Support provided to progressed learners in the Intermediate and Senior Phases

by

Megha Brahmbhatt

Student Number: U18219293

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

in the

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

at the

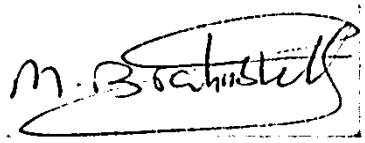## UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Supervisor: Dr Nevensha Sing

Co-supervisor: Dr K. Adeyemo

APRIL 2020

DECLARATION

I, Megha Brahmbhatt, hereby declare that this M.Ed. dissertation:
Support provided to progressed learners in the Intermediate and Senior
Phases to be my original work and that all the sources I have consulted
have been acknowledged

_____   <u>29/04/2020</u>

Signature   Date

ETHICS CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**CLEARANCE NUMBER:** EM 19/05/01
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd
	Support provided to progressed learners in the Intermediate and Senior Phase
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Megha Brahmbhatt
DEPARTMENT	Education Management and Policy Studies
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	24 July 2019
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	31 March 2020

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire

CC

Ms Bronwynne Swarts
Dr Nevensha Sing
Dr Kolawole Adeyemo

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:
- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE

Dr C.G.A. SMITH

PhD (English)

Language practitioner: editing and proofreading

Cell: 0727661428

This is to certify that the following postgraduate document has been language edited:

Support provided to progressed learners in the Intermediate and Senior Phases

Author: Megha Brahmbhatt Joshi

Nature of document: dissertation

Date of this statement: 29 March 2020

Smithcga

ABSTRACT

Embodied within the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is the right to a basic education for all. The education system of South Africa, attempts to provide equal educational opportunities for all. However, in school as in life, not every learner progresses at the same rate. In fact, every year, a number of learners will not meet the requirements to be promoted to the next grade. In order to cater for this circumstance, the South African Department of Education introduced a policy to govern the requirements to progress on to the next grade. The policy requires that learners should not remain in a phase for longer than a period of four years despite the learner not having complied with all the promotion requirements for the respective grade. This means that learners must be progressed to the next grade after repeating a grade once, regardless of whether they meet the requirements for promotion. This is referred to as automatic progression.

When learners are progressed to the next grade without having met the requirements for promotion, their success becomes dependent on the level and forms of support which they receive in order to bridge the gap in their learning. The purpose of this study is to understand the forms of support that are made available to progressed learners. While there are many varied views on support, the study looks at support from the view point of teachers who are at the front line of the implementation of the policy, and have first-hand experience in providing support to learners and the challenges which arise in providing support. This study takes a qualitative approach through interviews of twelve intermediate and senior phase teachers

In general, teachers have raised concerns with the effectiveness of the policy as well as the mandatory support structures put in place by the Department of Education. They have also provided valuable input on measures which they believe would lead to effective support of progressed learners in order to help provide them with the opportunity to get back onto an even academic footing and set them back on a path to success.

Key words – progressed learners, promoted learners, education, Screening identification assessment and support (SIAS)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Annual National Assessment
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBST	District Based Support Team
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and Training
HET	Higher Education and Training
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SAMEQ	South African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBST	School based support team
SGB	School governing body
SIAS	Screening Identification, Assessment and Support
The policy	Policy Pertaining to the Programme of Progression and retention Gr R-12

CONTENT PAGE

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The right to basic education for all is embedded within the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Chapter 2, 108/1996). The education system of South Africa attempts to provide equal educational opportunities for all. The south African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) clearly stipulates that a learner is to attend school from the age of seven to the age of 15 or Grade 9. This is compulsory and no child in South Africa is exempted from attending school Section (s 1) of the South African Schools Act 84 (1996). The act further discusses that all learners should be provided with access to equal education. The structure of the South African education system is divided into three bands. The General Education and Training (GET) Phase from Grade 0-9 is compulsory. The Further Education and Training (FET) Phase runs from Grade 10-12 and is not compulsory. This equates to twelve Grades of schooling that move into the Higher Education and Training (HET) phase.

In order for a learner to move to Higher Education and Training (HET), a learner must successfully navigate through twelve grades of learning by meeting the requirements set out by the Department of Education (DoE). These requirements are set out in the "National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12" (hereinafter "The policy").

The policy defines grade promotion as the movement of a learner from one grade to the next, when the learner meets the minimum required level of achievement per subject in a particular grade as well as having complied with the promotion requirements of that grade (DoBE, 2012:10).

Grade progression, on the other hand, is defined in the policy as the advancement of a learner from one grade to the next (excluding Grade R), despite the learner not having complied with all the promotion requirements for the respective grade (DoBE, 2012:10). Grade progression is a process that addresses the situation that arises when a learner has repeated or "failed" a grade more than once. The policy has addressed such a situation, by stipulating that a learner cannot be retained in a phase

for a period exceeding four years (DoBE, 2012:10). This means that if learners do not meet the requirements for the current grade, and they have perhaps either failed the current grade before or failed a previous grade that is in the same phase they are in, by law, they must be progressed to the next grade. These learners are referred to as progressed learners.

The education system in any part of the world is complex. There are numerous debates on the content of the curriculum as well as which methodologies and pedagogies of teaching and learning are best. Educating children with different needs and different capabilities lead to the premise that one size does not fit all, therefore education needs to be conceptualised to best serve the needs of a variety of learners. The post-Apartheid education system in South Africa has been through several curriculum changes and policy implementations such as the implementation of Curriculum 2005 or better known as OBE, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). Despite all the many changes, the state of education in South Africa is not at the level that it should be. Assessments done in South African education, indicate that South African children are not at the academic level that they should be (Taylor, 2008).

The South African education system has changed drastically since Apartheid and rightfully so. Education provided was discriminated against on the basis of race and White learners received a far better education than the rest of the South Africans. In the 1975/76 the funding made available was rather unfair to say the least. The state would spend R644 annually on each White leaner, R189 on each Indian learner, R139 on each coloured learners and only R42 on an African learner. This led to a large discrepancy in education and majority of the country received inferior education (Villette, 2016). There were limited to no resources provided to African learners and the teachers were not always qualified. The injustice of the Bantu education system can still be felt today (Villette, 2016).

Due to the history of South Africa the need to provide equal and accessible education for all becomes even more important. The current statistics of education in South Africa compared to other countries show that the education system face challenges.

The Annual National Assessment (ANA) results for 2011 for Grades 3 and 6 learners, in 827 and 840 schools respectively, indicate that the percentage of learners

performing at adequate levels is unacceptably low in English and Mathematics in South Africa (DoBE, 2011). Of particular concern is the apparent drop in learner performance over the years. For example, in the assessment of more than six million learners in Grade 3, the national average performance in literacy stands at 34%, as compared to 43% in the 2007 Systemic Evaluation, while the national average in numeracy was 28% (DoE, 2010). Grade 6 language results indicate that only 30% of learners nationally reached at least the partially achieved level as compared to 37% in the 2007 Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation (DoE, 2010). During the release of the 2011 ANA results, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga found that, "this performance in recent international and local assessments reflects a matter for concern that 24 years after democracy, the country is still struggling to address literacy, numeracy challenges among young learners" (Motshekga, 2011:2). Many hold the view that Government needs to revisit the model of promoting learners and provide alternatives for those who are not academically inclined (Teke, 2015:1).

December each year marks the end of a school year in South Africa. At this time there are two possibilities, either the learner has passed or moved on to the next grade or the learner has failed and needs to repeat the year. If learners are promoted to the next grade without having mastered the skills of the previous grade it is evident that the learners will likely struggle with the new concepts being taught in the new grade. Therefore, it becomes necessary to implement support in the classroom to assist learners who are promoted so that they can be at the same academic level as their peers and not fall into a continuous cycle of progression without meeting basic promotional requirements.

The purpose of this research is to understand the needs of progressed learners. This study aims to understand what support can be provided for learners who are promoted in a South African context. The policy for the Programme and Promotion requirements (DoBE, 2012) is the centre of the study. This study is based on the years spent in primary school from Grade R to Grade 7. This is further divided into the Foundation Phase, Grade R to Grade 3. Intermediate Phase, Grade 4 to Grade 6 and Senior phase Grade 7 to Grade 9.

This research seeks to understand how progressed learners can be best supported from the perspective of teachers, in order to achieve their learning outcomes. By conducting this research, teachers may be better equipped to support learners.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

A salient challenge in South Africa has been the delivery of a quality education system (Soudien, 2007) as the performance of learners is much lower than that of South Africa's neighbouring countries (Taylor, 2008). The Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAMEQ) report of 2007, confirms the poor performance of South African children compared to other African countries. The SAMEQ report of 2007 indicated that 25% of Grade 6 South African learners were functionally illiterate. This compared to the illiteracy rate in Kenya which was at 7%, and 12% in Namibia and only 1% in Swaziland (Spaull, 2013). This study was done in ten countries and South Africa has the third highest illiteracy rate. This would mean that in seven other countries, learners are more literate than in South Africa. This study also looked at the number of learners enrolled into formal schooling. South Africa had the highest enrolment rate compared to the other countries. Only 2% had never enrolled or dropped out before Grade 6, whereas in Kenya the percentage is at 5%, 7% in Namibia and, 10% in Swaziland (Spaull, 2013). It is, therefore, crucial to understand root causes of the underperformance of the South African education system. A good starting point would be to look at the policies which govern the education system. An important policy which is crucial to the education system at large is the policy of retention and promotion of learners. The policy mandates the progression of failed learners, which means learners must be allowed to go to the next grade without having necessarily met the requirements for their current grade.

In 2015, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) called upon the government to put an end to the policy on promotion of failing pupils. Bheki Shandu, the SADTU's KwaZulu-Natal deputy secretary, in an interview with Independent Online [IOL], (Teke, 2015) stated that "this policy of passing through the system, learners who failed – known as progressed learners - is not sustainable and will lead to a total collapse of our education system." Allen Thompson, the National teacher union spokesperson asserts that, "Less than 40 % of progressed learners passed matric last

year. This means around 60 % of those who were pushed through, failed" (Teke, 2015).

According to the National Policy Pertaining to The Programme and Promotion Requirements of The National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12, 2012, "a learner who is not ready to perform at the expected level and who has been retained in the first phase for, four (4) years or more and who is likely to be retained again in the second phase for four (4) years or more, should receive the necessary support in order to progress to the next grade" (DoBE, 2012:16). The policy states that progressed learners need to be supported so that they are able to adapt to progress in the next grade. This policy statement informs the principal basis of this research, which is to address the gap in literature on how progressed learners should be supported to ensure that these learners will progress on their own merit in the years that follow.

1.3 RATIONALE

During my time in the classroom, as Intermediate Phase teacher, the significant academic gap between learners who were in the grade due to their own merit and progressed learners was quite apparent. In some instances, bridging the gap would require regressing the lesson by a few grades. However, due to the large number of learners in a classroom, as well as the extensive volume of curriculum coverage, providing these learners with individualised attention was close to impossible. This spurned the question of what would be required to bring these progressed learners on par with their peers. Having noticed that learners were just being progressed to the next grade without having acquired any knowledge of the current grade, I felt that this is an injustice to the learners who are going through the grades and not learning anything. Progressing learners without providing them with the necessary support can be very harmful to the development of the learner (Beere, 2017). As a teacher, I too was faced with similar challenges and even though I attempted to assist the progressed learners in my care, I often felt helpless due to the constraints and circumstances. Hence, this study aimed to understand what measures are being put in place by schools to support progressed learners, as this study has a personal, academic and professional motivation.

1.4 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate how support is made available, both inside and outside the classroom, in order to support progressed learners to meet the promotional requirements of each grade. Further, the purpose was to understand the challenges faced by teachers to provide this support. As well as to understand what the needs of progressed learners are in order for them to be at the same academic level as their classmates.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are shared next.

Main research question

> **How do schools support learners who progressed to the Intermediate and Senior Phases?**

Sub-questions

- What support do learners who progressed need in order to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes in Intermediate/Senior Phase?
- How are the current policies on support for learners who progressed implemented in primary schools?
- What are the complexities/challenges involved in supporting learners who progressed in the Intermediate/Senior Phase?
- How do the teachers address the identified complexities/challenges involved in supporting progressed learners in the Intermediate/Senior Phase?

The aim of the study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers in regard to progressed learners.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine how schools support learners who progressed to the Intermediate and Senior Phases.
- To determine what support learners who progressed need in order to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes in Intermediate/Senior Phase.

- To determine how the current policies on support for learners who progressed are implemented in primary schools.
- The complexities/challenges involved in supporting learners who progressed in the Intermediate/Senior Phase.
- By what means do teachers address the identified complexities/challenges involved in supporting progressed learners in the Intermediate/Senior Phase.

1.7 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

All the concepts that are of importance to the study are explained and defined in the section below.

Table 1.1: Concept clarification

Department of basic education	• National department responsible for basic education, Grades R-12 Section (s 1) of the South African Schools Act 84 (1996)
Educator/teacher	• As stated in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, a educator means any person who teaches, educates or trains other persons or provides professional educational services including professional therapy at any educational institution Section (s 1) of the South African Schools Act 84 (1996)
Grade	• Is the part of an educational programme which a learner may complete in one school year, or any other educaion programme which the memebr of the Executive council may deem to be equivalet thereto Section (s 1) of the South African Schools Act 84 (1996)
Learner	• As stated in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, a learner is any person receiving education or is obliged to receive education. Section (s 1) of the South African Schools Act 84 (1996)
Progression	• It is the advancement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R, in spite of the learner not having complied with all the promotion requirements. • Progression can be used to prevent a learner from being retained in a phase for a period exceeding four years as stipulated in the Admission policy for ordinary public schools as published as Government Notice 2432, Government Gazette, Vol. 400, No. 19377 of 19 October 1998, provided that the underperformance

	of the learner in the previous grade is addressed in the grade to which the learner has been progressed (Education D. o., National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 , 2011)
Promotion	• It is the movement of a learner from one grade to the next when that learner meets the minimum required level of achievement per subject in a particular grade, as well as complying with the promotion requirements of that grade as contemplated in the policy document; National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the NCS Grades R-12 (Education DoE National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 , 2011).

1.8 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

The progression of learners also, known as automatic progression, is not unique to South Africa. According to Okurut (2015) this form of children moving to the next grade due to age and not merit has been around since the 1930's. This was put in place as an alternative to grade retention. The debates around the efficacy of retaining learners lead to automatic progression. It has been argued that repeating the grade does not show academic improvement in the learner (Beere, 2017). Repeating grades leads to overcrowding in the classroom, which in turn has an impact on the quality of education. Such a system also has a financial benefit to both the state and to the families of such learners, as it firstly leads to lower costs on account of not having to continuously repeat the same grade and allows the learners to progress into the work force and therefore, becoming a financially contributing member to the family as well as state (Okurut, 2015).

The state's reasoning behind implementing such a policy of progression is to decrease the high dropout rate. The intention was to allow the learners to continue to the next grade and give them enough support instead of forcing them to be retained (DoBE, 2017). The automatic progression has been implemented in other countries such as, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Korea and the United Kingdom (DoBE, 2017). While there

may be merit in the implementation of such as policy, the success of such a policy is highly dependent on the support given to progressed learners.

Promoting learners without providing them with the necessary support has lifelong consequences for the learners (Beere, 2017). The reality is such that many learners are at an academic level which is lower than their current grade level. Retaining the learner does not always benefit the learner. As an alternate to retention would be to progress the learner, however, this cannot be successful if the learner does not receive the necessary support. Over 66% of learners drop out of school in South Africa. These are usually the learners who have progressed without receiving the necessary support. They continue going through school in this manner and then they realise they will not be able to pass Grade 12 and this leads to them to drop out (Beere, 2017).

Teachers have shared their concerns with regard to this policy of progression. Teachers have said, "This policy has to be revised because it's demoralising teachers. This policy is overloading teachers. This policy is wasting the time of learners" (Nkosi, 2019). Many teachers are of the opinion that the policy is detrimental to both the teachers and the learners. Teachers also do not receive the necessary support from the department of education (Nkosi, 2019).

Professor Labby Ramrathan of the UKZN School of education said that there are both positives and negatives to this policy (Nkosi, 2019). This policy resolves the problem of over age children in the classroom which was a serious concern. On the other end, this policy increased the pressure and workload of teachers (Nkosi, 2019).

The implementation of the progression policy has created challenges for both schools and parents. Stakeholders believe that the problem lies in progressing the learners, however, the actual problem is that learners are being progressed with limited to no support given in the next grade (Beere, 2017).

The focus of this study is to understand how progressed learners are supported in the classroom. In addition, the idea was to understand the challenges that teachers face in providing the support.

1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework gives a study the scientific background and shows how the study is based on existing literature (Vinz, 2019). It helps the researcher to demonstrate understanding of existing literature and gives the researcher direction (Vinz, 2019). This study is based on two well acknowledged theories. Firstly, the theory by Vygotsky on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner. These two theories are of prime importance when dealing with learner development. The ZPD is the place where a learner can move from what he knows to what he does not know with the help and support of a more knowledgeable person (McLeod, 2019). This more knowledgeable person is known as the mediator (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2007). The mediator can be a teacher or a parent that helps the learner move from what is known to the unknown.
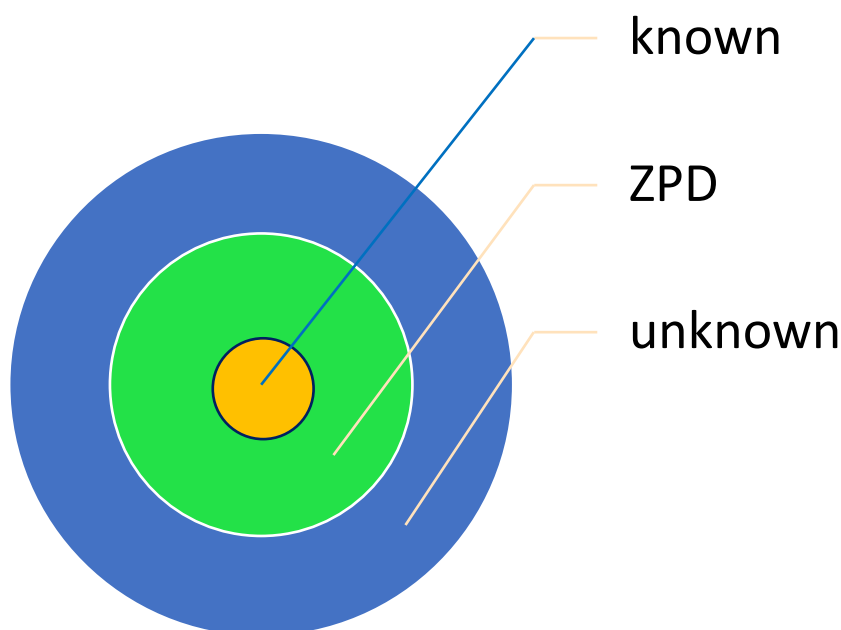
Figure 1.1*: **Zone of Proximal Development (***Adapted from McLeod, 2019***)**

The ZPD is the place where the learner interacts with a knowledgeable other to learn new knowledge (McLeod, 2019). This theory is important to this study because the focus of this study is to understand the support progressed learners receive and the challenges faced by teachers in providing this support. The ZPD then would be the place where the teacher would support the learner to move from the known to the unknown.

