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**THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN
LEARNER PROGRESSION POLICY ON
LEARNERS IN THE FET PHASE**

Tebalelo Mercy Aphane

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The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase

by

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DECLARATION

I Tebalelo Mercy Aphane (student number: 15308970), hereby declare that this dissertation “**The influence of the learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase**” submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Magister Educationis degree at the University of Pretoria is my original work and has not previously been submitted by me at this or any other institution.



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By Tebalelo Mercy Aphane

I am qualified to have done such editing, being in possession of a Bachelor's degree in English from Rhodes University, Grahamstown, an Honours Degree in English and HED with English as prime teaching subject from the University of South Africa, and having taught English to Matriculation, First Year University Level, GCSE and A level in both South Africa and the United Kingdom of Great Britain for over 40 years, as well as having been Senior (English) Associate Editor of a national magazine for two years. I have edited Master's Dissertations and Doctoral Theses for several years for several universities and institutions in South Africa and abroad as well as editing documents/papers for publication for various publishing concerns and a number of international academics.

I trust that this declaration is satisfactory.



DAVID JOHN SWANEPOEL

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my lovely husband and children. Thank you for your support and encouragement. Your love for me is amazing.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase, the challenges experienced by the progressed learners, and the support available for them. The South African schooling system experiences underperformance of learners, particularly in the low quintile (poor communities) schools, following the progression policy. The policy stipulates that multiple repetitions in one grade are not permissible. This policy implies that a learner who fails any grade in a single phase for the second time cannot be retained in that grade and should be allowed to progress to the next grade. This study was specifically focused on the grade 12 progressed learners. The study was approached from a social constructivism paradigm through the adoption of two theoretical frameworks: the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner, and the stress and coping transactional model of Lazarus and Folkman. A qualitative research paradigm was followed to collect data where semi-structured interviews were done with ten grade 12 progressed learners, five boys and five girls, and three grade 12 teachers from one township secondary school in Tshwane west district, Gauteng Province. Furthermore, document analysis was used to investigate the learner progression policy. An inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the research data. Although progressed learner challenges are commonly known from the existing literature, this study uncovered the fact that the participants experienced academic and psychological challenges, and that the availability of intervention strategies is inadequate. Thus, this study has contributed by providing an in-depth understanding that the progression policy still negatively influences progressed learners, and that the available support strategies are inadequate as they are not tailored specifically for the progressed learners. This study, therefore, makes recommendations in which the progressed learners could be supported to cope in the progressed grade.

Key words: learner progression policy, progressed learners, academic challenges, psychological challenges, intervention strategies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DOE	Department OF Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and Training
MEO	Multiple Examination Opportunities
PED's	Provincial Education Departments
SBA	School-Based Assessment
SACMEQ	The Southern and Eastern African Consortium Analysis for Monitoring Educational Quality
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBST	School Based Support Team
SSIP	Secondary Schools Intervention Programmes

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced the learner progression policy in 2013 as promulgated in the Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools. The focus of this policy is on the progression of learners, through the public schooling system, from one grade to the next to avoid the issue of learners repeating grades. The policy stipulates that multiple repetitions in one grade are not permissible. “This policy implies that a learner who fails any grade in a single phase for the second time cannot be retained in that grade and should be allowed to progress to the next grade” (Kika & Kotze, 2019, p.2). The South African (SA) schooling system experiences the underperformance of learners, particularly in the low quintile (poor communities) schools (Setlhodi-Mohapi & Lebeloane, 2014). Underperformance is more prevalent in the higher phases of the schooling system, particularly in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, which comprises of Grades 10-12, as the school curriculum is set in a way that the syllabus content progresses from less complex to more complex material. There are high repetition and failure rates in the FET phase, particularly in Grade 10 (Kader, 2012; Kika & Kotze, 2019).

Underperformance is also high among certain prioritised elective subjects in the FET phase, particularly in Mathematics, Physical Sciences and Accounting (Letshwene, 2014). The South African public sector schooling system prioritises these streams and thus, the monitoring of learner performance in these subjects is essential (Letshwene, 2014; Tshiovhe, 2018).

1.2 RATIONALE

Although there are progressed learners who pass matric, the reality is that there are scores of progressed learners who do not pass matric, for example, in 2020, out of 70 000 progressed learners who wrote matric, only 24 000 passed (DBE, 2020). The pass

rate for the matric progressed learners of 2015 was 37%. The 2015 matric results indicate that the average pass percentage dropped when including progressed learners compared to the pass percentage excluding the progressed learners. This shows that there is underperformance by the progressed learners.

As pointed out in the existing literature, within the FET phase, underperformance is high among learners (Kader, 2012; Makgatho & Mji, 2006). Considering the high underperformance within the current schooling system, introduction of the progression policy seems likely to compound the challenges of underperformance (Kader, 2012). This phenomenon is also likely to be more profound in the FET phase. During the years of teaching, the researcher personally experienced teaching the progressed learners in the FET phase since the inception of the learner progression policy. The significant academic achievement gap between the learners progressed and their promoted counterparts was observed. Furthermore, the inability of teachers to provide adequate and individualised support to the progressed learners was evident. This was due to teacher work overload, overcrowded classrooms, and the need to cover the prescribed syllabus according to the annual teaching plan. According to and Munje and Maarman (2016) and Beree (2017), progressing learners without providing them with the necessary support can be harmful to the development of the learner. The researcher as an experienced teacher, was also faced with challenges of being unable to support progressed learners in the progressed grades so that they can cope and flourish. The reality of teaching different grades, having to rush to complete the syllabus, especially in grade 12, and not being able to give individualised attention to progressed learners is evident. It is anticipated that the findings of the study will be useful to schools, the Department of Basic Education, and the policymakers. Furthermore, the researcher hopes that the study will add to the existing body of literature the strategies to be put in place by the schools and the DBE to support progressed learners. Based on personal experience of teaching grade 12 progressed learners, the researcher was motivated to explore the challenges they experience as well as availability of support for them.

