collaboration with local government bodies, streamlining processes and improving the overall effectiveness of the RPL program. By addressing these barriers through strategic training and technological solutions, UNESA aims to enhance the efficacy and credibility of its RPL program, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and accessible educational system.

Strategies for Enhancing Organizational Communication

UNESA's strategies for enhancing organizational communication in RPL program collaborations involve interactive approaches, resource sharing, and the use of digital platforms. An interactive approach through workshops and training sessions plays a crucial role in helping local government representatives understand the benefits of the program. As highlighted by Gilmore (2004), this strategy strengthens the relationship between institutions by fostering a mutual understanding and collaborative spirit.

Furthermore, the sharing of resources, such as joint curricula, enhances inter-institutional synergy, as noted by Austin & Seitanidi (2018). This not only facilitates a unified approach towards educational goals but also maximizes the impact of shared knowledge and expertise across entities.

Digital platforms also play a significant role in supporting cross-institutional communication. According to Brenner et al. (2021), technology enables fast and easy access to information, thereby expediting decision-making processes. This strategic use of digital tools allows the UNESA RPL Center

to maintain transparency and efficiency, supporting the sustainability of collaborations with local government agencies. By leveraging these strategic approaches interactive engagements, shared resources, and technological advancements UNESA aims to enhance the effectiveness of its organizational communication, ultimately improving the implementation and outcomes of its RPL program.

Effectiveness of Organizational Communication

The effectiveness of UNESA's organizational communication with local government agencies in supporting the transparency, selectivity, and sustainability of the RPL program is heavily reliant on external audits, ongoing staff training, and participant feedback. External audits, as noted by Seyfried and Pohlenz (2018), enhance institutional credibility by ensuring that quality standards are met. This external validation not only affirms the program's adherence to high standards but also reassures stakeholders of the institution's commitment to quality.

Ongoing staff training ensures that personnel are competent in implementing quality assurance systems, which is crucial for maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the RPL program (Guangli, 2016). Moreover, feedback from participants provides UNESA with valuable insights into their needs and expectations, as highlighted by Gosling and D'Andrea (2001). This feedback is integral to the continual evaluation process, which allows for early detection of areas needing improvement, thereby ensuring the program remains relevant and effective over the long term.

These components collectively enable UNESA to build trust and enhance the quality of service within the RPL program collaborations. By incorporating rigorous external audits, dedicated staff training, and responsive feedback mechanisms, UNESA fosters a robust communication environment that supports the program's objectives and enhances its sustainability and impact.

Approaches to Building Understanding of Quality Standards

UNESA's communication approach to fostering a mutual understanding with local government bodies about quality standards, learning outcomes, and assessment procedures in the RPL program includes structured assessments, resource support, and effective documentation. Garnett and Cavaye (2015) indicate that structured assessments enhance the relevance of the program for professional development, ensuring that participants are evaluated in a manner that reflects their actual competencies and learning achievements.

Resource support, such as e-books and online modules, plays a crucial role in preparing participants by providing them with accessible and relevant materials. This kind of support enhances participants' readiness and confidence, crucial for successful engagement in the RPL process (Ariefianto et al., 2023). Additionally, UNESA ensures effective documentation to maintain transparency and accuracy in participant data management. Baumeler et al. (2023) highlight the importance of documentation in fostering participants' trust in the RPL system, as well-organized records contribute to a clear and verifiable trail of learning assessments and decisions.

Through these strategies, UNESA not only ensures the smooth operation of the RPL program but also strengthens its relationships with local government authorities, supporting the broader goals of inclusivity and high-quality education. These approaches align with the institutional commitment to maintaining high standards and fostering an environment of trust and cooperation, pivotal for the long-term success of the RPL initiative.

Conclusion

This study highlights the pivotal role of organizational communication and collaborative strategies in the successful implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA). The program effectively integrates transparency, selectivity, and technological innovation to provide access to higher education for individuals with diverse learning backgrounds. Its alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also underscores its broader contribution to promoting educational inclusivity and lifelong learning.

One of the program's strengths lies in its innovative approach to combining institutional partnerships with structured communication strategies. This ensures a high degree of transparency and builds trust among stakeholders. The practical implications of these findings provide a roadmap for other institutions seeking to implement RPL programs while fostering collaborative synergies between universities and local governments. Additionally, the comprehensive use of qualitative methodologies ensures a nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved.

However, several limitations warrant attention. The study's focus on UNESA limits the generalizability of the findings to other institutional or cultural contexts. The absence of quantitative data further restricts the ability to statistically validate the impact of communication strategies on program outcomes. Furthermore, although the research emphasizes technological innovation, it doesn't explore specific tools or systems that could enhance RPL processes.

Future research should expand the scope of inquiry to include multiple institutions and regions, offering a comparative perspective on the implementation of RPL programs. Incorporating mixed-method approaches, particularly quantitative analyses, would enhance the validity and applicability of the findings. Exploring the role of advanced technologies, such as AI-driven assessment systems, could also provide deeper insights into overcoming administrative and logistical barriers. Additionally, investigating the perspectives of broader stakeholders, including employers and policymakers, would offer a more holistic understanding of RPL's societal and economic impact.

UNESA RPL program demonstrates the transformative potential of adaptive organizational strategies in advancing equitable access to higher education. Addressing existing limitations and scaling successful practices will pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable educational systems. This research lays the groundwork for future studies and serves as a foundation for institutions striving to balance local needs with global best practices in RPL implementation.

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