The second theory which forms the basis of this study is the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner. This theory focuses on the development of a child and the factors that influence the development. There are different systems that form part of this theory, namely the microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). All the systems will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
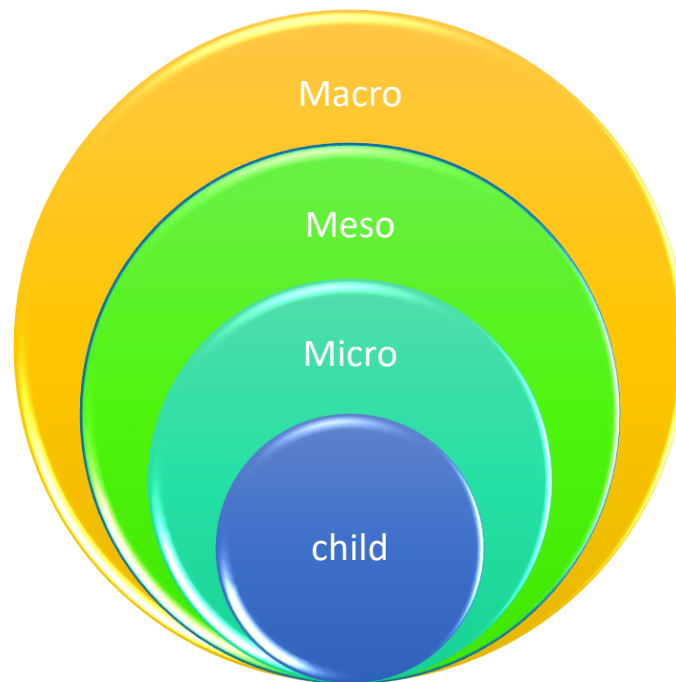
Figure 1.2: Ecological Systems Theory (Adapted from Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2007)

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study has adopted a qualitative research approach. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the viewpoint of participants from their experiences (Creswell, 2007). This study investigated the experiences of teachers and their interactions with learners who progressed to the next level. The data collected were from the experiences of the teachers therefore, it was best fitting to use a qualitative approach.

1.11 DATA COLLECTION

Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria. Thereafter from the relevant principals and teachers. All relevant parties were made aware of the ethical and confidentiality process of the study. The next step was to make appointments with the necessary participants.

The best means of collecting data in order to understand and comprehend the experiences of teachers was to conduct interviews with the teachers. Interviews are one of the best means to understand the experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The participants of the study were twelve Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers. Interviews were conducted at the schools of the relevant participants. The data were collected then transcribed and thereafter analysed.

1.12 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process that was followed was thematic analysis (Delehunt & Magurie, 2017). Which follows the following six step process.

Step 1 – become familiar with the data

Step 2 – generate codes

Step 3 – create themes

Step 4 – review and modify themes

Step 5 – ensure themes are aligned with literature

Step 6 – write up

1.13 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The structure of the study is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter includes the outline of the study. It consists of introduction, research problem and research questions as well as the rationale and a brief preliminary literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Literature review and conceptual framework

This chapter discusses the literature relevant to the study. It discusses the notion of progression and support from international literature. The theoretical framework discusses two theories that complement the research.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter evaluates the research methods, data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and the selection of participants.

Chapter 4: Data findings and discussions

This chapter examines the data collected and analysis it is using the themes that were created.

Chapter 5: Recommendation and Conclusion

This chapter summarises the study and gives suggestions and recommendations. This is of great value to policy makers and teachers alike to put the findings of this study into practise.

1.14 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter of the study discussed the introduction and background of the study. Furthermore, it covers the research questions and a preliminary literature review as well as the theories that were used in this study.

In the following chapter literature on progression and forms of support implemented have been discussed at length. The theoretical framework that was used to guide this study has also been discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the policy at hand as well as form of support implemented in different parts of the world. The first section reflects on the current challenges faced in South Africa. The second section investigate the policy put in place to ensure that all learners receive the necessary support they require. Thirdly, the literature review looks at different support methods that have been successfully implemented in other parts of the world. Lastly the theoretical framework of this study will be discussed in relation to how these theories form part of this study. The theoretical framework was then remodelled to give rise to a conceptual framework.

2.2 CHALLENGES FACED IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

South Africa achieved democracy 26 years ago, creating opportunities for access and equal educational opportunities yet the education system does not compare well globally. Primary concerns are a lack of resources, inadequacy of facilities such as roof leaks and broken windows, outdated libraries, and poorly equipped laboratories, as well as inadequate opportunities for teacher professional development (Samoff, 1999). The South African education system has been through several curriculum changes post-apartheid (Jansen, 1999). The first wave of change was in 1994 which was aimed at changing the Apartheid framework to a more democratic one. The second change was called Curriculum 2005 which was based on outcomes-based education (OBE). This happened in 1997. The next change was the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002 (Kader, 2012). Currently the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is in operation. Despite all these changes in the hopes of a better education system, the country still faces many challenges. Spaull (2013:3) argues that there is an on-going crisis in South African education, and the current system is failing the majority of South Africa's youth. The majority of South African learners cannot read, write, and comprehend at the level that is required for their grade. According to Spaull (2013:3) this is the case for majority of learners; thus, South Africa faces a serious problem.

The situation that unfolds is that many learners are not performing to their full potential and are performing well below the level expected of them, increasing the level of school dropout rates. Fifty (50) of the 100 children that start Grade 1 will drop out before Grade 12, 40 will pass the National Senior Certificate exam, and only 12 will qualify for university (Spaull, 2013). These statistics are rather alarming. Put differently, out of 100 of the learners only 12 will have the opportunity to achieve a degree and become professionals. This has implications for the job market, potential earnings and employment rates which will affect the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Since the end of Apartheid, South Africa has been through a number of different educational policies. Many of these policies have been criticised and have not been able to help the population at large (Spreen & Vally, 2010). "The volumes of policy research conducted in post-apartheid South Africa show that despite the progress made, there is ample evidence to assert that things aren't working the way they were planned" (Spreen & Vally, 2010:442). The fundamental problem with policies has been that they have not taken into consideration the day to day functioning of a school (Spreen & Vally, 2010). Policymakers make the policies looking at the success rate of the policy from other countries, but do not look at how the circumstances and context are different in South Africa. The policies should look at being inclusive and challenge the current inequalities in society (Spreen & Vally, 2010). Thus, this study argues that there is a gap in this educational policy which needs to address the contextual circumstances of South Africa in order to be effective.

2.3 RETENTION VERSUS PROGRESSION

Over the years the concepts of retention, meaning a learner, who has not met the academic requirement, is then forced to stay in the same grade again, which has been deemed to have a negative impact on the learner and their development (Martin, 2001). According to Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (2003) retention of learners, leads to a high dropout rate. Learners who are retained perform poorly in comparison to learners who were progressed with support. Studies by Alexander et al. (2003) found that, retention of learners at first seemed beneficial however in the follow-up data if was found to be ineffective. Retention might not always be the best means to

improve learners' academic achievements but progression without intervention is also not beneficial (Martin, 2011).

2.4 THE PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICY

The policy of retention, when learners are not performing at the grade level that is required of them, it is important to look at learners who are performing at an even lower level. These learners are most likely to be retained in the grade with the intention that the learner will be able to perform at the level required in the following year. However, McIntosh (1996) states that retaining a learner does not help. The learner does not perform better in the next grade, in actual fact, it turns out that the learner on average performs poorly in comparison to the learner was progressed to the next grade. There is a direct link between learners who are retained and learners who dropout (McIntosh, 1996). Learners who repeat a year are more likely to drop out of school rather than those who have not repeated a grade.

The link between retention and dropout is well established (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007). According to Stearns et al. (2007) several factors affect a child who has been retained. Firstly, the child lacks self-confidence. The child is likely to feel hurt and demotivated. Secondly, the child will view the school system as a place where they have experienced failure. This will lead them to pursue avenues outside of school. Another factor is that retained children's social bonds are affected, and some friendships can come to an end. The child may also develop negative feelings towards teachers, seeing them as a cause for their situation. Lastly, the teacher may subconsciously be affected by the retained status and expect less from these children. The experience of retention is in itself a risk factor of dropping out.

The South African government's intention behind the policy of promotion and retention, was in the best interest of the learner, to avoid learners dropping out of school and to ensure that every learner gets the opportunity to achieve an exit level qualification (Reddy, Hannan, Zuze-Wilcox, & Juan, 2016). However, teachers have a different take on the policy.

South African teachers have vocalised their thoughts on the policy of promotion and retention, and the majority of the teachers disagree with the policy, as illustrated in the literature cited below. Many are of the view that this policy is detrimental to the future

of the nation. In a study conducted by Matiwane (2015), a teacher for 27 years in the Eastern Cape voiced her opinion that:

> "It is impossible for a learner to do well in a grade they don't deserve to be in…this policy is not working for both teachers and learners and should be scrapped."

In the same study, another Grade 10 English teacher points out that he had to revisit the curriculum by re-teaching and going:

> "….as far back as Grade 4 spelling and grammar as these learners were not coping (Matiwane, 2015)."

These and other sentiments expressed by teachers point to the view that learners are not learning, and the policy should be removed. However, the current head of communications at the DoBE Elijah Mhlanga, defended the policy by arguing that the phenomenon of progressing learners is not unique to South Africa and it is successful in other countries (Teke, 2015). In addition, he further advised that South Africa needs to strengthen their support programmes for progressed learners (Teke, 2015).

The requirements for promotion are different for each phase. For example, Grades 1-3 require fifty% in a home language, 50% in a first additional language and 40% in Mathematics. The Intermediate Phase, being Grades 4-6, require 50% in a home language, 40% in a first additional language, 40% in Mathematics and 40% in any of the other two subjects. A learner is therefore, allowed to get below 40% for one subject, apart from the languages and Mathematics. The Senior Phase, Grades 7-9, have the same requirements as the Intermediate Phase for home language, First Additional Language (FAL) and Mathematics. Senior phase learners do nine subjects in total therefore, a learner needs to achieve 40% in three other subjects and can achieve 30% in two other subjects. Finally, the FET phase, Grades 10-12. A learner needs to achieve 40% in a Home Language (HL), 40% in two subjects and 30% in the other three subjects (National Policy Pertaining to The Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12, 2012).

2.5. SUPPORT DEFINED

The word support has become a buzz word, but what does support mean in the context of a school? Support means anything that can be implemented to improve teaching and learning (Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla, & Sylvester, 2014). For purposes of this study, support is defined as going beyond the classroom; it is not just the pedagogy of content knowledge but the holistic development of a child. There are many barriers to learning that should be addressed so that learners receive the support they require. Poverty for example is a barrier to learning. Learning cannot take place if the basic needs of the child such as food, clothing are not met (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). Feeding schemes would, therefore, be an example of support implemented to remove barriers to learning such as hunger. This research focuses primarily on support which is implemented for progressed learners and mainly academic support. The basic needs of children are important such as food and shelter which would contribute to the academic performance of the learners. But the focus of this study is on academic support. The intervention strategies that are needed for the academic progress of learners are crucial.

In an attempt to provide academic support to all learners, the United States of America drew out the Bill of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (LaCava, Simpson, Sampson Graner, 2004). The purpose of this was to ensure that student achievement improves and the stakeholders such as schools, school districts and states are held accountable for the improvement of learner achievement (LaCava et al, 2004). This was a major step forward to ensure that all learners achieve academic support.

Academic support embraces measures implemented by schools to ensure all learners are able to meet the academic requirements. These are especially helpful for learners who are classified as learners at risk (Fluke, O'Connor, Hoff & Peterson, 2014). An example of academic support is tutoring. It is when a learner receives individual attention and a better understanding of concepts taught in class. Fluke et al. (2014) state that research shows a high chance of learners achieving results if they are provided with academic support. Schools need to implement support strategies with an extra focus on reading and numeracy. These support strategies can be anything from strategies implemented in the classroom or a school programme outside school hours and beyond a classroom setting. Some examples as stated by Fluke et al.

(2014) are strategies such as adult tutoring after school hours, mentor programmes and peer tutoring that can be implemented by the schools.

Teachers play a critical role in the academic development of a child. However, the motivation received from a teacher also plays an influential role in the development of a child. Children will learn better if they feel recognised and if they feel worthy (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). Learning does not take place in a vacuum and therefore the socio-economic background of a child also plays a role in the child's learning. The parental involvement in the child's education also plays a role in the development of the child (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

A study done by Bojuwoye et al. (2014) focused on what support the learners in a selected number of primary and high schools in Western Cape received. Bojuwoye et al. (2014) aimed to find out what impact the support had on the learners and what support they were still lacking. The study found that classroom practices by teachers had been effective in providing the support. These forms of support should be encouraged by the DoE. On the other hand, the challenges that the learners faced were that of being ridiculed by both teachers and learners. Other learning support strategies that are not linked directly to learning are providing feeding schemes, psychological and emotional support. Another support structure that students said works is the **buddy system**. This is where learners help each other to understand the content (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

In order for teacher to be able to provide learning support strategies it is necessary to understand what they are. It may look as if all learners are the same, but each child learns differently, and some learners may need extra time or a different teaching approaches to benefit from the content (Gilfeather, 2018). Therefore, it is important for a teacher to make provision for all types of learners in the classroom. All learners have a willingness to learn; all stakeholders need to find the means to provide the right resources, support structures and tools necessary for each individual learner. This will assist them to be successful in school and thereafter (Gilfeather, 2018).

This study also looked at challenges that learners faced when it came to support. Learners feared being ridiculed by teachers and peers. The recommendation here was that teachers create an environment for learning where all learners feel safe to express themselves. Learners also mentioned the support they lacked, and the responses here

varied between the different age groups. The primary school learners said they needed guidance, nutrition, and parental involvement. High school learners said they needed extra classes, textbooks, and parental involvement (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). This research therefore focused on the Intermediate phase, as it is evident that age groups have a bearing on the types of support required.

Schools must make provision for support in order to bridge the barriers to learning. The study by Bojuwoye et al. (2014) is relevant to this study as it illustrates the point that learners need support and teachers and parents need to provide it.

2.6 DIFFERENTIATION

The old methods of teaching such as chalk and talk and the notion of "one-size-fits-all" (Suprayogi, Godwin & Vackle, 2017) is not applicable anymore. Moreover, learners have diverse needs that need to be met. Not all learners learn in the same manner. Teachers need to be able to teach in such a way that all learners are able to access the curriculum and content. Schools and teachers need to provide for the needs of learners. Differentiation means using different teaching approaches and means to meet the needs of all the different ability groups in the classroom. The teacher uses different instructions and resources to meet the needs of all learners. A struggling learner and a gifted learner can complete the same task, but how the teacher teaches and makes different resources available to the different needs of learners which is called differentiation. Differentiation is being implemented in many countries from Korea to England and America (Suprayogi et al., 2017). Teachers have been urged to practise differentiation in their teaching. Studies have shown that if differentiation has been implemented properly, learner results have increased (Suprayogi et al., 2017) The study done by Suprayogi et al. (2017) in Jakarta suggests that teachers need professional development in order to effectively implement differentiation in the classroom.

2.7 LESSONS FROM INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

The success of a learner in school is dependent on the acquisition of Foundation Phase skills, such as reading, writing and comprehension (UNESCO, 2014). UNESCO (2014) states that international studies demonstrate that a programme in Vietnam where bilingual teachers were employed as assistants was imperative to help children whose Home Language (HL) was not the same as the language of teaching and

learning. Children were in this programme prior to starting Grade 1. The results revealed that children who were part of this programme showed school readiness 20%-30% higher than those who were not in the programme (UNESCO, 2014). Similar programmes could be adapted in South Africa, as a number of children have a home language which is different to the language of teaching and learning at the school. Such programmes could prove to prepare the children better for school and help them cope better with the curriculum.

A curriculum is put in place in order to monitor how much a child has learned in a year and to gauge the level of competency. However, a problem arises that the curriculum covers much of the content and learners are not coping (UNESCO, 2014). In order to complete the curriculum, teachers are forced to carry on with content without all the learners being able to comprehend the previous content.

A form of support that can be implemented to assist weak learners is an **accelerated learning programme**. This means that a child who is not coping in the current grade, because he has not mastered the skills of the previous grade would attend these programmes and learn the necessary skills. Once the child has mastered the skills, usually reading, writing or numeracy, they would then re-enter formal schooling. These programmes have successfully been running in several countries. In Ghana, a study showed that children who attended these programmes and then re-entered school performed better than their peers in formal school (UNESCO, 2014). This could be applied in South Africa where teachers identify learners who are not coping with their current grade and be placed in these accelerated programmes and once, they have mastered the skill that they were lacking they would then come back to formal schooling. Such programmes could prove to be effective in reducing the number of progressed learners as these learners will likely be better supported in such programmes.

Another form of support that could be considered is the **facilitation of access to reading material** which is inclusive and accessible to all learners. Studies have found that learners are often challenged in being able to read and relate to their prescribed textbooks (UNESCO, 2014). Reading material could be made available in the learners' Home Language (HL), where practically possible, as well as in English in order to increase literacy levels. One such campaign in South Africa, called the "Nal'ibali -

Reading for enjoyment campaign," focuses on providing reading material in six official languages as well as in English (Edwards, 2013). The campaign facilitates the setup of reading clubs in communities and schools and the aim is to get children to read for pleasure and to help them develop a culture for reading (Edwards, 2013). This could be a good way to help increase the literacy level.

However, providing reading material alone would not be adequate in supporting learners. There must be a structure put in place where children with the help of teachers, parents and communities imbibe the values to **create a culture of reading**. In Malawi, a programme involving parents and communities to help early reading in children contributed significantly to the reading competency in children (UNESCO, 2014). Similar programmes could also be adopted in a South African context where parents and the community can run reading clubs outside school hours to assist learners with reading. This will improve the literacy rate in the country and ensure that all children can read by the end of Foundation Phase.

Another support structure that has worked well in other countries is that of using a **teacher assistant** (UNESCO, 2014). A teacher assistant would work with the teacher and support the few learners who are struggling. Schools in London employ the support of a teacher assistant, and this has resulted in improved reading skills and a positive long-term effect on children with poor literacy (UNESCO, 2014). Having a teacher assistant could be very effective as the assistant could help the learners who are not coping with the syllabus, the learners would get one on one attention and this would help improve their content knowledge.