The current poor performance levels among the progressed learners are of great concern to both affected learners and teachers, and it is worthwhile to explore the

impact of the learner progression policy on learner performance. Additionally, undertaking this research was to help to contribute to the comprehension of how the progression policy impacts progressed learner's performance in the FET phase, with special reference to those progressed to grade 12. Through this study, the researcher wanted to have a deeper understanding of the real challenges that the progressed learners are still experiencing owing to the implementation of the progression policy. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to find out whether the progressed learners are supported as stipulated by the progression policy. The above-mentioned statements and the limited research pertaining to the poor performance levels among the progressed learners, propelled the researcher to address this gap in the research field.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the challenges of the SA learner progression policy on FET learners. In addition, the study aimed to explore the academic and psychological challenges experienced by learners progressed to grade 12. Furthermore, this study aimed to explore, in depth, the efficiency and effectiveness of the available support measures intended for the progressed learners. Hence, through this study, stakeholders may be able to improve the progression policy and guidelines on support measures for progressed learners based on the findings of this study.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To explore how the learner progression policy affect the progressed learners in the FET phase.
- To determine the academic and psychological challenges faced by progressed learners in the FET phase.
- To determine how progressed learners are supported to cope in the grades progressed to.
- To recommend strategies that the school (teachers) and the district (DBE) can use to support the progressed learners.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary research question

What is the influence of the South African progression policy on learners in the FET phase?

This main question will be explored by using the following sub-questions:

- 1) What are the challenges experienced by progressed learners in the FET phase?
- 2) How are progressed learners supported to cope in the FET phase?

1.6 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

The study assumed that without the mastery of the skills and content from the previous grade, progressed learners are limited to perform optimally, and as a result, they do not successfully complete grade 12. The study also assumed that there are limited systems in place to support the progressed learners emotionally and academically to help them cope in subsequent grades. This study further assumed that teachers are not provided with necessary in-service training with respect to teaching progressed learners, and therefore still rely on traditional methods. It was, therefore, necessary to conduct this study to shed light on how learners are affected by the progression policy and to further check whether the current support measures are effective in helping the progressed learners to cope in the subsequent grades.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Concepts pertinent to this study include the following: promotion, progression, social promotion, poor academic performance, progressed learners. The definition and clarification of these concepts is provided below.

1.7.1 Promotion

“Promotion refers to the movement of learners from one grade to the next after satisfying the minimum requirements stipulated by education authority” (Stott et al.,

2015, p 4). According to the Department of Basic Education, for learners to be promoted in the FET phase, they must pass three subjects with a minimum of 40% and three subjects with a minimum of 30%. Home Language and First Additional Language must be passed with a minimum of 40%. The criteria defining the minimum satisfactory percentage required to progress a learner, that will be used in this study, will be those set by the Department of Basic Education as outlined above.

1.7.2 Progression

According to Stott et al. (2015, p. 5) “progression refers to the movement of learners to the next grade, excluding Grade R, despite them not having complied with all the minimum promotion requirements”. According to DBE (2016), a learner can only fail once which allows a maximum of four years in a phase. However, there are stipulated criteria that the learners must meet to qualify to be progressed to the next grade (Kader, 2012). According to the progression policy, the learner is progressed when these four criteria have been met: the learner must pass at least four subjects (including Life Orientation), the learner must pass the language of learning and teaching, the learner must have attended school regularly, and must have complied with the School-Based Assessment (SBA) requirements in all subjects (DBE, 2012).

1.7.3 Social promotion

According to Jimerson and Renshaw (2012), social promotion refers to moving learners to the next grade without them mastering the learning outcomes but based on the age and maturity of the learner. Social promotion is thus similar to the school learner progression in a South African context. In this study, social promotion refers to the definition provided by Jimerson and Renshaw (2012).

1.7.4 Poor academic performance

Poor performance means performing less than expected, less than the desired outcome (Heeralal & Dhurumraj, 2016). Poor academic performance and underperformance are used as synonyms in this study. This study will adopt the poor performance definition of Heeralaland Dhurumraj (2016).

1.7.5 Progressed learners

A progressed learner is a learner who has been moved to the next grade despite not satisfying the minimum promotion requirements but having met the four criteria for progression (Stott et al., 2015). For this study, the focus is on the grade 12 progressed learners.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was primarily guided by the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (primary theory), and the transactional model of stress and coping of Lazarus and Folkman (secondary theory).

1.8.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory considers a child's world in relational systems i.e., the microsystem, macrosystem, mesosystem, exosystem and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Tudge and Rosa (2020), Bronfenbrenner argued that the interconnections within and between the elements of each system have an impact on child development and the child's ability to learn.