2.8 DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION IMPLEMENTED SUPPORT

In 2014, the Department of Education introduced a new policy designed to ensure that all learners receive the support they require. The policy on screening, identification, assessment, and support (SIAS) highlights the roles of all the stakeholders that play a part in the learners' academic progress. The purpose of the policy is to provide a standardised framework that will be used to identify and support learners who need support. This policy follows a four-stage process. The first stage is screening, as the school needs to gain background knowledge on the learner and communicate with parents or caregivers to form a holistic understanding of the learner's background. At this stage the teacher will be able to identify a learner with extreme barriers to learning

and the teacher will need to complete the special needs assessment form (SNA 1). Stage 2 is the identification of barriers to learning and development. This involves looking at what is hindering the learning process, both internally and contextually. Stage 3 is the assessment of support required. Considering all the information gathered from Stage 1 and 2, the level of support needed will be determined. This process is managed by the district-based support team (DBST). Finally, Stage 4 involves planning and providing support. The policy goes on to stipulate the roles of all the stakeholders in the process of supporting learners (SIAS policy, 2014).

The role of the teacher is to ensure the learner has access to the content knowledge by changing methodologies and assessment procedures and to use the school-based support team (SBST) to provide extra support and guidance. Only once the teacher has exhausted all avenues of support, should the DBST be contacted. The teacher should complete all the necessary documents. It is the responsibility of the teacher to keep this information up to date and to only share it with the necessary people (SIAS policy, 2014).

2.9 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed finds that the challenges faced in the South African education system indicate that transformation is necessary to enhance teaching and learning. The review further explored the views of teachers and other educationists regarding the policy of promotion and retention and the effect thereof. The study therefore argues that the policy of progression and retention can only be effective if the policy on support, SIAS policy is implemented effectively. Progression is not effective if there is no support provided. The literature then goes on to identify a number of support systems implemented both within South Africa and other parts of the world to support learners. In South Africa the SIAS policy has been implemented which is a good means of holding all stakeholders accountable. But the policy does not shed light on the everyday practices for teachers to support progressed learners. Furthermore, it does not provide for additional resources or means for teachers to overcome challenges. From international literature there were some effective measures of support that was implemented. As discussed above these are some of the forms of support that have been implemented in other parts of the world.

- **An accelerated learning programme** is a form of support implemented in Ghana. Struggling learners were sent to these programmes to "catch up" on concepts that they were still struggling with. This was very effective as learners came back to normal class performing better than their peers.

- **A teacher assistant** has been effective in providing support. If there are two teachers, it does make it easier to identify learners that need support and then implement support interventions in the classroom: and

- **Facilitation of access to reading material** is important because if we want to develop learners who will read for pleasure there has to be reading material accessible to them.

Thus, this study aimed to address this gap by investigating the everyday challenges faced by educators in providing support for progressed learners.

2.10 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are two sets of concepts that are discussed that inform the conceptual framework of this study. Each concept is discussed individually and then integrated to link to the study. The two focal issues discussed are the **Zone of proximal development** and the **Ecological systems theory**.

2.10.1 Zone of proximal development

The Zone of Proximal development (ZPD) by Vygotsky (1896-1934) is referred to as: "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". What children can do in collaboration today, they will be able to do on his own tomorrow (Chaiklin, 2003).

The ZPD is the unique area where children cannot understand something on their own but has the potential to learn it with the help or interaction with another person (Donald et al., 2007). The person with whom the child will interact is called the mediator; the role of the mediator can be taken by anybody that helps the child attain new knowledge. It can be a teacher, parent, caregiver, or sibling. The mediator needs to help move the child from the known to the unknown or from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This process where the child is moving from the known to the unknown

must happen in the ZPD for it to be effective and for the child to reach his or her full potential (Donald et al., 2007).

According to this theory a learner is able to learn or master a skill that they did not know before, with the help of a "significant other" (Donald et al., 2007). In a school situation the significant other would be a teacher or principal who will help the learner master the new skills and outside the school it could be a parent or any family member. As presented earlier, the theory by Vygotsky, what one could do in collaboration today one can do alone tomorrow (Chaiklin, 2003), so the learner in collaboration with the teacher learns a fundamental skill and will then be able to do it on his own.

This theory is useful in this study because this study deals with support for progressed learners. At school, the teacher would take the role of mediator and help the learner move from the known to the unknown. At home, this role can be taken by the parent or caregiver. As the child has been progressed to the next grade it is evident that the child lacks some knowledge from the previous grade therefore the interaction in the child's ZPD is very crucial. Therefore, the role of the mediator is just as crucial. The mediator needs to bridge the gap for this learner so that they are able to be at the same level as the other learners in the classroom. The mediator needs to connect with the learner's full potential in the ZPD and then through facilitation the learner will reach new levels of understanding (Donald et al., 2007). The main aim of this study is to understand what support can be implemented to help progressed learners. Therefore, understanding the learner's ZPD and how the teacher can mediate the learner to new levels of understanding is crucial to this study. However, learning does not take place in a vacuum. Many factors influence the learning process for a child. Therefore, the study turns to the ecological systems theory.

2.10.2 Ecological systems theory

The second theory which will be used in this study is Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological systems theory. In this theory Bronfenbrenner talks about different levels of interaction in the social context that help develop a child. There are five levels and each level impact the child and affects the child's development. The first level is the microsystem; the child is actively involved in this system. The micro system shows the closest interactions and experiences of the child such as family, school and friends (Donald et al., 2007). The next level is the mesosystem; this system is about how the

different sets of microsystems continually interact with one another. For example, if a child's parents and teachers get along well and the parents are involved in the child's school life then that will be a positive influence and if they are not then they will affect the child negatively. The next system is the exosystem. The children are not directly involved in this system, but it does influence them. For example, the workplace of the parents, promotion or retrenchment of parents impact the children. In addition, children have no control over this, but it still impacts their development. The next system is the macrosystem, this involves larger social, economic, cultural and political structures. Children have no say in these structures but would still affect their development. The final system is the chronosystem, this is the timeframe in children's lives, so factors like where the child stays or the events that happen and when they happen in their lives are important (Donald et al., 2007). For example, if a child loses a parent, this will affect a three-year-old differently than it would affect a teenager.

This theory can be linked to this study as it talks about the development of a child and all the stakeholders that play a role in the development of that child. This study wants to understand how progressed learners can best be supported and all these systems play a vital role in supporting, developing these learners

This theory is particularly useful to this study because each of these systems can play a role to support progressed learners and help them reach their full potential. The microsystem, the parents, and teachers, is the closest to the learner and they would best understand the learners' needs and give appropriate support. The teacher would give necessary support at school and the parents carry on with the necessary support at home. The mesosystem, the teacher, principal and parents, needs to have a good understanding amongst each other so that they can give the best and necessary support to each child. The exosystem, the financial situation of the parents determines how much extra support, outside of school can be given to the child. In addition, the resources available at the school are also important. Furthermore, the resources provided by the district, also play a role in the development of the child. All of these are part of the exosystem, because the children do not have control on the parents' financial situation or the number of resources available at the school, but these still play a vital role in their learning and development. The macrosystem, embraces the policies put in place by the DoBE. Policies have a direct impact on the child like the promotion and retention policy. Children have no direct influence in the systems in the

macro system, however the influence on the children's development is great. Lastly the chronosystem is the factor of time. If children are not developing or learning at the time or at the same age as the other children in that age group, they might appear to be slow and this will have a negative impact on them. Therefore, each of these systems plays a role in the development of the child and all these need to be considered if we want to understand how best to support children in the classroom.

2.11. INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The ZPD and the ecological systems concepts are both meaningful and relate to this study.

Macrosystem
- Governmental system
- Educational system

Exosystem
- Parents financial situation
- Support from Department

Micro system
Family, Friends School

Classroom
Teacher + Progressed Learner
SUPPORT
ZPD
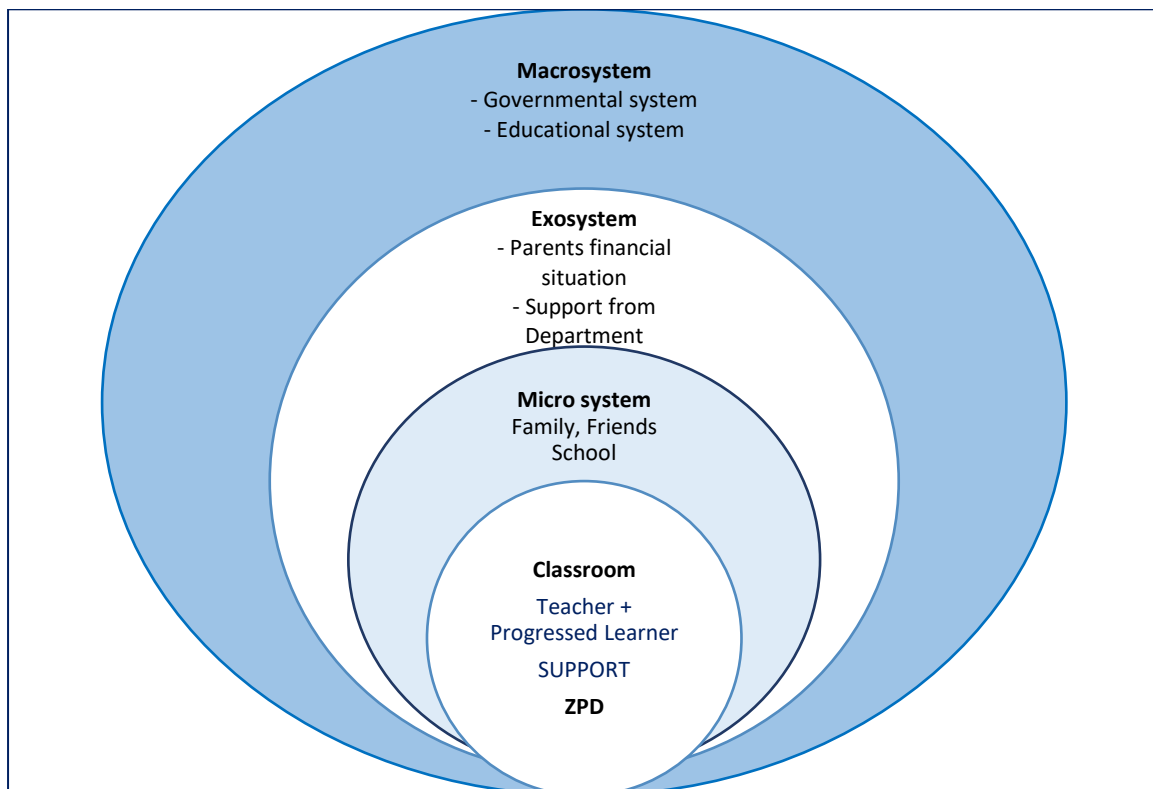
Figure 2.1: Support structure model for progressed learners (Adapted, Vygotsky, 1976 and Bronfenbrenner, 1975)

The ZPD helps teachers in their classroom to understand how best to support progressed learners to gain the required outcomes, gain new knowledge and achieve their full potential. The ecological systems concepts enable the study to understand that all the stakeholders play a role in the development of a learner and how they would affect the learning of a progressed learner, either positively or negatively. The

aim of adopting the ecological system, is to draw attention to the primary role of education, that is, for any learner to be able to pass school successfully, having achieved the required assessment outcomes, to be able to enter the macrosystem as citizens who are able to make a valid contribution to society by being able to further develop themselves. As mentioned above each of the levels in the ecological system links directly with children's development. The financial status of the parents, at some level, determines the access they must support outside the school. This element of financial status falls within the exosystem. The next level is the macrosystem, and the policies that the government implements fall within this level. Each of these levels plays a vital role in children's development and therefore, they all need to be taken into consideration. Progressed learners thus need support to not just be shuffled through the years at school, but to do so having met the required developmental outcomes in each grade.

The conceptual framework designed for this study, forms the support structure for progressed learners, and informs the study in the following ways. It enables us to understand the factors that influence the development of a child. A teacher can teach her heart out, but if there are other factors that interfere with the learning process, then it is important to take these factors into account. The teacher can implement the ZPD to work as a mediator and support the learner to reach new understanding. However, if there are factors outside the classroom that are making it difficult for a learner to learn then this makes it difficult for the teacher to support the learner to reach new knowledge. The factors that influence learning are the ecological systems theory. Therefore, it is important to look at both the theories as individual and integrated.

It guides the study's research questions. One of the sub questions was to understand what support a progressed learner needs in order to pass on merits in the new grade. This theory can help answer this question as we unfold the challenges of the learner. It is also important to indicate how the challenges in the classroom, relate to the ZPD and ecological systems theory. Another aspect to address was to understand the challenges faced by the teachers in order to provide the support to the progressed learners. The challenges that teachers face can be related to the development of the learner, which is related to the ecological systems theory. In order to understand the challenges that teachers face it will be necessary to understand the factors that influence the development or learning ability of learners. The ecological systems

theory will be of great use to do that. This conceptual framework will be used when analysing the data. This will help to understand the challenges both in and beyond the classroom.

2.12 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter discussed the state of education in South Africa which indicated that there was a problem in the education system. The statistics show that learners in South Africa were performing much lower than other countries. Further it moved on to discuss means of support in South Africa as well as in other countries. There is a need to provide support to progressed learners so that they are able to meet the academic requirements on their own merit. The theoretical framework discussed the two theories that were of important to this study as well as the conceptual framework that indicated how the two theories were integrated to best examine the research questions. The next chapter discusses the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter covered the literature review and shared the theoretical lenses. The focus was on learner support by the more knowledgeable caregiver and peers. Furthermore, the interrelated relationships among the various layers in which the learners are nested like a set of dolls, were discussed. This chapter shares the research design, paradigm and approach. The research methods are also discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

This research used a qualitative research approach. "Qualitative research is about gaining a better understanding of human nature and their qualities, meaning to find out what is going on from the perspective of those who are in the situation being researched" (Bouma, Ling & Wilkinson, 2009:41). This study has used the qualitative research approach as it is best suited to discover and understand the situation from the participants' viewpoint. In qualitative research, researchers collect data in the natural setting of the participants, while understanding the sensitivity of the participants. The researcher then studies the data and identifies themes arising from the data. The final report then consists of the voice of the participants and the interpretation of the researcher with regard to the main research questions. This report could also consist of recommendations as well as next steps that can be taken in order to resolve the problem (Creswell, 2007).

In this chapter the researcher explains the research method and procedure followed in order to conduct the research. This chapter explains the nature of the interactions with the participants, the teachers. This study adopted a phenomenological approach as the purpose of the study was to understand the support provided to progressed learners from the viewpoint of teachers. These are the experiences of teachers that are being discussed. It further discusses the data analysis process as well as consider credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

As human beings we are very curious about our world, how we relate to it and how everything around us works (Nicholls, 2011). Due to this curiosity we want to explore

and understand why certain groups of people behave in a certain way, what people think about phenomena, and share results in conducting research to find answers (Nicholls, 2011). In the field of education research is often done to improve the way different practices occurs in the classrooms, school, staffrooms, or teachers/learners' perceptions about different educational and social issues. The role of research is vital in education. Doing research in education allows educationists to gain a better understanding on how and why children learn, and this is essential because it informs pedagogical practices. If we can teach better, we can ensure more learners are getting epistemic access in our schools. This study aims to understand the forms of support provided to progressed learners in schools.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is about the school of thought that guides the questions asked and how they will be answered. A paradigm guides the researcher and forms the basis for the enquiry (Hans, 2014). This research paradigm is based on the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm is based on human beings' values, perceptions and beliefs (Hans, 2014). In this view individuals seek understanding of their world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2007). Research is then based on the participants' perception and views on the topic, and these views are based on the individuals' interaction with others, meaning society (Creswell, 2007). The views or beliefs of the teachers are based on their interaction with progressed learners.

3.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL PARADIGM

This is a phenomenological study which is the study of several individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). An experience that is common for all of them. The common experience in this study would be the daily experience of teachers with progressed learners in the classroom. Questions that would form part of this would be what has been experienced and how has this been experienced (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) discusses two main types of phenomenology, namely hermeneutic and empirical transcendental phenomenology. This study follows a hermeneutic phenomenology that is the study of lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The most appropriate research design for this study in order to understand the teachers' experiences in the classroom with progressed learners is phenomenology (Crswell, 2007). The theory of phenomenology is about the individual experiences of

a person in relation to other people (Smith, 2018). This is related to this study because the study dealt with the experiences of progressed learners from the perspective of teachers as well as teachers experiences of teaching progressed learners. What challenges do teachers' experience in providing support to the progressed learners? These are the types of questions that this study hopes to answer. Therefore, phenomenology is the best option, since this study aimed to understand the experiences of the teachers.

The process of conducting a phenomenological study. Firstly, the researcher ensures that this form of research is based on the shared experiences of a group of people. Then data were collected from the people who have experienced this phenomenon. The best means of data collection are interviews (Polkinghorne, 1989 in Creswell, 2007). These aforementioned researchers suggest that researchers should interview between 5 to 25 people who have this shared experience. Participants are asked two main broad questions. What are your experiences with this phenomenon and what influences or affects your experiences (Creswell, 2007)? These questions will help answer the questions on the shared experiences of the phenomenon. The researcher then goes through the data in the form of interview transcript and analyses the statements and quotes of the participants in order to understand their experiences. This is called *horizontalization*. These findings are then grouped and turned into themes (Creswell, 2007). The themes are then used to write a description of what the participants experienced. From this the researcher then writes what is known as the "essence" (Creswell, 2007:62). This would give the reader an understanding of what it would be like to have this experience. After having read this study an individual who is not a teacher will be able to understand the experiences of the teacher in the classroom and their interaction with progressed learners.

Creswell (2007) mentioned that having this understanding of experiences can be useful to therapists, teachers, health care personnel and policymakers. This research will be useful to teach as well as to inform policymakers, to make informed decisions on methods of support and policies.

3.5 RESEARCH SITE AND SAMPLING

3.5.1 Research site

This section looks at the site where the research was conducted and the selection of participants. The **research site** is of prime importance, this study focuses on the support provided to progressed learners from the viewpoint of the teachers as well as to understand the challenges that teachers face in order to provide the necessary support. Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers are the participants of the study. Therefore, the school where the teachers currently teach would be the ideal research site for this study.

3.5.2 Sampling

The collection of data is crucial to the research process. The data collected will answer the research question (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2015). This study used **purposive sampling**. In order to answer the research, question the participants must be carefully selected. This process is purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2015). Where participants are deliberately chosen. The sample of this study comprises of practising South African teachers from Intermediate and Senior Phase. In order to determine the ideal sample size required in order to help answer the research question, it was necessary to set some pre-requisites. The following were identified as pre-requisites:

- The participant has been in the classroom for at least three years. The reason for this was to ensure that the participants have been in the system long enough to understand the needs of progressed learners. As well as to see the improvement or lack thereof in the learners.
- The participant should be familiar with the policy of promotion and retention;
- The participant should agree and give consent for the study.

Based on the above criteria, **12 Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers** with three years or more experience were selected to be interviewed. Of the 12 teachers I interviewed, two (2) of them were Deputy Principals at their respective schools and one of them was a member of the School-based Support Team (SBST) leading their school. The teachers that were interviewed were from schools that are in Johannesburg North and fall under the district D10.

3.5.3 The role of the researcher

In qualitative research the researcher needs to remain as subjective as possible. The researcher is involved in the entire process and therefore subjectivity is important (Fink, 2000). This study required the researcher to conduct interviews with teachers to understand their experiences in the classroom with progressed learners.

The researcher understood the need to be sensitive to the participants and their feelings as well as encouraging the participants to be honest. The researcher asked questions with sensitivity while maintaining a professional relationship.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews. Interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data, as individuals can convey a situation from their own perspective and in their own words (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research and can occur either with an individual or in groups. This study used individual interviews in order to obtain teachers views in a private setting, thereby contributing to the authenticity and integrity of individual teacher's perspective on implementing different forms of support in the classroom and their points of view on the policy of promotion and retention. For the purpose of this research, 12 Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers from two schools were interviewed. The interviews were voice recorded with the permission of the participants in order to further maintain the integrity of their responses.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The data analysis process for this study is thematic analysis. Analysis requires the researcher to find ways in which to manage the volume of data acquired. The thematic approach follows a six-step process to analyse the data. Step one is to become familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts. At this stage early impression can also be jotted down (Delehunt & Magurie, 2017). The second step is to generate codes, and at this stage the process of organising the data in in a systematic order begins. For the purpose of this study open coding was used. This involves a line-by-line coding, comparing statements with each other (Holton, 2010). This form of coding ensures that no data or codes are left out and rich data are obtained. The third step is

to search for themes (Delehunt & Magurie, 2017). Themes emerged as the coding was done. Then themes which emerged in the third step were reviewed, modified and developed further. By the end of this step final themes were identified. A detailed evaluation was undertaken to identify whether the themes were in line with the data and the literature review and the final step involved the write up (Delehunt & Magurie, 2017).

Figure 3.1: Data analysis process (Delehunt & Magurie, 2017)

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spires (2002:14) argue that "without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility." Hence, a great deal of attention is applied to reliability and validity in all research methods. Guba and Lincoln (1989) state that there are four aspects to ensure trustworthiness in a study namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. **Credibility** is a strategy that ensures that participants are as honest and truthful as possible, without feeling vulnerable. **Transferability** is determined by how far the participants can be confident in transferring information to the researcher. **Dependability** is the processes within the study that should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. **Confirmability** is defined as the steps taken to help ensure as far as possible that the research findings are the result

of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Each of these categories of trustworthiness have been practised in this study. With regard to credibility the participants were made aware well in advance that their participation in this study is completely voluntary. They may decide to withdraw at any point with no questions asked. The participants were made to feel comfortable and share any information they would like as they were aware that they will always remain anonymous. As this is a study based on the experiences of teachers' conformability will be attainable, and the researcher will only use the data received from the experiences of the teachers.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research in social science involves working with human beings and therefore, ethics in doing research is of the utmost importance. Ethics are there to ensure that the researcher does not take advantage of or exploit the participants. The researcher will ensure that participants are comfortable while discussing their personal experience. The researcher understands that discussing these experiences may cause the participants some discomfort and the researcher is aware of this the participants of the study will remain anonymous and this was communicated to them in detail

The researcher at all times kept in mind that participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any point without any consequences. In order to pursue and proceed with this research there are several stakeholders whose permission was needed.

3.9.1 Ethics clearance

Ethics clearance was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria. The first stakeholder from whom permission will be needed is the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). It is important and necessary to seek permission because this research requires interview responses from teachers who are employees of the Department of Education. Permission was also required from the principal of the school as well as from the teachers being interviewed. The participants were ensured that their names would not be mentioned in the study and pseudonyms are therefore used. They were further informed together with GDE and their principals that data from

the interviews will only be used for this study. Furthermore, the teachers were informed that their participation is voluntary, and they may withdraw from the study at any point and there will be no negative consequences for withdrawal.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Considering the nature of the study, it required a qualitative approach, with a small sample size of twelve participants. Thus, the results cannot be used and assume the same results will appear if the study is done elsewhere. The sample size of this study was primary schools in Gauteng and the findings of this study cannot be assumed to be the same for other settings. The findings on intervention strategies can however be taken into consideration. Therefore, the limitation of this study lies in the fact that the sample size is limited.

3.11 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology. A qualitative research approach has been used and the reasons for this were provided. These methods were best suited to answer the main research question of this study on the support provided for progressed learners. The means of data collection, sampling of participants, ethical considerations and voluntary participation were discussed. The next chapter examines the findings from the interviews and interpretation of the data through the formation of themes.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study is to understand what measures are put in place at schools to support progressed learners in the Intermediate and Senior Phases. The emphasis of the study was to obtain the perspective of teachers as they are primarily the ones who provide support to the learners. In this chapter, the data collected has been discussed in detail. The main research question formed the basis for analysing the data. From the data collected and analysed, themes and sub-themes were identified. This was done in correlation with the literature review.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the data collection method entailed semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted at relevant participants' school, either in the teacher's classroom or in the staffroom. The interviews were conducted either during the teacher's preparation time, during breaks, or after school. All participants were asked the same questions as stated in the interview schedule. However, some probing questions were asked to obtain rich data as well as to get a better understanding of what the participants were saying. The participants were all teachers in the intermediate and senior phase (Grade 4 -7).

4.2 PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

4.2.1 Teacher 1

Teacher 1 is currently a Grade 7 Afrikaans and Creative arts teacher. She has been teaching for 22 years. In her 22 years as a teacher she has taught all subjects in the Intermediate and Senior Phase. She has also taught Foundation Phase Grades 2 and 3. Teacher 1 expressed the view that:

"*Even if the child has a language barrier, it does not mean that he or she is academically challenged, but what we are finding is that children at the age of 13 (Grade 7) or even older who are unable to read. There is no formation of phonics, they don't even understand how to use and combine phonics. They can speak the language but when it comes to reading it is a big problem.*"

4.2.2 Teacher 2

Teacher 2 is a young lady who has been teaching for 3 years. She is currently a Grade 6 Mathematics teacher and has been teaching this grade and subject for all three years. Teacher 2 said that:

"Learners do not know the basic operations. They are at a level where they struggle to add three-digit numbers with three-digit numbers, but at this point they are supposed to be able to add nine- digit numbers with nine-digit numbers. They are unable to do the basic operations like addition and subtraction and all other content is dependent on that foundation. I do not have the time to go back and do the basics every time I teach a new concept".

4.2.3 Teacher 3

Teacher 3 is a middle-aged male teacher who has been teaching for 10 years. He is currently teaching Afrikaans to Grade 5 learners. He, like other participants has taught all the subjects over the years except for Mathematics. He said that:

"Most of the learners do not improve so they struggle to get to the next grade because they do not know how to read and write properly."

4.2.4 Teacher 4

Teacher 4 is a young lady who has been teaching for seven years. She is currently teaching Grade 6 Mathematics as well as personal and social wellbeing. Over the years she has taught Grades 4, 5 and 6 Mathematics, as well as personal and social well-being to Grade 5 and 6 learners and physical education to Grades 4 and 5. She said that,

"This year I currently have ten learners in each class who cannot cope with the demands of the grade. That is one out of every four learners."

4.2.5 Teacher 5

Teacher 5 is also a young lady who has been teaching for five years. She teaches Grade 6 English Home Language (HL) and Social sciences. In her five years of teaching she has taught Grade 5 English home language, Social Science and Life Skills. She said that:

"Daily, in the classroom, there are challenges with learners who are below the grade level who cannot grasp new concepts as they are not ready for the current

grade. These learners pose a daily challenge as concepts need to be lowered to their level."

4.2.6 Teacher 6

Teacher 6 is also a young lady who has been in the profession for 7 years. She is a Grade 5 Mathematics teacher. In her teaching career she has taught grade five Natural Science and Technology as well as grade four social science. She has experienced that:

"*Many learners are not functioning at the grade level that they are in.*"

4.2.7 Teacher 7

Teacher 7 is a dynamic woman and has been teaching in the Intermediate Phase for three months however she has been teaching in the Foundation Phase for over 30 years. She was the Foundation Phase Head of Department (HOD) for many years and currently serves as the deputy principal of the school. She is currently teaching Grade 4 Mathematics and previously taught Grades 1 and 2 in the Foundation Phase. In her experience she has found that:

"*Each class has learners experiencing great learning difficulties and they need a great deal of support.*"

4.2.8 Teacher 8

Teacher 8 is a middle-aged woman who has been in the profession for 21 years. She is currently teaching Grade 5 English Home Language (HL) and Life skills and has taught these subjects throughout. She is currently the deputy principal at the school and is also the head of the school's School-based Support Team (SBST) committee. As mentioned earlier all schools are expected to form an SBST committee to ensure that progressed learners are obtaining the necessary support. She said,

"*Since we are not allowed to retain the learners more than once in the phase, we have to progress them, and this is very taxing as the learners are unable to read. I have a learner in Grade 5 who cannot read anything.*"

4.2.9 Teacher 9

Teacher 9 is a wise man with 30 years of experience. He is currently teaching Natural science and technology to Grade 4 learners as well as Life skills. Over the years he

has taught Mathematics and Natural sciences throughout Grades 4 to 7. He is the current HOD at the school. Teacher 9 is of the view that every year there are severe cases of learners not meeting the demands of the grade and little or no improvement is visible in this regard.

4.2.10 Teacher 10

Teacher 10 is a woman with 28 years of experience in the classroom. She is currently teaching Grade 6 Life skills and Social sciences to Grade 7 learners. Over the years she has taught all subjects in all grades except for Mathematics and Technology. She strongly felt that:

"Progressed *learners are wasting their time; they are not benefitting at all, as they do not show any improvement."*

4.2.11 Teacher 11

Teacher 11 is also a young lady who has been teaching for four years. She is currently teaching Afrikaans and physical education to grade four learners. She has previously taught Grades 1, 4, 5 and 6. She said:

"*On a daily basis I see children who struggle with reading, writing, following instructions and focusing."*

4.2.12 Teacher 12

Teacher 12 is a male teacher who has been teaching for over 12 years. He is currently teaching Afrikaans and personal social well-being to Grade 6 learners. For the majority of his career he was teaching English HL. He strongly believed:

"*The system we have now in place is focused on quantity and not quality hence, we are getting too many cases where learners are being pushed to the next grade. It is an unfair reflection of their academic ability."*

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

In performing the data analysis, data which were collected were immediately transcribed. The transcripts were then read several times and the researcher immersed herself completely in the data to gain an understanding of participants' response and valuable insight in connection with the research.

Four main themes emerged from the critical review of the data, together with relevant sub themes. The table below discusses the themes and sub themes.

Table 4.1: Emerging themes

Theme 1: Teachers' regards towards the policy of progression	• Teachers' opinions on the efficacy of the policy • The broader effects of the policy on the learners • The effectiveness of the policy in achieving learning
Theme 2: Needs of progressed learners	• Support in the classroom • Forms of external support
Theme 3: Challenges faced by teachers	• Environmental Challenges • Support from parents • Support from the school and Department
Theme 4: Forms of support put in place	• Best means of support • Alternative methods

The **first theme** which emerged was the **feelings and attitudes** of teachers towards the policy. The **second theme** focussed primarily on the **needs of the progressed** learners. The **third theme** considered the **challenges faced** by teachers in supporting progressed learners and the **fourth and final theme** dealt with examples of **support** which have been or could be provided to support progressed learners.

All participants were assured that experiences and information shared by them, as well as that their opinions would not be traced back to them. The identities of the school as well the teachers would remain anonymous. Therefore, all participants will be referred to as stated in the table below.

Table 4.2: Coding used for participants

Participants	Code
Teacher 1	T1
Teacher 2	T2
Teacher 3	T3
Teacher 4	T4
Teacher 5	T5
Teacher 6	T6
Teacher 7	T7
Teacher 8	T8
Teacher 9	T9
Teacher 10	T10
Teacher 11	T11
Teacher 12	T12

4.4 THEME 1: TEACHERS' REGARD OF THE POLICY OF PROGRESSION

The first theme that emerged was the feelings and attitudes towards the policy of promotion and retention including the views of teachers on the effectiveness of the policy, with emphasis on the progression of learners. The question posed to all participants was – "What are your feelings towards the progression of learners?" A number of strong views emerged from this question. All participants expressed negative feelings towards the progression of learners. Their statements and candid opinions showed that they were not at all in favour of the policy.

T1 reported:

> "*I feel the system is failing the learners; we as the teachers are also part of this system, because we are failing to help the learners. We submit reports and evidences (sic) how the child's academic performance is improving but the benefit is very minimal. The problem never gets resolved.*"

Similarly, T3 believed that:

> "*Most of the learners do not improve as they do not know how to read or write.*"

T2 observed that learners are given an incorrect outlook on life as they are not being adequately skilled and emphasised this further from the statement that:

"It gives them the wrong impression and makes it difficult for them to grow in the long term as they do not know all the fundamentals."

T4 also had some negative feelings the policy and expressed her view as follows:

"I feel that in most cases it does a disservice to the learner, as the learner is, so to say, pushed through to the next grade, without meeting the requirements of the current grade and thus is not well equipped with the knowledge to cope in the next grade."

T5 expressed a balanced view in outlining both the pros and cons in her experience as it relates to the progression of learners.

She observed:

"On the one hand it can be good, since learners that are too old or too mature are not interacting with very young learners and influencing them negatively. It can also be beneficial for the teachers, since some learners who are retained do not change or improve academically the next year and there would be no benefit for them if they fail again and continue not to learn anything. They can cause behavioural problems in the classroom which distract both the teacher and other learners. The progression of learners is also beneficial to the state as they do not have to spend money on resources for the same learner such as, money for furniture, books and consumable stock. And they do not have to offer additional teaching posts when the failure rate is very high. The progression of learners can be negative as learners are unable to cope with the demands of the next grade/phase and are pushed through. They lose interest in school as most concepts are 'too challenging' for them and eventually drop out without acquiring any skills. They do not acquire the knowledge or skills needed for the world and they are under a "fake" perception that they have succeeded in schooling."

The view from T5 introduced an interesting perspective in that, there are instances where some learners, who may be retained in their existing grade, are unlikely to learn regardless of a number of efforts. In such circumstances, progression of such learners may alleviate pressures off the teacher, freeing up resources to better support the rest of the learners. A further probing question, which arises from this response is to understand what the purpose of keeping such a learner in school is, if the learner is in

fact not learning. To this point, T5 expressed the view that the retention of progressed learners has been highly ineffective in making any difference to the learner's academic performance, in her opinion.

Another participant who felt very passionate about this was participant T8. T8 expressed the view that in her experience progressed learners become "rebellious and destructive."

In her opinion, the reason for this is that they are not adequately equipped to learn the content of the grade which they are progressed into and they continue to perform poorly in the new grade. In addition to their poor performance, in some instances added pressure from their parents leaves these learners highly frustrated. T8 strongly believes this to be an injustice to the learners and in her opinion, there are two alternatives, either progressed learner should be supported, or they should be retained in their existing grade to obtain mastery of the concepts of that grade prior to moving to the next grade.

T10's view was similar to many of the other participants, as she expressed the view that progressed learners were "not benefitting at all, and they do not show any improvement".

T10 put the cause of this down to the fact that teachers are unable to provide sufficient assistance and that the learners are expected to move along with the pace of the class, where they clearly had challenges in the previous class. Here the participant alluded to deficiencies in support provided by teachers, and this concept will be discussed further in the theme below related to teachers' challenges in providing support.

From the responses obtained to the question posed, it is evident that while some teachers do see the possibility for progression for learners, the majority are of the opinion that progression is unfavourable to the progressed learner, the teacher and even potentially other learners in the classroom. Teachers had strong views, labelling progression an "injustice" to learners. The sub-theme below explores the teachers' opinions on the efficacy of the policy.

A study was done in primary schools in Cameroon by Nalova (2016). This study wanted to understand teachers' perception of automatic promotion. A total of 275 teachers participated in this study either by survey or interview. The findings of the

study in Cameroon were similar to this study. The table below shows the result of the study by (Nalova) 2016. Participants were asked questions in a survey. They had to give their answers based on whether they agree, disagree, strongly agree or strongly disagree.

Table 4.3: Findings from the study by Nalova (2016)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Collective promotion creates problems for the next class because pupils do not fulfil the basic requirements for the current grade.	207	43	10	4
Collective promotion improves students' achievement in the next class.	12	13	144	96
Learners who were automatically promoted catch up with their peers in the next grade	9	57	124	69
Collective performance does not help teachers to easily identify the learner's area of difficulty.	97	90	47	26
Collective promotion encourages learners to work hard	29	38	108	84
Collective promotion is not the best way of improving learner achievement	118	112	17	18
Collective promotion does not provide enough time for learners to catch up with what they have not grasped.	143	95	20	7
The policy of collective promotion needs to be revised.	202	58	2	5

The study found that teachers have negative feelings towards automatic promotion. This form of progression causes problems in the next grade. Learners do not learn and are not encouraged to learn (Nalova, 2016).

4.4.1 Sub-theme: Teachers' opinion on the efficacy of the policy

The participants were asked, if they agreed or disagreed with the policy of progression of learners and why. 8 out of the 12 participants said they disagree with the policy. Out of the 12 participants not a single participant agreed fully with the policy on progression of learners. Four participants agreed somewhat, however the participants also

provided strong reasons supporting disagreement with the policy. T4, for example, was a participant who agreed to some extent with the policy. T4 indicated partial agreement, as she was of the opinion that in her experience retaining learners more than once could potentially do more harm than good to the learner. It may demoralise the learners, lowering their self-esteem and even potentially resulting in an attitude of disregard, a so called "don't care attitude". T4 expressed the view that retention can sometimes lead to challenges with discipline in the classroom as the progressed learners are older than their classmates and may tend to bully and act out with the teacher and peers, perhaps to hide the shame of being retained. However, T4 also shared her reasons for disagreeing with the policy and said:

"I feel that in most cases it does a disservice to the learner as the learner is, so to say "pushed" through to the next grade, without meeting the requirements of the current grade and thus is not well equipped with the knowledge to cope in the next grade."