In this study, the microsystem refers to the learners and the people with whom they interact at school and at home, namely teachers and peer groups. The mesosystem refers to the interactions between the several microsystems (Basham et al., 2010). In this study, mesosystem will refer to the interactions between the school, peers and the family systems of the progressed learner. The exosystem refers to the connections and connectedness between environments. (Hilmi & Razali, 2021). For this study, the support given to teachers by the Department of Education is directly affecting the learning and performance of the progressed learners. According to O'Toole (2014), the macrosystem includes the school policies and cultural context over which the learners do not have control.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model guided this study by focusing on the systems that affect the progressed learners in the FET phase, particularly in grade 12. Furthermore,

the study did not look at the progressed learners in isolation. Instead, it took into consideration the relationships between the progressed learners and their teachers, the school infrastructure, support from families and communities, learner support materials, teaching strategies, and the available support strategies provided by the department of basic education.

Progressed learners are affected by the different systems as referred to in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. The learners must interact within these systems. The transactional model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was furthermore used to refer to the coping behaviour of progressed learners as seen in their constant interaction with the different systems.

1.8.2 Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping transactional model

The transactional model of Lazarus and Folkman views coping as a complex and evolving process of dealing with stress (Krohne, 2002). They describe it as learned behaviour. According to Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2018), people cope in different ways, and these ways include problem-focused coping which involves tackling the problem head-on. This coping behaviour implies that the progressed learners will have to acknowledge that they struggle in their learning, and therefore, that they need, for instance, to spend more time preparing for a test or examination. The stress and coping model of Lazarus and Folkman guided this study to explore the challenges faced by the progressed learners and to identify strategies to manage internal and external stressors in their learning. This model further guided this study to develop recommendations, for the progressed learners, for coping with both the academic and psychological challenges.

1.9 EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE STUDY

For this study, social constructivism was chosen as an interpretative framework. The social constructivists assert that knowledge is not only created through interactions of the individuals and their worlds or experiences but also co-created with interactions with other individuals within a specific social community (Fuller & Loogma, 2009). It entails

those human beings create their meaning and knowledge. This is done through the use of language (Mansour, 2013). Furthermore, socialisation is achieved through institutions such as school and significant others such as teachers, peers, parents, and friends (Mansour, 2013)

According to Jha (2012), social and cognitive processes are important for creating meaning and knowledge. For social constructivists, the reality is multiverse and subjective, as opposed to a single and objective truth (Fuller & Loogma, 2009). It entails that human beings create their meaning and knowledge. Thus, the challenges of the progression policy can only be understood in its own unique context and cannot be generalised to other settings (Mansour, 2013).

When using social constructivism as a paradigm, the teaching model becomes learner-centred as opposed to teacher-driven. The learner-centred model might support the progressed learners to master the 4C skills (communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking) of the 21st century. The progressed learners may benefit from active contributions to their learning which enhance their confidence (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009).

Social constructivism encourages group work. Group work may help learners to learn from their peers who might also enhance their social skills in general (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). Learners could learn to support one another and to be open to the opinions and suggestions of other learners (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Constructivist teaching facilitates innovative discussions on thoughts and ideas as well as activities that help learners improve their learning (Kim, 2001). This implies that learners can form groups comprising of progressed learners and learners with abilities in specific academic areas. Furthermore, the progressed learners can actively participate in creative activities and self-organisation. They can also come up with questions that need clarity. This could encourage active and participatory learning among learners.

1.10 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The qualitative methodological approach was selected as the most appropriate option to answer the research questions. Qualitative research is a scientific method that requires collecting, analysing, and interpreting a non-numerical data (Creswell, 2014). It focuses on the meanings, concepts, symbols, and descriptions of things. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). According to Myers (2019), qualitative research is naturalistic and attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural settings. Qualitative research aims to get a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It aims to understand how the participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behaviour (Myers, 2019). This research approach is relevant to the study because the study aimed to explore the challenges experienced by progressed learners following the progression policy. First-hand experience was explored by interviewing the learners and teachers. This helped with understanding the concept of the progression policy, the challenges with which the progressed learners were faced, whether the learners were supported or not, and if supported, was it effective or not. Thus, the qualitative research approach was instrumental in gathering in-depth insight on the influence of the progression policy on FET learners, particularly those progressed to grade 12.

1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was designed as a case study located within a qualitative paradigm. Case study research is described as a method with strong philosophical foundations which provides a framework for exploratory research in a real-life context (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study followed an exploratory case study design, aimed at exploring the influence of the progression policy on learners in the FET phase, specifically the grade 12 progressed learners. The study thus sought to provide a comprehensive description of the challenges of the progression policy and its effect on progressed learners.

In this study, data collection was done through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. This enabled the researcher to gather historical information for the study and allowed the researcher control over the line of questioning (Cohen et al., 2017).

1.12 SAMPLING AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The sampling strategy used in this study is a purposeful sampling. This is a strategic approach to sampling in which information-rich cases are sort out to address the research purpose and questions (Gentles et al., 2015). Ten progressed grade 12 learners were randomly selected, five boys and five girls. Grade 12 learners were selected on the basis of their awareness that they are in their final year of secondary school, without having mastered the prerequisites in grade 11. The participants are learners from a township secondary school in Soshanguve, Tshwane West District.

Taking a purposive procedure means following a non-random approach to generate results (Etikan, 2016). This approach helped the researcher to save time and money by selecting the population that matches the phenomenon. Purposive sampling also has a low margin of error because the information collected is from a specified source (Ames et al., 2019; Hamed, 2016). Learners who have the same identifiable scholastic characteristics, that is, have been progressed to the current grade were observed and interviewed. A full description of the sampling criteria is discussed in Chapter 3.