Once again, the strong negative feeling of doing a disservice to the learner arises.

T5 strongly disagreed and expressed the belief that:

"By progressing learners, it is not benefitting the child. In most cases, the learners believe that they are knowledgeable or have done well to succeed to the next grade, when in fact they may have not met any of the requirements the previous year."

T5 went on to say that the learners also continue the following year with the same negative attitude since they do not realise that they are not passing through their efforts and hard work. The same opinions of teachers were found in the study done by (Nalova) 2016. As mentioned above teachers in Cameroon also felt that learners who are automatically promoted do not feel the need to work hard. Learners are aware of the fact that even if they do not work hard and study they will still go to the next grade at the end of the year. This decreases learners' motivation to try and achieve and pass on their own merit. This cycle of non-achievement will persist until the learner reaches the end of schooling and has not acquired any noteworthy skills. By the time the learners realise their mistake it would have been too late.

In T5's opinion, learners who are progressed have a poor knowledge of concepts learnt previously and lack foundational knowledge, and so they continue to be

challenged in the learning process as they do not have the skills or knowledge to understand and grasp new concepts. Concepts are too challenging for them and they "waste" the year sitting in the classroom as they do not grasp the new content. The link between the teachers' feelings and attitudes towards the policy and their agreement with the policy is quite clear in the teachers' responses.

T10 voiced disagreement with the policy and held the view that:

"Progressed learners must get special assistance they need as they cannot grasp the content because of the speed with which we go into the class; the gap is getting wider and there is not enough support being given to these progressed learners."

Participant T11 had a different view. T11 agreed somewhat, and shared a view that while progression may not be doing justice to the learner in the form of enabling learning, by keeping the learner in the schooling system may at the very least provide a different experience in a school environment rather than remaining at home. When probed further as to whether a school experience without learning would be a fruitful endeavour, T11 agreed that while the situation may not be ideal, a school experience does afford the learner the opportunity to obtain other skills such as listening skills and social skills. This is an interesting dimension to issue at hand, and a view, which although not in the majority, supports the concept of progression as a means to continue some form of learning, even if it is not the ideal form of learning.

Participant T12 also agreed with the policy to some extent and expressed support for certain aspects of the policy while disagreeing with a number of other aspects of the policy. T12 expressed the understanding for the fact that the age cohort factor may well be a significant practical factor for consideration but expressed concern that the focus in the mainstream schooling system is more around the quantity and not the quality of learner throughput. T12 remained convinced that

"The progressed learners are falling through the cracks."

The responses to this question indicate the understanding of many of the teachers around some of the logistical challenges and how these challenges support the design of the policy. T8, while disagreeing with the policy in itself, expressed an understanding of the fact that logistically, if for example, all learners who did not meet the requirement to achieve a 50% score in English were to be retained, classes would be overburdened

and under capacitated. T8 expressed the view that the reason for such poor performance may well be outside of the control of the learner and even perhaps the parents, in that English may be the learners fourth language and so T8 expressed the view that:

> *"We understand what the district or the department is trying to do but I do not agree with it."*

This view juxtaposes the right of all to access education, against the ability of the education system to make that right practically and logistically available to all.

Teachers are professionals in their fields, and passionate about the learning process and should be accorded respect. In this sub-theme, no teacher has voiced outright support for the policy; the majority disagreed with it, and the minority somewhat agreed with it. Regardless of the views for and against the policy, teachers mentioned a number of issues which are relevant to the need for a policy. These include:

- The fact that lack of progression may lead to a significant age gap between the progressed learner and his or her classmates. This could have other negative consequences such as the impact on the confidence and self-esteem of the progressed learner, frustration being experienced in the classroom by the progressed learner, teacher and classmates, strain on the teacher to support the progressed learner within a capacity constrained environment, and the potential for acting out and bullying; and
- A number of teachers have voiced understanding for the policy on the basis of logistical challenges that the policy seeks to address.

However, regardless of the above, it is clear that all teachers have some points of disagreement with the policy and voice a common concern that progressed learners are not well supported in the current schooling system.

4.4.2 Sub-theme: The broader effects of the policy on the learner

The participants were asked if they believe that the policy of progressing learners is harming or benefitting the learners. All 12 participants said that the policy is harming the development of learners. It is clear that all participants were of the opinion that this policy of progression is not beneficial to progressed learners in any way. T1 believes that the policy is harming progressed learners, as the learners have a false hope of

passing when in actual fact they are progressed. T1 expressed the belief that this leads to much denial on the part of the learner and the parents and said the learner is not being prepared for the challenges and realities of the real world.

Participant T2, who is a Mathematics teacher was of the view that the policy is harming the progressed learner as the curriculum for the year is full, and said:

"Every lesson we give is a building block to the next topic."

The absence of these building blocks in a subject such as Mathematics poses significantly increasing challenges for the progressed learner and by default the teacher who has to support such a learner. In such a situation the gap between the known and the unknown becomes continues to grow. According to the ZPD theory by Vygotsky, the mediator, in this case the teacher, has to take the learner from the known to the unknown Donald et al. (2007). If the gap is very large it will take the mediator a longer time to mediate the gap. As the gap gets wider, and where there is insufficient mediation provided, the learner will not develop the knowledge and never move into the ZPD to form new knowledge (Donald et al 2007). From this response, it is clear that this is what is currently happening in the classroom. Progressed learners are not obtaining the mediation required to support their learning. The academic gap grows wider and wider for them. Hence, they are unable to move from unknown knowledge to known knowledge.

Participant T3 held the simple view that the policy is harming the progressed learner as the learner is reaching the next grade without learning anything. Participant T9 expressed the same view and added that it is simply a process of "…going through the system."

T4 also voiced some concerns by stating:

"I feel in most cases it is doing harm to the development of learners as they do not have adequate knowledge to cope in the grades thereafter and keep on struggling. Constantly struggling to cope could result in the learner giving up and developing a disinterest towards learning and school and could later also lead to high-school dropouts.".

The view of T4 adds a further dimension to the harm that is caused by the policy which may in fact result in outcomes which are the exact opposite of the intention of the policy.

While participant T1 put forward the view that progression may lead to the incorrect belief by the learner that he or she is progressing on their own merit, participant T5 posited that:

> *"A number of progressed learners are merely passing through without effort and are aware that even if they do not work hard or concentrate, they will still pass."*

T5 goes on to point out that this creates a false impression that the learners are learning. The view expressed by T5 puts forward a potentially dangerous situation which arises where learners are fully aware that they do not need to put in the necessary effort, as there are policies in place which will ensure their progression through the school system with minimal effort on their part. Participants T11 an T12 both had similar views, that due to the policy, learners have no sense of responsibility and no motivation to do any work, because the learners know very well that regardless of the circumstances, at the end of the year, they are going to go to the next grade.

Participant T6 had a different look on the matter. She explained that:

> *"The policy is harming the learners because the learners are being forced to go to the next grade level, and learners do not understand the basic concepts and are being forced to understand the next level's concepts."*

The participants' use of the word "forced" raises the interesting question as to whether the opinions of the teachers, learners or parents are given enough weight in the decision around progression.

Policies are put in place to ensure that all learners benefit from the education system. Policies are formulated on the basis to see what is in the best interest of the learner. In summary, teachers have expressed the view that the policy does more harm to the progressed learner than good, and a number of far reaching consequences, including:

- Learner apathy, where the learner does not put in the necessary effort as he or she is aware that he will be progressed.

- Learner and parent disillusionment, where the learners and parents of the learners believe that the learners are progressing on their own merit; and

- Growing knowledge gaps, where failure to master building block concepts continue to impede the learning experience on an ongoing and growing basis.

4.4.3 Sub-theme: The effectiveness of the policy in achieving learning

Participants were asked a question based on the outcome of the policy. In terms of the policy, a learner who does not fail a single year in school would complete the 12 grades of schooling in a 12-year period. However, learners who fail a year in every phase and are then progressed in line with the requirements of the policy would still complete their schooling up to Grade 11, but in a maximum of 16 years. Therefore, with or without the necessary competencies, a learner would be able to progress until the penultimate level of secondary school, albeit without a Grade 12 qualification. Therefore, the questioned asked was, "Do you think with the current policies in place it is possible for a learner to complete schooling in a maximum of 16 years and still not be able to read and write appropriately? What are your feelings towards this?" The outcome of the question would be an indicator of whether it is possible for the policy to result in a complete failure of the learning process by allowing a learner to progress to grade 11 and then be completely ill equipped to take on the challenges of Grade 12, where progression would not be possible. Eleven of the twelve participants indicated that in their opinion it is possible for a learner to progress through the grades until Grade 11 and still not have learned the basic skills of reading, comprehending and writing. Participant T10 did not respond with a yes but instead held the view that such a learner would fall out of the system before he reaches Grade 12.

T2 responded to the question by pointing out an experience with a learner in Grade 6 who would read one word at a time. Similarly, T8 shared an experience where she taught a Grade 10 learner who was unable to spell the word mother, and so in her opinion it is possible for learners to get to Grade 12 without having mastered the basic skill of reading.

In addition to the question above, participants were also asked if they saw any academic improvement in the progressed learner. Meaning, if the teacher had a progressed learner in his or her class, were they able to see any improvement in their academic performance by the end of the year. Furthermore, to obtain a view of the

contrasting situation, participants were also asked if they saw any academic improvement in the academic performance of a retained learner? Meaning that the teacher had a learner who has failed the grade and was repeating the grade. The question was raised if the teacher observed any form of academic improvement.

All twelve participants said they saw zero to minimal academic improvement in the progressed learner. T3 expressed the view that:

"I observed no difference between retained and progressed learners."

In my opinion learners should be retained until they fully grasp the necessary skills and content. T11 expressed the same sentiments that she had not observed any marked improvement in their academic performance.

T8 pointed out that he had noticed that some retained learners showed progress as they are familiar with the curriculum and assessments the second time around and were therefore more comfortable with the curriculum. By contrast she stated that she had seen very few cases of progressed learners who then pass on their own merit.

"Progressed learners do not show any form of improvement and they go to the next grade that is really hectic for them."

Once again, the study by (Nalova) 2016 shared similar views. The teachers in this study were asked if automatic promoted learners showed academic improvement in the next class. The majority of the teachers said they disagreed, as they felt that these learners do not show any academic improvement. In both these studies teachers felt that progressed learners do not show any academic improvement. Nalova (2016) also asked if automatically promoted learners caught up with their peers in the next grade. The majority of the teachers disagreed; they said these learners do not catch up on content. Progressing of learners does not lead to academic improvement, therefore there is a need for implementation of support.

The next question that was asked, was what difference teachers saw in the academic ability of a retained learner. eight participants said that they saw between zero to minimal improvement and four participants said they saw some improvement. Participant T8 mentioned that if the learner that is retained does not lack basic knowledge then there is a chance that the learner might show some improvement. T8

went on to say that already in Grade 4, the gaps in basic knowledge are too wide, making it difficult for the learner to pass. T5 said:

"In some cases, retained learners works harder and there is slight improvement in their marks and attitude towards schooling. In other cases, retained learners do not show any interest in schooling and no improvement in marks or attitude occurs."

She believed that sometimes there is a chance that the retained learner is able to show some form of improvement and therefore retention was a good choice. However, the purpose of this study is not to see the benefits of retention, but rather to evaluate the impact of progression. The question around retention facilitates a comparison in order to identify whether other interventions may be more effective than progression. From the responses of the participants all of them believed that progressed learners do not make any academic progress and are just passing through the grades and not learning and participants pointed out they are just wasting time. Based on the responses to these questions, it is evident that while retention may not be the ideal solution, progression does not appear to support the learners in achieving learning at all.

4.5 THEME 2: THE NEEDS OF THE PROGRESSED LEARNERS

Progress learners need extra support in order to fill their academic gaps. This theme discusses the policies that are in place to support learners and the effectiveness of them. As well as the teachers' recommendations that are in the best interest of the learners.

4.5.1 Sub-Theme: Support in the classroom

One of the questions that the participants were asked is, how can progressed learners be supported in the classroom by the teacher? All participants answered the question however a few participants named the challenges they faced in order to support the learners, instead of providing the examples of support. T2 said:

"There are so many learners that are progressed which makes it difficult for me to assist them individually, so I have tried to make groups and activities that can support their learning, also I try to encourage them to practice after school hours which can promote long term growth."

As T2 said there are too many progressed learners that need individual attention. T3 mentioned, a third of the class, learners are below the required academic ability for that grade. That is there are too many learners to support in a class of at least 40 learners.

Participant T4 mentioned:

"They can be supported in the classroom through differentiated teaching where simpler but meaningful activities are prepared by the teacher for these learners so that they are able to grasp enough to help them pass on their own. They can also be supported by receiving individual attention from the teacher and in remedial class."

Differentiated teaching is a good way to support learners. T7 also mentioned differentiation, and she said:

"Differentiation of activities helps a great deal. Learners experiencing difficulties need to be taught at their own pace. Learners cannot be expected to do activities they experience difficulty with but rather drop the level to equip them with the necessary skills to assist them holistically."

Some teachers mentioned classroom size, T6 mentioned:

"Smaller classroom numbers would assist in having individual attention. Extra lessons can be given to the learners after school or during breaks."

Having as many as 40 learners in a classroom for a short time period, makes it difficult to give individual attention to the progressed learners.

Participant T8 said:

"Luckily now the department is very strict with the progressed learners and every term we have to send them statistics of progressed learners and indicate how many were progressed from 2018 to 2019. We are tracking them, and the department tracks them every term when we go for ratification. We have to tell them that there were four that were progressed last year out of which three passed term one so we can see that one failed and have to determine how we are going to help that one, or the other way around. So, we have to keep supporting because every time we have to go for ratification, we look at our progressed learners and they say that

number needs to decrease. The teachers are supporting because there is tracking. We are supporting activities for them. We have the support period, and we try and do one- on-one explaining of the assessment task, because where they are really lacking is where they can't read the assessment task. We try and read it out to them orally, to do one-on-one interventions with them. We decide if we must keep them in during break or after school depending on the teacher. We have the 1.5-hour support period on a Wednesday where we are really trying to support them."

As mentioned earlier participant T8 is the head of the SBST committee, therefore she has more interaction with the DoBE. It is good to see that the department is making a sincere attempt to track the progressed learners, so they do not get left behind. However, more than just tracking the learners is going to be required to make a significant difference in the academic performance of the learner.

T11 mentioned:

"The basic things we do is revise and pair with higher ability. But still we do not do enough, because it has to be done starting from the basics. The lack of basics of reading and writing causes a bigger gap to fill."

T11 observed that just the normal pairing of the learner is not enough as the gaps are too big to just fill. Much more intervention is needed if any significant improvement is to be seen.

Participant T12 brought up an important point; he said there are far too many assessments.

"I can't give special attention. With regard to languages there are, 9-12 assessments per term. Much time goes into doing the assessments. No teaching, just doing assessment. More learners go through the gap. They need one-on-one attention by teachers or tutors to assist the child as average learner."

T12 is a language teacher and he said that much of their time is spent on doing the assessments which is time-consuming with the result that much teaching time is lost. From the answers given by teachers it becomes evident that there are no suitable and rigid means of support that teachers are practising to support progressed learners. Teachers are trying their own methods, but these are not very effective. There is no sign of academic support happening beyond the classroom. Nalova (2016) also found

that there were no established forms of support. Teachers tried their best to assist weaker learners by giving them extra work and homework and using the pairing system, where an achieving learner helps a weaker learner. These were some practices in the classroom but none that leads to significant forms of support (Nalova, 2016).

While discussing what was in the best interest of the learners, three participants, namely T3, T5 and T7 talked about bringing the academic level down in the class so that the progressed learners can grasp the concepts. T5 said:

"Teachers can provide extra classes and provide activities were concepts are lowered. They can also use visual aids, concrete activities while teaching and games."

T3 suggested:

"Teachers must set the assessment questions on a lower level so they can grasp the work faster."

It does make sense to teach concepts at a lower level so that all learners can understand the concepts. However, there are leaners in the classroom who are intelligent and can learn fast. If the concepts are always lowered these learners will get bored and will not reach their full potential. These learners also need to be catered for.

There are countering arguments that suggest that making content easy for learners is not always useful. Maton (2013) talks about semantic gravity, which prompts the question to what degree meaning relates to its context (Maton, 2013:11). Semantic gravity can be strong semantic gravity or weaker semantic gravity. Strong semantic gravity indicates that more meaning is dependent on its context and weaker semantic gravity means less meaning is dependent on its context (Maton, 2013:11). Strong semantic gravity means a teacher uses the context, the real-life example, to explain the content. Weak semantic gravity means that the teacher does not use much of the context to make the content more abstract. According to Maton (2013) a weaker semantic gravity is also beneficial to learners. Maton (2013) asserts that teachers try to make the content or knowledge relevant to learners. So basically, they bring the knowledge a level down, but the problem with this is that learners do not raise that

content back to an academic level. They leave it at a lower level. He says that we should not always relate the knowledge to learners' lives or bring down the content knowledge but leave it at an academic level.

Teachers believe that lowering the content knowledge would help the progressed learners to grasp concepts. What are then the implications of lowering educational standards? In the long run this is not going to benefit the education system. Nalova (2016) also found that automatic progression leads to a drop in the education system.

4.5.2 Sub- theme: Forms of external support

The participants were asked: What support can the district (department of education) provide to the school which will eventually support the progressed learner?

Five participants said that they needed teacher training as they did not know how to deal with progressed learners in the classroom given the challenges they face. T2 said:

"*Resources and workshops teach us to deal with these kinds of students.*"

Six participants said that having extra teacher, in the school would assist with providing support to progressed learners. T8 said:

"The department should provide classrooms and more teachers, and we should be able to support a learner who is progressed by having outside educators or having LSE (learner support educator) who are helping full-time to teach those learners. When they go to the next class or progress, they are able to do well."

Teachers are willing to go for training and then implement their training in the classroom. There is a need for continuous teacher development (Lessing & de Witt, 2007). The study done by Lessing and de Witt (2007) asked teachers the questions on the value they see in continuous professional development. At least 90% of the teachers agreed on the importance of development through workshops. The process of professional development in teachers is a lifelong process (Jovanova-Mitkovska, 2010). The need for professional development is that it has an influence on teaching and learning; it affects student learning, and it provides teachers with new knowledge that will have a direct impact on the learning process (Jovanova-Mitkovska, 2010).

Lessing and de Witt (2007) discuss the importance of having workshops that are well organised and aligned with the principals of continuous professional development. If the training or workshops are not well designed, it would discourage teachers to attend. Teachers need to see the value in what the workshop is designed to support them with (Lessing & de Witt, 2007).

The principles that underlie continuous professional development are, firstly the aim of the workshop should be that which improves education. The workshop should be planned systematically in line with the aim. The contextual needs of the teachers should be taken into consideration (Lessing & de Witt, 2007). A teacher would not see the value in a workshop that does not take their contextual needs into account. For example, if a teacher attends a workshop on teaching computer skills, but the school has no access to computers, this would be of no value to the teacher and would discourage them from attending workshops in the future. The workshops should focus on teachers' teaching approaches as well as give them the opportunity to share their knowledge to learn in a group (Lessing & de Witt, 2007). If these principals of continuous professional development are applied to training sessions, there would be those of more value that encourage teachers to attend. Lessing and de Witt (2007) conducted a study by implanting these principles in a workshop and then asking teachers to give their opinion on the effectiveness of such workshops. The study found that teachers found this to be useful and of great value to their development. Teachers were willing to sacrifice their time in attending these workshops. All in all, the workshop was successful and of great value.

The study at hand showed that teachers are willing to attend training so that they may better support progressed learners. However, the department needs to ensure the workshops or training sessions are well organised and add value to the teaching and learning process.

When asked this question two teachers who said that they need resources to assist the progressed learners. By resources they meant tangible resources that they can use in the classrooms to better support learners. Having a functional library is very important in a school. Two participants said there is a need for more classrooms, and mainly infrastructure at the schools. These teachers suggested that the progressed

learners need to attend remedial classes so that they can get one-on-one attention from the teacher.

Two participants said that the department is not doing anything to support them. T3 said:

> *"District is just asking for statistics and evidence from us, but they are not physically taking any steps to support these learners, for instance they could offer classes themselves."*

When asked what he meant by the classes that they could offer, he said that the department needs to organise extra support classes for the progressed learners, like extra English and mathematics classes. T12 said:

> *"We don't get much from the department, as a learner for 4 years is still in the process of being referred. Parents are all on board, but we are just waiting. The child is still sitting with us only passing because of age."*

These two participants are of the opinion that the department is not providing them with the necessary support and the progressed learners are passive. The participants were then asked how the other stake holders like the SGB and parents can play a role in supporting progressed learners. All participants said that the SGB needs to provide the funds required to organise extra classes outside school hours. The participant said that the SGB can organise volunteers to come to the school and to assist learners with reading or any other form of learning. This will give the learner the one on one attention they need.

The role of the parent is extremely valuable. All participants said that the parents really need to put in the extra effort to assist the learners. T1 said:

> *"I feel parents' involvement needs to be more active even if they do not understand the work. They should at least try to know what is going in their child's life. They need to admit and identify if the child has a problem. If they give us background on a child, it will be very helpful."*

T1 explained that parents do not always know or understand concepts to help their children. However, they do need to make an effort to provide the support. T8 said:

"Parents definitely need to play a crucial role. Firstly, because they are paying school fees and extra when the child is retained. Remember at school we can only do so much; we are dealing with 40 children at a time. So, we need the parents to support them in every aspect by making sure the learner is doing all the homework. They must also assist the learner in reading development. They can make sure that they give four hours of schoolwork even if there is no homework. I always tell my parents there are DoBE books and they must make the children go through these books. I tell my parents when they are cooking, they must involve the child to read the recipe. When involving children like that, they will pick up all the problems, and ask questions so that they are developing comprehension skills."

It is all good and well if the parents are making the effort to support their children. Three participants namely T10, T11 and T12 mentioned that the parents are not involved. T10 said:

"Parents can get tutors who can help them at home, but I think parents' involvement is very poor as they expect teachers to make the difference."

The tutor here can serve as the mediator (Donald et al., 2007) according to the ZPD theory of Vygotsky. T12 mentioned that often what happens is that the good learners' parents come for the parents' meetings whereas the learners whose parents they really want to meet, hardly attend. No one can deny that the role of the parents is very vital in the development of the learners.

The above correlates with the ecosystem's theory by Bronfenbrenner is mentioned in Chapter 2 in the conceptual framework. These are all the other factors in the micro, macro and meso system that influence the development of the child (Donald et al., 2007). In the micro system the child needs to get the sufficient interaction and support from the parents. However, from what the teachers have mentioned above, the parents are not involved making the children's development in the micro level more challenging. This leads to the mesosystem, which is the interaction between the teachers and parents. This once again leads to a challenge since there is minimal to no interaction between the parents and the teachers. The next system according to Bronfenbrenner (Donald, et al., 2007) is the exosystem. This is the influence of external factors that exert an influence on the development of the child. These are factors such as parents' financial situation and the support provided from the DoBE.

From the interviews with the teachers they have mentioned that the socio-economic background of the learners is not the best. The parents are not very financially secure. The teachers have also mentioned that they are not getting enough support from the DoBE. Teachers have listed their requirements from the department, as mentioned above, that they need. Once again in this system the children are not getting the support that is required. The macro system is the larger system where the child has no say but the influence on the child is clearly observed. For example, it refers to the policymakers, the government of South Africa that has stipulated this policy. This policy plays a profound role in the lives of the progressed learner. As the teachers have mentioned due to this policy progressed learners are not learning. Therefore, the implementation of this policy has a big impact on the development of the child. From all the systems mentioned all of them have failed to some extent in providing support for the learners. Teachers discussed how all the systems are insufficient and do not provide the support that the children need. This is a major concern, since the child is not receiving support at any stage and it stands to reason how the child is supposed to develop and become successful.

4.6 THEME 3: CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS

All the participant listed the challenges they face in supporting progressed learners. The challenges:

- Time constraints – limited time available to support progressed learners;

- Need for training – specifically designed to deal with progressed learners;

- Large classroom size (40 or more leaners in the classroom);

- Extensive content coverage – which ties back to the inability to dwell on concepts for too long to help progressed learners;

- Too many assessments – teachers are required to have numerous assessments each term which impact the time available for teaching and support;

- Learner discipline and lack of interest;

- Academic gaps are far too wide – learners face challenges with the basics such as reading and writing, and the fundamental building blocks of pre-requisite knowledge;

- Lack of parental involvement; and

- Language barriers.

4.6.1 Sub-theme: Environmental challenges

Seven participants mentioned time constraints faced as a challenge. The teachers felt they do not have enough time to support progressed learners. They linked this with the large classroom size and extensive content. T2 pointed out that she had far too many progressed learners and so it is challenging to give individualised attention to progressed learners. Five participants said that one of the challenges is the large classroom size. If there are 40 learners or more in a classroom, it proves immensely challenging for teachers to be expected to teach new concepts, assist the progressed learners and check for understanding of all the learners. All this needs to take place in the 40 to 50 minutes of lesson time. T4 also echoed the point that:

"Time is a huge constraint as CAPS is a content demanding curriculum and therefore it is difficult for teachers to do class remedial work while also covering the curriculum content. After all, school programmes do not always work because of transport issues for learners and sometimes there is no or poor attendance by learners because of simple disinterest."

The teachers feel they must cover all the content and by doing this they do not have time to wait for all learners to catch up. This means that these learners are left behind, and the academic gap continues to increase. Participant T8 said:

"The biggest challenge is time because when you are seated with 40 learners it is very hard to teach. There is no class with less than 40 learners. If you only focus on them all the others are going to be bored and frustrated, so time is the most crucial factor. The admin periods are very few and we need to do all our admin. There is too much paperwork that teachers need to do."

The factors of time constraints, and large classrooms go hand in hand. It is due to the large classroom size that teachers feel that they do not have enough time to meet the

needs of all the learners. Many studies have shown that smaller class leads to higher student achievement, Tennessee STAR Project, Indiana's Project Prime Time and Wisconsin's SAGE Programme (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). The findings of these studies have shown that a smaller class size in the younger grades is more beneficial to learners in terms of academic achievement in reading and math. The STAR Tennessee project was a long-term study. The study began 1985 and learners were placed in smaller classes and their academic achievement was tracked. The findings were that smaller classes increased academic achievement. What is interesting to note in this study is that once the learners had completed Foundation Phase, they would go back to normal sizes classrooms. The study continued to track these learners and in 1995-96 these learners were in grade 10 and the study found that learners who were in smaller classes in the Foundation Phases still displayed high academic performance in comparison to learners who were not in smaller classes in the Foundation Phase (Biddle & Berliner, 2002). The key findings were that reduced class size shows significant improvement in academic achievement. The best results of smaller classes are when there are less than twenty learners in the classroom (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

The number of learners in a class makes a big difference in the learners' academic performance. In a South African context, the demographics of a class are such that there are both progressed learners and high achieving learners in the same class. This makes the job of the teacher to attend to the needs of all the learners all the more difficult. A decrease in classroom size would make a big difference in providing support to the progressed learners.

4.6.2 Sub-theme: Support from the department

Another key challenge, which was raised by five participants was the lack of teacher training. Teachers said they do not know how to assist progressed learners. T8 stated:

> *"Some of our teachers do not know how to support these learners so they actually need workshops. I have been to a three-day conference on differential curriculum development; it was said that there needs to be differential assessments also for these learners, but we just can't get to that. I mean how are we were supposed to draw up different assessments for all progressed learners and learners at risk. So,*

the teachers need a lot more support and training on differential curriculum and differentiated assessment."

Another teacher that mentioned differentiation was T4. She pointed out that the large classroom size makes it difficult to do differentiation and that high teacher to learner ratio – in many schools as high as 1:40 and in some schools even more, makes individual attention challenging. This also renders differentiated teaching to be much more difficult. Also, T1 mentioned lack of teacher training and time constraints. T1 went as far as saying that:

We are not qualified to help these kinds of learners, and department is not giving them the quality of education they need, they are more focused on the content and not concentrating on a learner. There is no time for us to come back and really see where the child is struggling as we have to cover up a lot of content in a curriculum.

These abovementioned constraints, embracing lack of teacher training and extensive content to cover, are a recurring view from the majority of the teachers interviewed.

4.6.3 Sub-theme: support from parents

Five participants mentioned the lack of parental involvement as a challenge. T4 said:

"A number of learners come from poor or broken homes where there is little parental involvement and no one to monitor homework or assist them with learning and tasks."

T7 brought up an interesting point, she said some parents are in denial. They do not want to accept that their children need extra support. She underscored the point that the longer the parents take to accept this fact, the more harm they are doing to their children. Taking longer to learn concepts in the classroom does not mean that the child is going to always struggle. Sometimes learners just need the extra support to help them get back on track. According to T7, parents need to be made aware of this. Some participants mentioned that even if extra classes are arranged after school learners have transport problems and therefore, they have to leave directly after school with the transport arranged for them. Forms of parental support have been discussed in sub-theme 4.4.2.

Four participants observed that progressed learners tend to be disruptive in the class, bereaving other learners of valuable teaching and learning time. T5 stated:

> *"Discipline in the classroom prevents teachers from focusing on academic issues in the classroom."*

Also, some progressed learners lose interest. As mentioned previously they feel that there is no reason for them to work hard because they will still pass at the end of the year. T4 said

> *"Learners show poor work ethic. They refuse to be helped and do not complete given activities. They do not make an effort to improve."*

T5 held the view that these learners become bored in the classroom as they do not understand the concepts being taught, for example the learners who are still struggling to read and are in Grade 6 are unlikely to succeed in completing the activities expected of them. This will lead to frustration which will cause them to become disruptive. One participant said that the academic gaps are too big to help the learner in the classroom. For instance, some learners in Grade 5 and 6 still cannot read and so need to go back to phonics. However, there is not enough time to do this.

Parental involvement in the education of their children is an important factor to increase the quality of education (Drissen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2004). Parents need to be motivated to be constructively involved in the education of their children. Parents need the motivation to be part of the education process and overcome contextual factors such as time and energy (Green, Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Walker, 2007). The study by Green et al. (2007) wished to see the factors that influence parental motivation. The main thing was parents needed to feel involved and were willing to attend all school events and assist their children at home. Parents needed almost like an invitation and they would become involved.

Drissen et al. (2004) came up with six forms of parental involvement, between the parents and the school. Firstly, in connection with parenting, schools must help parents create home environments that encourage their children's development. Secondly, development requires communication as schools must inform all parents of the school calendar as well as of the children's academic performance. This information should be accessible to all parents. Thirdly, there is volunteering; parents help during school events, like celebrations and fund raisers. Fourthly, there is learning at home; this involves parents giving the extra support, or clarification of concepts and helping with homework. The fifth aspect involves decision-making. This is the

involvement of parents in the decision-making and management of the school, like the SGB. The last form is collaborating with the community, making use of community resources for the benefit of the school and learners.

Schools should attempt to implement such forms of parental involvement and parents should be motivated to take an interest in their children's education this could help with more parents being involved and in turn progressed learners have support system as home to help bridge the learning gap.

4.7 THEME 4: FORMS OF SUPPORT PUT IN PLACE

As mentioned earlier, the SIAS policy was put in place to ensure that learners get the support they need. The process of the policy has been stipulated in Chapter 2. Participants were asked, "To what extent has the SIAS policy been implemented at the school?" All participants acknowledged that the policy has been implemented, however, there are varying views on the effectiveness of the policy implementation. The SIAS policy requires certain steps to be followed so that the desired outcomes are met. The teacher is required to fill out the SNA 1 and 2 forms and the department is then required to come in to perform a screening. However, ten of the participants said that the department is not following through with this requirement. T10 indicated that even if the forms are filled in and sent to the DoBE, the forms tend to get misplaced or the department is slow to respond. T10 noted that in some instances, T10 had not received a response for over a year.

T8 however, held a contradictory view saying that the SIAS policy was indeed highly effective and had been fully implemented at the school. T8 went further to point out that the school ensured that every learner who was at risk had an SNA form which was completed by all the teachers of the grade who teach the learner. T8 pointed out that the school ensures that all the other information required from the parents is also obtained during first academic term when the learners' report cards are handed out, and that the parents have to sign the SNA forms each term. Teachers also have meetings with parents and additional meetings for parents of progressed learners to tell them that their child is at risk. T8 emphasises that the school does not only complete SNA 1 forms, but also completes SNA 2 where individual support plans per child are also developed. Ultimately however, T8 concluded that despite the school's

commitment to the process, only two children have been screened in three years, and the screening process, and the processes from that point forward are not effective.

The responses of the teachers indicated that they were doing their best to remain compliant with the SIAS policy, however response and support from the Department of Education is not forthcoming.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, all schools are required to form an SBST (school-based support team). The purpose of this team is to ensure that the learners that need support are recognised and are receiving the necessary support. The participants were asked if their school's SBST is effective. Seven participants clearly said that the SBST is not effective in their school. T3 said:

"The SBST gives too much paperwork without evident progress. They are promising referrals and retentions without much effect. The idea of assisting the learners is basically on us teachers and we teachers have minimal resources."

The participant felt that there were no evident results from all the added work which was done by the teachers. T10 echoed the sentiment that the SBST was not highly effective and went on to say that the SBST focused primarily on providing guidance. T1 expressed strong views about the ineffectiveness of the SBST and held the view that, *"They are not making any difference."* Another participant felt that while the SBST was not entirely effective, meetings did indeed take place and teachers were also informed of the need for remedial actions. The participant also indicated that the SBST also assisted in contacting the educational psychologists to assess learners identified through the process, and in developing remedial programmes such as winter school support programmes in the mid-year holidays. The participant did, however, point out that the SBST was not able to provide guidance or support on challenges pertaining to time constraints or solutions pertaining to providing further interventions.

It is evident from the responses received to these questions that the majority of the teachers held the view that while the SBST did make an effort to support the process, the SBST was not a highly effective structure, in that the SBST was not always able to provide practical suggestions to challenges.

4.7.1 Sub-theme: Best means of support

Participants were asked what can be done to ensure that the progressed learners are catered for in the best way possible. Seven of the participants suggested having a remedial class in the school for learners who face challenges in keeping up with the content in the normal classroom. Such remedial classes should facilitate the one-on-one interaction these learners need in order to improve, and such interactions are not always possible in the normal classroom setting. Once the learner has bridged the gaps they can then come back to the normal classroom. T1 said:

"Every school needs to have a remedial class that will help the learners."

T2 said:

"Every phase needs to have remedial classes where they can get special attention as we as teachers in class do not have enough time to assist each individual."

T4 provided a number of suggestions

"Each progressed learner should be thoroughly screened to ascertain whether progressing or retaining the learner would be to their benefit before just progressing them. Have an extra remedial/intervention class where a trained remedial teacher can work with the learners who are struggling to cope. Have a special 'bridging' class for a year, where a trained teacher helps to 'bridge' the gaps in the learners' knowledge from the previous grade to the next so that the learner will be able to cope in the next grade of the following year. For example, if learners in Grade 3 have to be progressed to Grade 4, before progressing they will be part of the bridging class the next year and then progress to Grade 4 the year after."

Once again, the concept of remedial classes surfaces as a recurring suggestion from a number of the participants. Participant T9 suggested that perhaps students should be progressed after two attempts in a grade rather than one, as is the current policy. The participant felt that an additional attempt at the year may improve the learners' results in future years. The participant was, however, not able to articulate a view on what the outcome would be if the learner continued to fail to meet passing grades even after a second attempt in the grade.

In summary, while there were some varied views on the best method to support progressed learners, all suggestions pointed towards some form of remedial classes

or bridging classes which involved either supplementing the progressed learners learning, or removing such learners from the class and providing them with individualised support in a separate classroom for progressed learners.

4.7.2 Sub-theme: Alternative methods

From the earlier interview questions, it became evident that the participants were not very supportive of the policy. Teachers were therefore asked for their opinions on whether alternative methods to progression and retention, and whether the policy should be changed.

Ten participants answered in the affirmative, unequivocally that the current policy should be changed. As a general theme, responses indicated that the participants were in favour of retention, but with the resolution of some practical challenges such as the provision of additional classrooms, additional and well-trained teachers, and additional support materials. T10 expressed a strong view that:

"Learners should be kept back until they are getting proper support as they are wasting their time and resources."

T5 said:

"*Yes, we need to consider how learners can be supported to learn and not merely pass."*

T3 said:

"*There needs to be a change in the current policy because it is not benefitting the learners; government may look out for multiple ideas for example: opening technical schools".*

T2 said in rather simple yet effective words:

"*Yes, it is not working in the benefit of the learners in general."*

Participant T9 said:

"Definitely, as I am saying the retention part should be emphasised. Teachers must be able to retain more learners, but because of the classroom size, the department should provide classrooms and more teachers, and we should have the facilities that when a learner is progressed they should have full support by having outside

educators or having LSE who are full-time helping those learners. When they go to the next class even if progressed, they are able to do well."