1.13 DATA COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

Qualitative research uses different data collection strategies, such as interviews, observations, and focus groups (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the researcher used interviews and document analysis to collect data. According to Creswell (2014), an interview is described as a conversational practice where knowledge is produced through interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online at one selected secondary school in the Tshwane West District, Gauteng province. The semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with insight and in-depth understanding of the context of the area of interest

under study (Singleton & Straits, 2005). This further helped the researcher understand the challenges and experiences of progressed learners. Semi-structured interviews allowed learners to elaborate in their responses to the interview questions. In this way, new knowledge was constructed through online interaction between the participants and the researcher.

Predetermined and thematically arranged questions were used in an interview schedule. The interview schedule was prepared beforehand and circulated to the participants in advance. In addition, it probed follow-up questions which were asked where clarity was required to gain in-depth narratives from participants (Creswell, 2014). The interview questions were generated from the research topic and the literature review.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, document analysis was used. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the South African progression policy of 2013 and Circular S7 of 2020, Revised Promotion Requirements for Grade 10-12 were analyzed by the researcher. For the data documentation, the researcher used audio recordings during the semi-structured interviews, with the consent of the participants. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim as to preserve the intent of the participants and timeously transcribed after the interview not to lose any information and to maintain total immersion into the data. The document analysis in the study was done by making copies of the South African progression policy and Circular S7OF 2020. The most salient information referring to the current study was highlighted and annotated (Juraj, 2015).

1.14 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), qualitative research employs inductive data analysis to check whether the relationship exists between the variables. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse data in this study. “Thematic data analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting on themes emerging within the data” (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p 5). The researcher used thematic analysis to allow for the emergence of themes.

The following procedure was followed for data analysis:

- Step 1: Familiarising with data collected
- Step 2: Generalising initial codes
- Step 3: Searching for themes
- Step 4: Reviewing themes
- Step 5: Defining and naming themes
- Step 6: Producing the report

Table 1.1: Research methodology

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research design: Exploratory case study design
Sampling procedures: Purposeful sampling. Selection of one secondary school in the Tshwane West District in Soshanguve, with ten Grade 12 progressed learners (five boys and five girls), and three grade 12 teachers.
Data collection/generation and documentation strategies: Semi-structured interviews - Audio recorded and transcribed verbatim; and Document analysis.
Data analysis strategies: Inductive thematic analysis
Ethical considerations: Written permission to conduct the research obtained. Participants informed about voluntary participation in the study. Signed assent/consent forms (learners and their parents/guardians). Protection of participants' identity and possible link to the study. Safe and secure storage of collected data.

1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the best ethical practices, the researcher followed the ethical guidelines stipulated by the University of Pretoria and the Health Professional Council of South Africa.

The researcher received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria (EDU119/20) and obtained an approval to conduct the research study from the Gauteng Department of Education.

The researcher sent letters of informed consent to the school principal, teachers and parents, and assent forms to learners to agree to participate in the study. The participation of both teachers and learners was voluntary, and it was explained beforehand that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. It was further explained to them that no harm would be inflicted on them during participation and that there was no reimbursement for the participants. The researcher received the signed informed consent and assent forms before collecting data from the participants.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. The data collected are safe as they are password protected. Regarding non-maleficence, the participants were not exposed to undue risks or harm.

1.16 QUALITY CRITERIA

The researcher used data-triangulation to correlate data collected from the teachers and progressed learners and document analysis using different research methods. Trustworthiness was achieved by ensuring rigour in this study. Throughout the study, the researcher ensured trustworthiness through member checking, quality checks, verification, and discussion with the supervisor. A detailed discussion of the rigour concepts, credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and authenticity of the research data is presented in chapter 3.

1.17 CHAPTERS OVERVIEW

The chapters in this study are structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Contextualising the Study

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Presentation of the results and discussion

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.

1.18 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 has provided the panorama of the research study. The purpose of the study as well as the primary and the secondary research questions that guided the study were discussed. In addition, the researcher clarified the concepts that are specific to this study. Furthermore, the theoretical framework, research design and methodology selected were highlighted. Finally, the ethical considerations and the quality criteria were also considered.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

An understanding of the progression policy for FET learners relating to its influence on the learners who have been progressed to the next grade is explored through existing available literature. The focus is to undertake a detailed literature review of the topic under investigation. This entails, firstly, providing a brief overview of the South African education system's current state and its challenges. Due consideration will also be given to previous research findings in line with the research questions, aims and objectives of this proposed study. This will help the researcher to understand the contemporary challenges experienced by the education system in South Africa regarding the progression policy. Therefore, this segment's goal connects to the impetus to interrogate the influence of the progression policy on FET learners.

2.2 THE CURRENT STATE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The South African education system has undergone many transformations since the advent of democracy in 1994. The primary aim of these changes was to bring about curriculum reforms that would benefit all citizens and ensure equal opportunities for everyone in South Africa. Before democracy, the South African education system was skewed in favour of the white minority race (Kader, 2012). The government had to take a bold stance to establish a mass education system for Africans to correct the imbalance of the past, where a black child was denied the right to quality education (Makgatho & Mji, 2006). Accordingly, the government passed several acts of legislation to provide and ensure access to quality education for all citizens. A massive, controversial curriculum reform was undertaken in 2005 to enact a radical ideological break from the past (Kader, 2012). The primary purpose of the 2005 curriculum reform was to enhance nation building by promoting the constitution and fostering inclusive education. In addition, Kader (2012) further highlighted that the outcome of this

curriculum revamp was the birth of an innovative “Outcomes Based Education system” that was well accepted by the public.