Participant T11 brought up a rather interesting point he said

"Yes, quality over quantity. Learners do not deserve to be in the grade. Effects at tertiary level Look at the number of first-year dropouts; it all starts from here. We are encouraging them not to work hard. Fine 40% is fine then if there are too many who have 30%, the department will do a block adjustment also at matric level. This is an unfair mark, but they are passing the grade and go through the system, but it is an unfair reflection."

T11 held the strong view that learners keep on going to the next grade so both learners and parents believe that the learner is doing fine, and if the learner does eventually get to a tertiary institution where the standards do not allow for progression, then the learner is unlikely to succeed. So, the policy is not just setting up learners for failure in schools, but also for tertiary school.

In the study by Nalova (2016) teachers were asked if they think the policy for collective promotion needs to be revised. The majority of the teachers were of the opinion that the policy needs to be revised. Grade retention was deemed to have negative impacts on the learner, it decreases the learner's self-confidence, and was the main reason for the high drop-out rate (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Social promotion on the other hand was deemed to have a less negative impact on the learner.

However, the downfall of social promotion is that it frustrates learners, because they are not ready for that grade. Learners get the impression that they do not need to work hard, and teachers are compelled to deal with learners who are prepared for the grade as well as those who are not. It leads to parents having false hope that their children are coping with school and these learners will come into society and not be prepared (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Hence, there are major downfalls for both grade retention and social progression. According to Picklo and Christenson (2005) researchers believe the best means to deal with this is by identifying learners at risk of failure early in the year and providing the necessary support throughout the year. Means of support provided should be both in the classroom and as a school. (Picklo & Christenson, 2005) have formulated four strategies that can be implemented to improve teaching and learning and by so doing decrease learner retention. The first

strategy is to improve teacher development; teachers should have the skills to provide support for the needs of all learners in the class. Secondly the school should make recognisable attempts at providing intervention strategies. These intervention strategies should be accessible to struggling learners. Lastly, the idea is to conduct assessments that inform teaching. If appropriate means to reduce retention are implemented, then this would lead to decrease in progressed learners, as all learners would be getting the appropriate support to meet academic requirements.

This is a means of bringing learner to the required standards and not lowering the standards completely. Lastly the participants were asked to share their final thoughts about the progression of learners. From the responses it was evident that the teachers genuinely care for the learners and want the best for them. Participant T7 said:

> *"Learners need our support and love for them to develop their potential to the full. We need to focus more on remediating the problems experienced for learners to realise their maximum potential. Our focus must be for all learners to succeed and achieve at their own pace. They need to acquire necessary skills to prepare them to be responsible adults and future leaders."*

T1 said something similar:

> *"I hope all of us involved in the education can find ways together to make these learners' life successful."*

Teachers indicated that they realised the problem, and this is affecting the learners in the long run. Teachers had some strong sentiments as well. Many teachers saying that the government needs to relook at the policy. Participant T6 said:

> *"The South African department of education needs to relook at the policy as they are causing an injustice to the learners."*

Participant T9 said:

> *"Things are getting very bad. As you are aware the new policy came out where Grade 9 is the exit grade. I understand because learners are not making it in Grade 10, 11, 12 but the thing is that all our quality and level at which the children should be in is all dropping. In Grade 7, 8 and 9, learners can get 10% in Maths and they are passed, condoned passed at 10%. We are sending children to high school who*

have completely failed Maths. In the end we are going to be a whole nation of literate people without the literacy."

Participant T4 also had some bold sentiments she said:

"The policy on progression can negatively impact learners and their future. Schooling is being viewed as a joke where the learner will eventually pass. The value of schooling and gaining knowledge is being lost and learners will eventually leave school without gaining valuable skills and knowledge to become respected citizens of our country."

She has made some bold statements that the learners do no not have work ethics and rather prefer to sit around and not attempt to learn because they know that at the end of the year they are still going to the next grade. However, they may be too young to understand the implications of this, and when they do realise it, it will be too late.

Participant T4 said:

"When learners are progressed, it is not a true reflection of the learners' performance. The standard of education is dropped low and teachers are expected to cover a demanding and prescriptive curriculum at a stipulated pace rather than at the pace of the learners. The DoBE does not retain learners unless effective remedial steps can be proven. Teachers do not have the time to do effective remedial which means many learners are pushed through from grade to grade."

Another participant held the view that the standard of education has reduced as a result of progression. Nalova (2005) found that teachers in general had negative feelings towards the automatic promotion of learners. They felt that slow learners should not be promoted automatically. They should be given time to learn the concepts. Automatic promotion should only be accepted if the learner showed improvement and passed at least two terms. For collective promotion to be successful there is a great need for the establishment of intervention strategies.

A study done on automatic promotion in the region of Punjab in India found similar findings of teachers not being supportive of such a policy (Chohan & Qadir, 2011). The findings of this study were that teachers were not in support of automatic progression as good practice. Teachers in this study found that due to this policy teachers felt helpless as they were not able to say which learners were prepared to go to the next

grade. They felt that they were professionals and knew better the capabilities of the learners. Teachers also felt that there was no distinction between the hardworking learners and the poor students. At the end they would all pass so there was no motivation to work hard. Teachers showed a great concern for learners who are not ready for the next grade. The feared that automatic progressed learners would reach high school and be completely unprepared. Automatically promoted learners do not show any improvement in the next grade. Learners cannot master such skills in a year they need more time. Teachers said that weaker learners suffer with such a policy as they are not receiving the necessary skills when going to the next grade. They then further fall behind then their classmates.

Chohan and Qadir (2011) found in their study that teachers were in favour of automatic progression. They believe that it decreases the dropout rate. This could be beneficial to children who come from poor backgrounds. If parents saw that their children were failing continuously, they would take them out of the school system, as they would feel that they are wasting money. But if the parents saw that there was value and even if their children were not doing well, they could see that they were progressing through the grades they would try their best to keep them in school. Keeping children in school is better than joining the work force at a young age. Due to automatic progression there is less retention, and this of course makes place for new learners to join the school system. Lastly the findings found that it helps learners to have a positive self-image. Having failed a grade can cause a learner to feel inadequate in comparison to others; they may suffer from an inferiority complex.

This study by Chohan and Qadir (2011) found some views of teachers similar to the findings of this study. With regard to teachers' views and the effect on the academic progress of the learners, it was found that failing grade impacts the learners negatively since they feel inadequate. Teachers also mentioned the benefits of automatic progression which are noteworthy. They agreed that progressing learners help learners to be positive (Chohan & Qadir, 2011).

4.8 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In summary, teachers held the strong view that alternatives to the current policy must indeed be explored. Teachers strongly favoured retention of learners as they held strong views based on their experiences that progression is detrimental to the learner

in the long run, and also has far-reaching consequences on the quality of thinking of the citizens who are the product of the policy. While the participants were strong in their views on the policy, other than retention, and remediation, there were not many other strong alternatives proposed. The next chapter shares the conclusions and recommendations to the study.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored the forms of support progressed learners received at schools. The policy of promotion and retention in South Africa have been in the limelight for quite some time. The researcher aimed to explore the opinions and concerns of teachers in relation to support for progressed learners. After all, they are the individuals who interact closely with such learners, and those surrounding progressed learners on a daily basis and their thoughts are informed by practice. The data collected from the teachers gave an in-depth understanding of the experiences of teachers. At this point it is necessary to refer to the research question of this study (Chapter 1)

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questiions are briefly answered next.

Main research question

How do schools support progressed learners in Intermediate and Senior Phase?

It was found that learners suffered because of a lack of attention due to the large numbers per class. The support provided, while limited, was mainly the mandatory support which is required under the SIAS policy. Few schools went above and beyond these mandatory requirements. There was a need for additional support and specialised input to assist with remedial lessons as well as out of school learning programmes.

Research sub-questions

- *What support do progressed learners need in order to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes in the Intermediate/Senior Phase?*
  Teachers need the DoBE to provide more staff members so that teachers can apply differentiation and help learners individually in accordance with their

needs. Furthermore, specialised staff can be incorporated to help learners with their academic challenges.

- *How are the current policies on support for progressed learners implemented in primary schools?*

  Staff employ the guidelines, but it was clear that they were not always so confident of the policy guidelines. They need additional training and support. The SIAS policy is implemented at a school level however, the policy is not implemented at a district level.

- *What are the complexities/challenges involved in supporting progressed learners in the Intermediate/Senior Phases?*

  Learners who are merely progressed without having mastered all the requirements, do not comprehend what is taught in the next phase which causes them to fall behind even more. Participants mentioned several challenges they face such as large number of learners in the class, lack of teacher training, lack of support from the Department, lack of parental involvement and extensive curriculum coverage.

- *How do the teachers address the identified complexities/challenges involved in supporting progressed learners in the Intermediate/Senior Phase?*

  Teachers endeavour to provide individual attention even though it is not quite possible with all the learners in the class, especially those with very high numbers.

Furthermore, the research set out to understand what support was made available both in and outside of the classroom, in order to help progressed learners to meet the promotional requirements of each grade. The findings of this research show that there are support measures put in place in the form of the SIAS policy and the SBST committee. However, the research found that these measures are not enough to support progressed learners. There are several challenges that teachers face that need to be addressed in order to enable teachers to provide the best support to progressed learners.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The four themes that were discussed at length in chapter 3 are as follows in the table below.

Table 5.1: Emerging themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub- themes
1. Teachers' regards towards the policy	1.1 Teachers' opinions on the efficacy of the policy. 1.2 The broader effects of the policy on learners 1.3 The effectiveness of the policy in achieving learning.
2. Needs of the progressed learners	2.1 Support in the classroom 2.2 Forms of external support
3. Challenges faced by teachers	3.1 Environmental challenges 3.2 Support from department 3.3 Support from parents
4. Forms of support put in place	4.1 Best means of support. 4.2 Alternative methods

There are several recommendations that have emerged from this study. Firstly, many teachers believed that having a remedial class at school would be highly beneficial. Learners who have a wide academic gap can go to the remedial classes and with the one-on-one attention from the teacher as well as teaching at the pace of the learner, the learner will be able to bridge the academic gap. With this in place, teachers believe no child will be left behind. If this is in place learners will not reach Grade 5 and still struggle to read. This recommendation is in line with theme 2, and it focuses on the needs of the progressed learners. Teachers stated that progressed learners need individualised attention as well as teachers who teach the curriculum at a pace that the learners are able to follow. In a remedial class there will be less learners, which will allow for individual attention. In a remedial class these needs of the progressed learners will be met.

Moreover, teachers mentioned that they do not have enough time during normal class time to support these learners, especially if the knowledge gap is rather wide. It is evident from the emotive nature of the teachers' responses that teachers do want to support the learners however, the challenges that teachers have raised are serious and this does make their jobs rather difficult. The UNESCO report (UNESCO, 2014) mentions an accelerated learning programme which produced promising results, as

stated in Chapter 2. Remedial classes support the same concept as the accelerated learning programmes. This form of intervention would be very beneficial to the South African schooling system.

Another point that was raised by the participants was that of teacher training. This recommendation is in line with theme 2 and 3. If teachers are more equipped with the skills necessary to provide the support for all learners with different needs then this would help with meeting the needs of progressed learners. Teachers felt that they do not know how best to support progressed learners. Teachers mentioned differentiation, a method of tailoring teaching to learning ability of the learner, as a possible solution. However, the participants felt that they needed specific training on this. A recommendation would be for the department to facilitate professional development on differentiated teaching and assessment. While many of the teachers that were interviewed have been teaching for over twenty years, they also reiterated the need for training as the methods of teaching and learning have changed over the years. The study done by Suprayogi et al., (2017) also mentions the need for professional development on differentiation.

The lack of teacher training is one of the challenges faced by teachers in providing support for progressed learners, this is in line with theme 3. Teachers indicated that they were aware of the problem, the lack of support being provided, and they were willing to assist the learners, however, they stated that they cannot do this unless they are given the best training.

The following recommendations are in line with theme 3, the challenges faced by teachers in providing support for progressed learners.

Several teachers mentioned that the classroom size ratio of one teacher to forty or more learners is very high. This causes challenges for the teacher who has to pay attention to all the learners. The teacher is expected to teach all the learners as well as provide the necessary support for progressed learners and bridge their academic gap. This is hard to achieve in the short time span. It is also noteworthy to mention here that the teachers interviewed felt that there are many learners in the class that need the extra attention. There are many learners in a class of forty that need the extra help and there are at least 11 to 15 learners who are below the academic requirement for that grade. This makes the provision of support even more challenging. It would be

ideal if the learner to teacher ratio was less. The study by Biddle and Berliner (2002) found that learners in smaller classrooms in the Foundation Phase did better academically even if they were moved to bigger classes in the Intermediate Phase. In South Africa funding is not always accessible therefore even if Foundation Phase classes are smaller there will be an increase in academic improvement.

The lack of parental involvement was another challenge that the teachers faced. The SGB can try to arrange workshop where parents are invited to learn different ways in which they can provide the best support to their children. The SGB can initiate a reward system for the most involved parents. The school at large can get involved in extracurricular activities, such as reading clubs and book clubs. This would help many learners to improve their reading skills. A good initiative to make good readers is the Nalibali reading programme. The programme provides many resources in many languages to help improve children's reading and comprehension skills. The SGB can drive such initiatives which are low cost and can involve the whole community. As the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child". Therefore, the whole community as well as parents need to become involved to support all children in their learning and personal development.

Another point that teachers had raised was that of the extensive curriculum. Teachers felt that there was too much content that needed to be covered. Due to this they are unable to ensure that all the learners have understood the concepts. They must carry on teaching otherwise they will not be able to complete the curriculum in time. This causes the academic gap in learners as they are unable to keep up with the new content when they have not mastered the content taught earlier. Curriculum developers should look at ways to reduce the curriculum to ensure that all learners are able to keep up.

Another recommendation would be to reduce the number of assessments. In languages there are at least 9 to 12 assessments per term. Teachers mentioned that there are far too many assessments which affects teaching time negatively. Teachers opined that this time can be used to teach concepts. Instead of teaching just to assess, it would be more meaningful to teach concepts until learners have understood the knowledge.

These recommendations are aligned with theme 4, forms of support that have been put in place. Teachers mentioned that they have implemented the SIAS policy and have been following the procedure of completing the SNA forms. However, they follow procedures required by the SIAS policy, where the department needs to perform the screening and provide the external support that the learner would need, and these do not appear to be executed efficiently. Teachers then do not see the need of such a policy if all the procedures are not being followed. The policy is not effective if all the stakeholders do not play their part in providing the learners with the necessary support. The SIAS policy has been implemented by the department of education however, the DoBE of that district has not been following through with the policy.

As the teachers have mentioned that the policy is doing more harm than good to the learners, it may be time to look at an alternative approach or how the policy could be amended to include the experiences and warning signs as indicated by the participants of this study. If the policy is not going to be changed then at least the forms of support made available must be of real significance. Teachers in this study made it clear that the support the learners are receiving now is not sufficient. Therefore, it becomes necessary to ensure that learners receive support that is meaningful and continuous. All stakeholders such as parents and the DoBE need to provide all the necessary support that the learner needs.

5.4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The conceptual framework was an integration of two theories, the constructivist theory embracing the ZPD by Vygotsky and the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner. As discussed in Chapter 2 the ZPD is the place where a child learns new knowledge, moves from known knowledge to unknown knowledge by support of the more knowledgeable caregiver or peer (Chaiklin, 2003). This is done with the help of a mediator. In the case of learning at school the mediator is the teacher. From the data collected teachers have said that they need training to support learners. The process of ZPD then would not be very effective as the mediator (teachers) feel that they are not well equipped to assist progressed learners.

Learning does not happen in vacuum there are many factors that influence the learning or development of a child. The ecological systems theory consists of different layers

that influence the development of the child (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The challenges that teachers face as discussed in Chapter 3 are aligned with the ecological systems theory. The large classroom size, or lack of teacher training, or lack of support from the department of education, have a great influence on the learning and development of the learner. However, all of these factors form part of the exosystem. They have a direct impact on the learner, but the learner has no control over this system. For example, the number of learners in the classroom have an impact on the learner in terms of access to individual attention. However, the learner does not have any control over this factor. The need for this theory in this study is to understand all these factors that play a role in the development of the learner. If these factors are understood then parents, teachers and policymakers can make informed decisions to best support the learners.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As much as qualitative research was the best approach to this study, there are some limitations to qualitative research. According to Atieno (2009) a major drawback of qualitative research is the findings cannot be generalised to a wide group of people. The findings of this study might not be the same if tested in another district. The findings can, however, be transferred to a similar context.

The sample size of this study, comprising 12 teachers is a very small sample size in comparison to the number of intermediate and senior phase teachers in South Africa. Therefore, the findings in this study are not the views and experiences of all Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers. The situation and scenarios may be different for schools in another district. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be applicable to all teachers or all school contexts, depending on their availability of resources, teacher experience and commitments. Each school is different and to generalise all schools under the same banner would not be appropriate.

A recommendation for further studies would be to have a bigger sample size. The study can be carried out nationwide. This would help in identifying the needs of progressed learners and the challenges faced by teachers in providing support. If this is done on a large scale, then it would give the department of education enough information to draw up an intervention programme that can assist both teachers and learners. By doing this, we can ensure that all learners are given the support that they

require and so that they are able to access the education system in the best way possible.

5.6 CLOSING REMARKS

This study found that teachers are not pleased with the policy and they believe that it is doing more harm to the learners than good. Progressed learners are not learning and are merely just passing or being pushed through the grades. Not enough support is being provided to the learners contributing to them being left further behind. Teachers shared the numerous challenges they face in terms of large classroom sizes, large number of learners requiring support, the extensive curriculum, lack of support from the DoBE, lack of parental involvement, the high number of assessments as challenges, which have all been discussed at length in chapter four. The SIAS policy that has been put in place is not being implemented properly, meaning that the progressed learners are not receiving the support as envisaged by the policy. Teachers are of the opinion that they are doing their part to abide by the policy, but the DoBE is not complying.

There is a dire need for intervention. Currently progressed learners are receiving limited support and it is not enough to help them bridge their academic gaps. The problem in accordance with the teacher participants is that learners will be progressed to high school and still not be able to read, write or comprehend texts. This is a big issue, since if learners are not provided with the support, they will not have learned anything. The system would have failed them and without the basic skills of reading and writing the learner will not succeed outside the school. One can only imagine the impact of this on the life of the individual in terms of finding jobs and contributing to the economy. Therefore, it is crucial that solid forms of support are implemented in schools, so that all learners are have equal access to education and are able to become contributing citizens of South Africa.