However, despite the government's efforts, the South African education system is still facing a plethora of problems. It seems the education system is not yet out of the woods (Kika & Kotze, 2019). Unlike other African emerging economies, the South African education system is still characterised by high costs and low-performance outcomes (Kika & Kotze, 2019).

This poor performance of school learners, especially high school learners, has drawn attention from various quarters of society, lamenting that the education system is in crisis and resulting in calls for urgent intervention from all stakeholders to save the country (Makgatho & Mji, 2006). However, lately, there have been some small improvements in learner outcomes and some essential policy innovations such as the recently introduced learner progression policy (DBE, 2016). This policy intervention, in the form of a progression policy, aims to limit the number of times a learner may repeat and remain in the same grade owing to poor performance (DOE, 1998). Below is table 2.1, showing an overview of the policies related to the progression of learners:

Table 2.1: Summary of policies linked to learner progression since 1998

TITLE OF POLICY/DOCUMENT	YEAR	PURPOSE
“Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools”	1998	“Initial policy document on learner progression, mainly focusing on the GET (General Education and Training phase) band– limited grade repetition to once within a phase” (DOE, 1998).

TITLE OF POLICY/DOCUMENT	YEAR	PURPOSE
“Ministerial Committee to address learner retention Report”	2006	“Ministerial Task Team established by the then Minister of Basic Education Naledi Pandor tasked with a mandate to investigate the extent of retention and drop-out in schools and the reasons thereof across all grades for the periods 2003 to 2005” (DOE, 2006).
“Approval of the regulations referring to the Programme and Promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – Grade 12”	2012	“Circular from the Minister of Basic Education (DBE), making it mandatory for all schools to apply learner progression policy. Promulgated as Notice No. R1114, in Regulation Gazette No. 9886 of 28 December 2012” (DBE, 2012)
“National Policy pertaining to the Programme and Promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – Grade 12”	2015	“Another national policy aimed to ensure that all government schools appropriately apply the correct criteria for promotion to the next grade, repetition of a grade or progression to the next grade. The policy ensures that progression forms an integral part and that it should be specified in terms of the criteria to be followed” (DBE, 2015a).

TITLE OF POLICY/DOCUMENT	YEAR	PURPOSE
“Guideline for the implementation of promotion and progression requirements for Grades 10 – 12”	2015	“The guideline's main objective is to provide support on the implementation of the policy in a more consultative manner when Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) deal with the progression of Grade 10 and 11 learners. The guidelines are also intended to ensure consistency and uniform application of the regulations about the Programme and Promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement by all Provincial Education Departments relating to Grades 10 – Grade 12 promulgated as Notice No. R1114, in Regulation Gazette No. 9886 of 28 December 2012” (DBE, 2015b)
“Guideline for the implementation of promotion and progression requirements for Grades 10 – 12” Circular E22	2016	Guideline for the implementation of promotion and progression requirements for Grades 10 – 12” DBE (2016). The purpose is to outline the conditions for progression of learners in the FET phase.
“Circular S7” Revised Promotion Requirements for grade 10-12.	2020	The purpose is to provide guidance on the key amendments regarding the weighting of School Based Assessment (SBA) and the final year-controlled test” (DBE, 2020)

Despite the government's effort in terms of the policy interventions highlighted above, Mbanjwa (2014) laments that the majority of South African learners still fall short of meeting the minimum requirements in terms of curriculum understanding and the milestones expected in numeracy and literacy levels.

This study aimed at exploring the influence of the progression policy on progressed learners' performance in the FET phase. Therefore, it was pertinent that the causes of learners' poor performance in general were first examined to understand more effectively how the progression policy affects the performance of progressed learners. The quality of education offered by South African schools has not improved over the years, learner performance remains poor, and researchers have done much work to unravel the leading causes of poor learner performance (Maeresera, 2016; Munje & Maarman, 2016; Tshiovhe, 2018; Kika & Kotze, 2019). These leading causes were referred to in the section below.

2.2.1 Reasons attributed to poor performance by learners in the FET phase

There are several reasons for poor performance in schools. Below are reasons attributed to poor performance by learners.

2.2.1.1 Teachers' content knowledge

Teachers play a critical impact in their learners' academic success. According to Maeresera (2016), most learners rely on their teachers as their primary resource towards achieving intended positive learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers should always strive for continuous professional development since they occupy a central position in the lives of these learners. However, previous research has revealed a shocking and glaring revelation that most teachers lack basic level content knowledge. According to Venkat and Spaul (2015), the Southern and Eastern African Consortium analysis for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) of 2007 bears testimony to this. Furthermore, the analysis of Grossen et al. (2017) revealed that, in South Africa, many teachers lack fundamental content knowledge in mathematics, with the majority being unable to answer questions based on the content they teach their learners (Venkat & Spaul, 2015). This sad reality is comparable to an average grade 10 teacher in Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi with similar content knowledge (Venkat & Spaul, 2015). However, other countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Tanzania have comparatively higher content knowledge than their South African counterparts in the same grades (Venkat & Spaul, 2015). Concerning rural Mathematics educators, the

same study further revealed that South African rural teachers have significantly lower content knowledge levels than rural mathematics teachers in Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya (Grossen et al., 2017). If these research findings are anything to go by, then the question is asked as to whether South African teachers are significantly contributing to their learners' dismal academic performances?