In conclusion, this study found while there are merits in a policy of progression, teachers at the forefront of the implementation of the policy are of the opinion that the policy is ineffective. The primary deficiency exists in the lack of support structures for these progressed learners, given that there are a number of broader challenges weighing down the will of teachers to support learners. In short, the pursuit of a fair and balanced system supporting educational outcomes is yet a long way from fruition.

The perseverance of teachers, however, continues to shine through in their daily actions.

5.7 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to understand the different forms of support that had been implemented in primary schools in order to support progressed learners and more especially to understand the challenges that arise in providing such support. It has become evident that progressed learners are not receiving the necessary support to assist them to pass the grade on their own merit instead of passing due to progression. Teachers raised several challenges that they face in order to provide this essential support. The recommendations made in this study may alleviate some of these challenges. The study found that there is merit in the conception of the progression policy however, progressing learners without providing the necessary support is doing more harm than good. The study therefore argues that there is a need for meaningful and rigid forms of support to be provided to progressed learners in order to ensure that the school progression policy is made effective.

6. REFERENCE LIST

Atieno, O.P. 2009. An Analysis of the Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Paradigms . *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 13:13-18.*

Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D. R., & Dauber, S.L. 2003. On the Success of Failure, A Reassessment of the Effects of Retention in the Primary Grades. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Beere, B. 2017. Progression without support. *Inclusive education South Africa.*

Biddle, B.B. 2002. Small Class Size and Its Effects. *Educational Leadership 59(5):12-23.*

Bojuwoye, O., Moletsane, M., Stofile, S., Moolla, N. & Sylvester, F. 2014. Learners' experiences of learning support in selected Western Cape Schools. *South African Journal of education*, 34(1):1-15.

Bos, K., Howie, S. & Plomp, T. 2003. Common diversity: TIMSS-1999 findings from a national perspective. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 29:169-175.

Bouma, G., Ling, R. & Wilkinson, L. 2009. The Research Process. Canada: Oxford University Press.

Burnard, P. 1991. A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research. *Nurse Education Today*, 11(6):461-466.

Chaiklin, S. 2003. The Zone of Proximal Developement in Vygotsky's Analysis of Learning and Instruction. In: Kozulin, B. Gindis, V. S. Ageyev, & S. M. Miller, *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Chohan, B.Qadir, S. 2011. Automatic Promotion Policy at Primary Level and MDG-2. *Journal of Research and Reflection in Education*, 5(1): 1-20.

Creswell, J. 2007. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. London: Sage Publications.

Delehunt, B., & Magurie, M. 2017. Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Learning and teaching in Higher Education. 9(3):* 351-364.

Department of Basic Education. 2011. National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 .[Online] Available from: https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Policies/PolicyProgPromReqNCS.pdf?ver=2015-02-03-154857-397 [Downloaded: 2018-03-25].

Department of Basic Education. 2014.Policy on Screening, identification, assessment and support [Online] Available from https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/Specialised-ed/documents/SIAS-2014.pdf [Downloaded:2018-04-05].

Department of Basic Education. 2017. DoBE: Basic Education on policy on progression and policy on multiple examination opportunity. *Polity* [Online] Available from https://www.polity.org.za/article/dbe-basic-education-on-policy-on-progression-and-policy-on-multiple-examination-opportunity-2017-10-31 [Downloaded:2020-01-20].

Donald, D., Lazarus, S., & Lolwana, P. 2007. Understanding Human Development, *Educational Psychology in Social Context*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Driessen, G.S. 2005. Parental Involvement and Educational Achievement. *British Educational Research Journal,* 31(4):509-532.

Edwards, V. 2013. *Telling tales: The story of the Nal'ibali readaing for enjoyment supplements.* Cape Town: PRAESA.

Etikan, I., Musa, S., Alkassim. R., 2016 Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*. 5(1):1-4.

Fink, A. 2000. The Role of the Researcher in the Qualitative Research Process. A Potentail Barrier to Archiving Qualitative Data. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 1(3).*

Fluke, S., O'Connor, A., Hoff, N., & Peterson, R.L. 2014. Academic Support, Strategy Brief. Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education [Online] Available from. http://k12engagement.unl.edu/academic-supports. [Downloaded 2019-10-27].

Gilfeather, S. 2018. Ready to learn: 5 strategies to help students with learning differences improve their focus. *Education Dive*.[Online] Avialable from: https://www.educationdive.com/news/ready-to-learn-5-strategies-to-help-students-with-learning-differences-imp/521005/ [Downloaded 2020-01-08].

Green, C.Hoover-Dempsy, K Sandler, H Walker, J. 2007. Parents' Motivation for Involvement in Children's Education: An Emerical Test of a Theoretical Model of Parent Involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99(3):532-544.

Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, 1989 Y.S Fourth generation evaluation, Newbury Park: *Sage*.

Hans, G. N. 2014. Addressing the Needs of Underachieving Students in an Extended Programme. Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa.[Online] Available from http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/5120 [Accessed:2019-10-20].

Holton, J. 2010. The Coding Process and Its challenges. *ResearchGate*, 20-42.[Online] Available from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2010/04/02/the-coding-process-and-its-challenges/ [Accessed: 2019-04-05].

Hughes, G. 2007. Using blended learning to increase learner support and improve retention. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 12(3):349-363.

Jansen, J. 1999. The school curriculum since apartheid: Intersections of politics and policy in the South African transition. Curriculum Studies. [Online] Available

from https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/131/Jansen%20%281999%29a.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y [Accessed:2019-05-05].

Jovanova-Mitkovska, S. 2010. The need for continuous professional teacher development. *Procedia Social and Behaviour Sciences 2*, 2921-2926.[Online] Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238384666_The_need_of_continuous_professional_teacher_development [Accessed:2020-01-20].

Kader, I. 2012. *Challenges of grade promotion and progression in outcomes-based education among educators of grade ten learners in the Western Cape. A case study of Emmerose Secondary School*. Unpublished thesis. University of Western Cape. [Online] Available from https://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11394/4050/Kader_MPA_2012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. [Accessed:2019-06-09].

Koppensteiner, M.F. 2014. Automatic grade promotion and student performance: Evidence from Brazil. *Journal of Development Economics*,107:277-290.

LaCava, P., Richard, S.,Priciasa Sampson, G. 2004. The No Child Left Behind Act:Challenges and Implications for Educators. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 67-75.

Lessing, A.D. 2007. The value of continuous professional developement: teachers' perceptions. *South African Journal of Education* 27(1):53-67.

Martin, A.J. 2011. Holding back and holding behind: Grade retention and students' non-academic and academic outcomes. British Educational Research Journal, 37(5):739-764.

Matiwane, Z. 2015 Teachers slam policy of promoting learners who've failed. *The Daily Vox*. [Online] Available from https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/teachers-slam-policy-of-promoting-learners-whove-failed/ [Accessed:2018-05-20].

Maton, K. 2013. Making semantic waves: A key to cumulative knowledge-building. *Linguistics and Education*, 24(1):8-22.

McIntosh, P.D. 1996. The Impact of Grade Retention on k-5 Elementary Students: Perceptions of Educators in State Served by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. *Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association.* Alabama: ERIC.

McLeod, S. 2019. *What Is The Zone of Proximal Developement.* Simply Psychology. [Online] Available from https://www.simplypsychology.org/Zone-of-Proximal-Development.html. [Downloaded:2020-02-16].

Merriam, S.B. 2009. *Qualitative Research A guide to Design and Implementation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spires, J. 2002. Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. International Institute for Qualitative Methodology. 1(2):13-23.

Motshekga, A. 2012. Ave. performance in Grade 9 maths ANA 13% - Angie Motshekga. from Politicsweb: [Online] Available from http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71656?oid=344529&sn=Detail [Accessed:2018-05-12].

Munje, P.M. 2016. A capability analysis on the implementation of the school progression policy and its impact on learner performance. *Journal of Education,* 66:186-206.

Nalova, M. 2016. Teachers Perception and Practice of Automatic Performance in English Speaking Primary Schools in Cameroon . *British Journal of Eucation,* 4(11):11-23.

Nicholls, C. 2011. *Advantages of using qualitative research methods* Alexander Technique College:[Online] Available from http://www.alexander-technique-college.com/files/2011/10/books_articles_qualitative.pdf [Accessed:2018-04-29].

Nkosi, B. M. 2019,. Progressed learners policy must go. *Pretoria News.*[Online] Available from https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/pretoria-news/20190108/281573766834104 [Accessed: 2019-05-20].

Paquette, D. & Ryan, J. 2001. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Oxford: Oxford university Press.

Picklo, D.C. 2005. Alternatives to Retention and Social Promotion The Availability of Instructional Options. *Remedial and Special Education.*26(5):258-268.

Okurut, J. 2015. Examining the Effect of Automatic Promotion on Students' Learning Achievements in Uganda's Primary Education. *World Journal of Education*, 5(5):85- 100.

Reddy, v., Hannan, S., Zuze-Wilcox, L., & Juan, A. 2016. Spotlight on Matric 2015: Is our education system failing our learners?.[Online] Available from http://repository.hsrc.ac.za/bitstream/handle/20.500.11910/9817/9257.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed: 2019-04-20].

Samoff, J. 1999. No Teacher Guide, No Textbooks, No Chairs: Contending with crisis in African Education. *Prepared for presentation at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association.* Philadelphia, U.S Department of Education.

Smith, D.W. 2018. Phenomenology. *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. California: Metaphysics Research Lab Stanford University. [Online] Available from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/ [Accessed: 2018-09-12].

Soudien, C. 2007. The "A" factor: Coming to terms with the question of legacy in South African education. *International Journal of Education Development*. 27(2):182-193.

Spaull, N. 2013. *South Africa's Education Crisis: The quality of education in South Africa 1994-2011.* Centre for Development and Enterprise.

Spreen, C.A. & Vally, S. 2010. Prospects and pitfalls: A review of post-apartheid education policy research and analysis in South Africa. *Comparative Education,* 46(4):*429-448.*

Stearns, E., Moller, S., Blau, J., & Potochnick, S. 2007. Staying Back and Dropping Out: The Relationship Between Grade Retention and School Dropout. *Sociology of Education.* 80:210-240.

Suprayogi, M., Godwin, R.& Vackle, M. 2017. Teachers and their implementation of differentiated instruction in the classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67:291-301.

South Africa. 1996. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, substituted by s. 1 (1) of the Citation of Constitutional Laws, 2005 (Act No. 5 of 2005) [Online] Available from https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SAConstitution-web-eng.pdf [Downloaded: 2020-01-20].

South Africa. 1996. South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (s 1). [Online] Available from https://pestalozzi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/SOUTH-AFRICAN-SCHOOLS-ACT-and-Regulations.pdf [Downloaded: 2019-05-08].

Taylor, N. 2008. What's Wrong with South African Schools. *Presentation to the Conference: What's working in school development.* JET Education services.

Teke, Z.M. 2015. *Sadtu: Stop passing failures.* Retrieved from IOL: [Online] Available from https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/sadtu-stop-passing-failures-1809788 [Accessed: 2018-03-20].

Turner, S.L. 2011. Student-Cantered Instruction: Integrating the Learning Sciences to Support Elementary and Middle School Learners. *Preventing School Failure,* 55(3):123-131.

UNESCO. (2014). *Teaching and Learning: achieving quality for all.* Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.[Online] Available from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225660 [Downloaded: 2018-03-07].

Villette, F. 2016. The effects of apartheid's unequal education system can still be felt today. *Independent Online* [Online] Avialable from https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/the-effects-of-apartheids-unequal-education-system-can-still-be-felt-today-2035295 [Accessed: 2020-02-15].

Vinz, S. (2019). Sample theoretical framework of a dissertation. *Scribbr* [Online] Avialable from https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/theoretical-framework-example/ [Accessed:2019-06-20].

APPENDIX A: Ethics approval from UP

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Ethics Committee
24 July 2019

Ms Megha Brahmbhatt

Dear Brahmbhatt

REFERENCE: EM 19/05/01

This letter serves to confirm that your application was carefully considered by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. The final decision of the Ethics Committee is that your application has been **approved** and you may now start with your data collection. The decision covers the entire research process and not only the days that data will be collected. The approval is valid for two years for a Masters and three for Doctorate.

The approval by the Ethics Committee is subject to the following conditions being met:
1. The research will be conducted as stipulated on the application form submitted to the Ethics Committee with the supporting documents.
2. Proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research must be submitted where relevant.
3. In the event that the research protocol changed for whatever reason the Ethics Committee must be notified thereof by submitting an amendment to the application (Section E), together with all the supporting documentation that will be used for data collection namely; questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedules, for further approval before data can be collected. Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void. The changes may include the following but are not limited to:
   - Change of investigator,
   - Research methods any other aspect therefore and,
   - Participants
   - Sites

The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.

Upon completion of your research you will need to submit the following documentations to the Ethics Committee for your Clearance Certificate:
   - Integrated Declaration Form (Form D08),
   - Initial Ethics Approval letter and,
   - Approval of Title.

Please quote the reference number EM 19/05/01 in any communication with the Ethics Committee.

Best wishes

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn
Chair: Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education

APPENDIX B: Consent letter to principals

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Dear Principal

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for MEd (Masters) in the Faculty of Education. I must complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to ask you whether you will be willing to allow teachers from your school to participate in this research.

The topic of my research is: Support provided to progressed learners in the intermediate and senior phase.

The purpose of this study is to investigate what support is made available both in and outside the classroom, in order to support progressed learners to meet the promotional requirements of each grade. As well as to understand what challenges are faced by teachers to provide the necessary support to progressed learners.

The nature and methodology of my study necessitate that I interview Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers. These interviews will be recorded and will take place at a venue that is convenient to you and the teacher (please note: the venue should have limited distractions and low noise levels to allow recording of the interviews). Participation in this study will not interfere with teaching time and the interviews will take approximately 30 minutes to conduct. Once completed, the recorded interviews will be transcribed and analysed for the purpose of the dissertation. It would be an honour to hear the experiences of teachers at your school. The participation of teachers from your school will be valuable to the production of new knowledge and assistance that can be provided to support progressed learners.
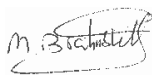
If you wish to participate in this study, the participants intermediate senior phase teachers in your school will be interviewed. Should you not want to participate in this

study, you will **not** be penalised. Should you agree to participate in the study then later decide that you no longer want to participate, you may do so at any time. Please also note that the identity of the teachers will be protected and will only be known by myself as the researcher and my supervisor. The information provided by the teachers will only be used for the sole purpose of this study.

Name of student: Megha Brahmbhatt

Contact number for student: 0832006126

E-mail of student: bmeghz@gmail.com

Signature of student:

Supervisor: Dr Nevensha Sing

Email of Supervisor: nevensha.sing@up.ac.za

Number of Supervisor: 0124205712

Consent form

I, _____ (your name), agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: Support provided to progressed learners in the intermediate and senior phase. I understand that the teachers will be interviewed on this topic for approximately 30 minutes at my school, but that will not interfere with school activities or teaching time. The interview will be audio taped.

the role of the researcher will remain objective and non-invasive.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

☐ Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.

☐ Informed consent, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.

☐ Safety in participation; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.

☐ Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.

☐ Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Consent letter to teachers

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Dear Teacher

I am a student studying through the University of Pretoria. I am currently enrolled for M. Ed (Masters) in the Faculty of Education. I have to complete a research module and one of the requirements is that I conduct research and write a research report about my work. I would like to ask you whether you will be willing to participate in this research.

The topic of my research is: Support provided to progressed learners in the intermediate and senior phase.

The purpose of this study is to investigate what support is made available both in and outside the classroom, in order to support progressed learners to meet the promotional requirements of each grade. As well as to understand what challenges are faced by teachers to provide the necessary support to progressed learners.
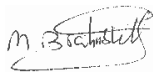
The nature and methodology of my study necessitates that I interview intermediate and senior phase teachers. These interviews will be recorded and will take place at a venue that is convenient to you (please note: the venue should have limited distractions and low noise levels to allow recording of the interviews). Participation in this study will not interfere with any of your duties and the interviews will take 30 minutes to conduct. Once completed, the recorded interviews will be transcribed and analysed for the purpose of the dissertation. It would be an honour to hear your experiences as a teacher teaching progressed learners. I believe that you have valuable insights that needs to be shared. Your participation in this study will be valuable to the production of new knowledge and assistance that can be provided to support progressed learners.

If you wish to participate in this study, I would like to let you know the following: should you not want to participate in this study, you will not be penalised. Should you agree to participate in the study then later decide that you no longer want to participate, you may do so at any time. Please also note that your identity will be protected and will only be known by myself as the researcher and my supervisor. The information provided by you will only be used for the sole purpose of this study.

Name of student: Megha Brahmbhatt

Contact number for student: 0832006126

E-mail of student: bmeghz@gmail.com

Signature of student:

Supervisor: Dr Nevensha Sing

Email of Supervisor: nevensha.sing@up.ac.za

Number of Supervisor: 0124205712/0828772564

Consent form

I, _____ (your name), agree / do not agree (delete what is not applicable) to take part in the research project titled: Support provided to progressed learners in the intermediate and senior phase. I understand that I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately 30 minutes at my school, but that will not interfere with school activities or teaching time. The interview will be audio taped.

the role of the researcher will remain objective and non-invasive.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

☐ Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the

research at any time.

☐ Informed consent, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.

☐ Safety in participation; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.

☐ Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be

protected at all times.

☐ Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: Interview Schedule

1. How many years have you been teaching in the intermediate/senior phase?
2. What grade and subject are you currently teaching?
3. What grades and subjects have you taught previously?
4. How often are you faced with learners whose academic ability is below the grade he/she is in? Describe in detail.
5. Are you familiar with the promotion policy for your phase?
6. What are your feelings towards the progression of learners?
7. Do you agree or disagree with the policy and why?
8. If you disagree with the policy, what do you suggest it the best way to deal with this situation of progressed leaners?
9. Do you think this policy is benefitting or harming the development of learners? Please explain in detail. For example, do you think that progressing learners is not actually benefitting them but rather causing more harm.
10. How can progressed learners be supported in the classroom by the teachers so that they are not progressed again at the end of the year?
11. What challenges do teachers face in providing support for progressed learners?
12. To what extent do you see a difference in the academic performance of a progressed learner?
13. To what extent do you see a difference in the academic performance of a retained learner?
14. Do you think with the current policies in place it is possible for a learner to complete schooling in a maximum of 16 years and still not be able to read and write appropriately? What are your feelings towards this?
15. Do you think we need to look at alternate methods of promotion and retention? Elaborate.
16. What support do you think the district could give to the school which would eventually support the progressed learner?
17. What role could parents and SGB play in supporting progressed learners?
18. How effective is the School based support team (SBST) in your school? Please give details.

19. To what extend is the screening, identification, assessment and support policy (SIAS) being implemented in your school? Please provide details.
20. Any closing thoughts on the progression of learner.