2.2.1.2 The use of under-qualified and unqualified teachers

Due to a severe shortage of teachers, particularly in key subjects such as Science and Mathematics, the South African Education system has resulted in the employment of under-qualified and unqualified educators (Munje & Maarman, 2016). This action contributed to the perennial problem of poor performances in schools because they lack the necessary content knowledge required to teach their subjects adequately (Letshwene, 2014). They also lack the necessary skills and values needed to offer adequate support to the progressed learners. Some schools have decided to remove subjects from their curriculum where qualified teachers are challenging to be found, so depriving learners of their right to learn subjects of their choice (Grossen et al., 2017).

2.2.1.3 School management team and accountability

According to Setlhodi-Mohapi and Lebeloane (2014), the creation of an environment conducive to teaching and learning to enhance both learner performance and the quality of education is the responsibility of the school management team. Furthermore, the school principal should ensure that there are adequate resources, teachers are at work, and curriculum needs are adequately addressed to attain learner success. A sense of accountability should prevail within the school situation, i.e., teachers should be accountable to principals and principals to parents and the department of education (Setlhodi-Mohapi & Lebeloane, 2014). A survey done by the DBE (2016) found that in approximately 60% of the underperforming schools, there was no harmonious working relationship between the school management team and teachers. Those schools were characterised by many conflicts, with principals neglecting their duties and teachers abdicating their professional responsibilities (Munje & Maarman, 2016).

2.2.1.4 Inadequate provision of resources

Most schools, particularly those in the rural areas, are not adequately capacitated regarding educational resources (Munje & Maarman, 2016). Literature stipulates that lack of material resources is associated with a lower ability to cope with the effects of others' harmful behaviour and barriers associated with some policies (Pitesa & Thau, 2014). Employing underqualified teachers in addition to inadequate provision of resources leads to an increased percentage of poor performance in learners (Maeresera, 2016). The lack of resources in classrooms can cause extreme distress for the learners and teachers. Not only are the learners and teachers in distress, but they are unable to perform to their full potential because they are not being given the proper resources (Ngema & Maphalala, 2021).

2.2.1.5 Overcrowding in classrooms

This problem of classroom overcrowding is evident in rural and township schools where teachers become overworked, and thus negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning (Akiri, 2013; Bayat et al., 2014). The recommended provincial average teacher-to-learner ratio is 29, but the teacher-to-learner ratio was found to be 1:40 in most underperforming schools. Having such a high ratio puts great pressure on the educator and other school resources. In addition to this, an overcrowded classroom limits the teacher's movement in the class, monitoring learners and the learners' concentration is also affected (Letshwene, 2014). According to Ngema and Maphalala (2021), overcrowding is seen as the biggest constraint of academic performance, especially to progressed learners.

2.2.1.6 Learner progression policy

Moving learners with learning challenges to the next grade poses a problem for learner performance and educational goals (Kader, 2012). According to the findings of Letshwene and Du Plessis (2021), learner progression among others, is a major contributor to learners' poor academic performance. According to Letshwene and Du Plessis (2021), progression leads to poor content knowledge because learners move from one grade to the next without acquiring the foundational knowledge. Furthermore,

these learners cannot build on what was taught in the previous grade if they failed to master the content in the previous grade. According to Munje and Maarman (2016), learners who are progressed are the ones who are likely to drop out of school because they are unknowledgeable on what is taught in the classrooms.

2.2.1.7 Inability of teachers to intervene

Though teachers are at the forefront of identifying learners with academic challenges, they fail to do so timeously due to lack of time as their focus is on syllabus completion (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). Hence, learners with academic challenges do not get adequate support for their academic needs (Munje & Maarman, 2016). Furthermore, Munje and Maarman (2016) argued that the policy fails to consider teachers' capabilities to offer the required support. According to Mogale and Modipane (2021) and Muedi et al. (2021), teachers indicated that they are not equipped on how to teach and support the progressed learners. They are therefore unable to adequately intervene successfully.

2.2.1.8 Learner motivation

Motivation is an imperative influence of learner achievement (Letshwene, 2014). According to Letshwene (2014), learners who enjoy learning are likely to spend more time and energy mastering a subject. Hence, they are reinforced by the success they achieve, which in turn encourages them to do well in their learning. Furthermore, motivation influences the amount of effort and time learners dedicate to their studies, the manner in which they do homework, how they relate with their teachers and peers and the extent to which they would be willing to seek help when confronted with academic challenges (Nkosi & Abedayo, 2021). However, learners who lack motivation are unlikely encouraged to pay attention to their learning. Thus, possibly resulting in poor academic performance (Letshwene, 2014).

2.2.1.9 Involvement of parents in school activities

Lack of or poor involvement of parents in their children's school activities and development contributes to poor learner performance (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021; Ngema

& Maphalala, 2021). Previous research has shown that children perform well academically when parents take active roles in their children's education (Beree, 2016; Makgatho & Mji, 2016). Parents should continuously encourage their children towards learning, instil confidence in them, and complement teachers' efforts. Some parents even go to the extent of assisting their children with homework. Letshwene (2014) as well as Munje and Maarman (2016) noted that such collaboration between schools and families effectively promotes good classroom behaviour, class participation, good academic performance, learner attendance, and a reduced chance of high-risk behaviours. In addition, when parents and schools work together, they can mould a child to be useful in all aspects of life (Grossen et al., 2017). Therefore, any lack of parental involvement in their children's education is considered a serious drawback. This is true as developing children still need to be guided and motivated for them to succeed. In essence, parental involvement in child's school activities is of paramount importance as it can boost emotional support which in turn help children improve academic performance.

2.2.1.10 Parents/Guardians' level of education

The poor performance of learners at school can be linked to the educational background of their parents/guardians. A study conducted in Kenya to determine the reasons for the poor performance of learners in Mathematics, in secondary schools, revealed that the parents' education level contributes to the learners' performance (Makgatho & Mji, 2015). Therefore, if parents are well educated, this will positively impact their children's performance as they will act as role models for them in education matters. Conversely, uneducated guardians/parents have nothing to offer their children as they are not able to meaningfully assist with homework and may not, in addition, be role models with regards to their children's educational matters, thus leading to a continuous chain of poverty (Bayat et al., 2014). The findings by Idris and Ahmad (2020) confirm that a correlation was found between parents' education and learners' academic achievement. Although many researchers are of this view, from the researcher's personal experience as a teacher, there are learners who perform outstandingly despite having uneducated parents. This can be linked to intrinsic motivation and resilience,

particularly when learners know what they want to achieve in life. Furthermore, learners can have role models other than their parents, hence, influencing academic achievement.

2.3 LEARNER PROGRESSION INTERNATIONALLY

Progression refers to learners' movement to the next grade, despite them not having complied with all the minimum promotion requirements (Stott et al., 2015). This has been practised globally by many countries, such as Canada and the United States, who have referred to it as social promotion (Babcock & Bedard, 2011; Winters & Greene, 2012). Social promotion is described as promoting learners to the next grade regardless of their academic proficiency.

Several meta-analysis studies in the United States have shown that socially promoting learners leads to higher or equal to academic achievement outcomes than learners retained for one year (Babcock & Bedard, 2011; Schwedt et al., 2017). In addition, researchers have found negative effects of retention, such as poor attitudes toward school, decreased self-esteem, more poor social adjustment, negative implications for academic motivation, a negative predictor of academic self-concept and aggressive behaviour (Babcock & Bedard, 2011; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Winters & Greene, 2012). Moreover, retention has been linked to dropping out of school (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). According to Jimerson and Ferguson (2007), retention has been linked to lower employment status rating, being paid less per hour, and receiving poor employment competence. A study by Picklo and Christenson (2005) stated that policies on social promotion and retention, although formulated to regulate academic success and failure in the field of education, have become burdensome. Hence, they are now considered to be damaging the public education system. The findings in Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) revealed that learners who are socially promoted find that their long-term academic potential is significantly undermined.

A study by Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) saw a link between increased dropouts, and retention and social promotion policies. Consequently, this was also linked to social ills such as unemployment, reliance upon welfare, poverty, and increased crime rates.

Furthermore, meta-analysis studies revealed that social promotion leads to classrooms with learners of different cognitive abilities, so undermining the chances for teachers to meet the different needs of learners as required (Jimerson, 2011). According to McCombs et al. (2009), social promotion leads to a lack of student motivation. They argue that while social promotion usually focuses on learners who have academic challenges, there are also learners who have the potential to pass but fail. Unfortunately, social promotion sends the wrong message to them, that effort makes little difference in school. In addition, Winters and Greene (2012) argued that social promotion gives the impression that it is not required to master academic standards for high school graduation. Restoring the self-esteem of learners is one of the aims of social promotion. However, learners are very aware that they have been moved to the next grade despite not meeting the required standards. Therefore, social promotion may be doing more harm than good, leading to high dropouts more than amongst other learners.

Based on the above arguments, instead of implementing the social promotion or the strict no fail policies, it is imperative for teachers to use their discretion on retaining and promoting learners. This means that, if teachers are confident that the learners have put hard effort into their work and demonstrated an improvement, but have not met the minimum pass requirements, those learners could be moved to the next level. On the other hand, the learners should be retained if there are serious academic challenges (Lynch, 2013). According to Jimerson and Renshaw (2012), both retention and social promotion are not successful tools to address the needs of learners who are facing academic and emotional difficulties. Instead, prevention and early intervention ought to be the first line of defence. In addition, evidence-based instruction and support are of the utmost importance. Thus, schools and districts should use a comprehensive approach that caters for multiple interventions (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

2.4 LEARNER PROGRESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

“Progression refers to learners’ movement to the next grade (excluding Grade R) despite them not having complied with all the minimum promotion requirements” (Stott

et al., 2015). In 1998, the DBE introduced a policy to govern learners' progression from one grade to the next, thus allowing for the progression of learners despite them not meeting the minimum academic requirements to move to the next grade (Kika & Kotze, 2019). Since then, the policy has been used in the GET phase, but only became operational in the FET phase in 2013.

The policy also endeavours to ensure that learners do not trail behind their age cohort but should move with their age group since a learner is only allowed to repeat a grade once in each phase (Letshwene, 2014; Munje & Maarman, 2016). "This progression implies that learners will complete school with their age cohort and the policy ensures that a learner is allowed to progress with the age cohort" (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021, p 27).

The policy advocates that, if a learner fails to meet the required standards but has been retained in the current phase for a maximum of four years and is likely to be retained, that learner should be supported and be progressed to the next grade. However, the policy does not stipulate specific support programmes or strategies for the progressed learners (Beree, 2016).

In this regard, it is not possible to prevent the learner's progression to the next grade, even if the promotion requirements are not met (Hartley, 2006). The assumption is that the learner will receive the necessary support in terms of content knowledge lacking in the new grade to assist that learner to cope in the current grade, and progress to the next grade (DBE, 2012). According to Muedi et al. (2021), it is imperative to note that learners who struggle academically may need additional time with the same material to achieve the desired academic levels. Receiving resources, such as an additional teaching and learning time for the learners who have been progressed in the schools, may be problematic, and therefore, it is left to districts and provincial education departments to develop their support strategies (Munje & Maarman, 2016).

However, it is believed that this approach of progressing learners would restore learner dignity and self-esteem (Beree, 2016). This is supported by Hartley (2006), who applauds the progression policy and insists that it is good for South Africa regarding its

diversity. In addition, Branson et al. (2013) supports the idea that progression is relevant for South Africans because learner retention is considered to perpetuate learner drop-out. Most researchers argue that learner progression is considered to be a superior policy that produces positive outcomes (Heeralal & Dhurumuraj, 2016).

Despite supporting learner progression, Stott et al. (2015) acknowledges the difficulties that progressed learners encounter when they are moved to the next grade without the curriculum content knowledge that is essential for the current level.

According to Kader (2012), it should be noted that progressing learners without adequate mastery of previous learning content is undesirable as it produces learners without the requisite skills and knowledge that do not prepare them for further education and limits career opportunities. Owing to its leniency, the learner progression policy is accused of instilling a passive and demotivated attitude amongst learners (Beree, 2016). The policy allows learners to move to the next grade irrespective of their poor performance in the end of the year results. According to Beree (2016), the progression policy promotes laziness in the progressed learners. The notion that implementing the progression policy makes learners lose motivation to work harder because they will be effortlessly progressed to the next grade is supported by Stott et al. (2015), and Mngadi (2021). The policy condemns learner absenteeism, but the policy contradicts itself, allowing undeserving learners to proceed to the next grade based on the number of years spent in a phase. However, according to Minister Angie Motshega's report on the matric results of the 2020 class, there has been a significant improvement in the pass rate for progressed learners despite them not having received adequate support from the department due to the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021).

It could be worthwhile to take note of the following statistics as outlined by the Minister of Basic Education in the 2021 report mentioned above:

- ❖ 249 162 candidates from “no-fee” schools obtained a National Senior Certificate (NSC) compared to 141 433 from “Fee paying” schools.
- ❖ 1 736 of the “no-fee” schools achieved above 80% pass rate in the November

- 2020 NSC compared to 2 484 in the November 2019 NSC examination, and
- ❖ 24 244 of the progressed learners that wrote all seven subjects obtained the NSC (DBE, 2020). This number increased from 23 483 in the November 2019 NSC. This translates into a percentage increase of 3,1%. The statistics show that the progressed learners, who would have been denied the chance to proceed to grade 12 and perhaps ended up dropping out from the school, performed very well, as evident from the 24 244 passing NSC figure. However, it is still less than 50%.

2.4.1 Implementation of the progression policy in South Africa

There have been different interpretations and varied implementation of the policy across the whole education spectrum.

With respect to the FET phase, the progression policy is not applicable regarding moving learners from Grade 12 to tertiary education. A learner must meet the minimum pass requirements for promotion (DBE, 2012). Candidates who fail to meet the minimum certification requirements can write the examination the following year in a maximum of two subjects. It is further stipulated that candidates who fail to qualify for the supplementary examination are allowed to re-enrol as an NSC full-time repeater candidate, as long as they are below 21 years of age. To lessen the burden of progressed learners sitting for a full examination, the Department of Basic Education introduced a policy of Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO) in November 2017, in which progressed learners were allowed to write some of the subjects in the first sitting of the examination and then complete the remaining subjects during a subsequent examination period (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). Unfortunately, this policy was discontinued in 2019, meaning that learners progressed from 2020 would not be allowed to write their subjects over two years. This may be regarded as an advantage in some way because the progressed learners would be motivated to be more serious and work harder knowing that they would be writing a full-scale examination at once. However, the MEO was an intervention strategy to support the progressed learners who did not cope with the curriculum content demands in grade 12. The discontinuation of this policy in 2019 is a disadvantage for the progressed learners as they are now

expected to face as full an examination as their promoted counterparts (Muedi et al., 2021). According to the findings in Mogale and Modipane (2021), the MEO should be reinstated to serve as an intervention strategy for the struggling progressed learners.

2.4.2 Learner progression policy and its influence on academic performance

There have been many debates relating to the progression of learners i.e., whether it enhances learner performance. Kader (2012) and Stott et al. (2015) argued that the inherent weaknesses in the learner progression policy render it ineffective in providing a remedy to learners who are at risk and those with a challenge of underperformance.

Learner performance has become a paradox as no one fully understands it, with educationists, researchers, and policymakers alike failing to grapple with the South African scenario of learner underperformance, particularly in the Quintile-1 schools. The government has made tremendous efforts in mobilising and providing resources in these schools but to no avail, as learner underperformance continues unabated. Introducing a learner progression policy to promote access, equity, and quality education has not helped the situation either (Hartley, 2006; Kika & Kotze, 2019).

Maeresera (2016) argues that this progression process is not a panacea for other problems afflicting learner performance in school. In a study by Kika and Kotze (2019), on both learner progression and repeating a grade, it was established that the supporting structures in place play a critical role in influencing performance. If proper supporting structures are in place, for both repeating and progressed learners, their performance could improve significantly. Letshwene (2014) echoed the same sentiments, that if the conditions in place are not favourable for the retained learners, their performance would be worse than if they had been progressed.

Progressed learners pose a severe challenge to teachers since they do not have the requisite knowledge to cope with the new grade (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Conversely, Letshwene (2014) is opposed to this, arguing that progressing learners is the best antidote to the adverse effects of learner retention. However, Letshwene (2014)

failed to come up with strategies that can be used for progressed learners to cope in the new grades.

2.4.3 Challenges of the progression policy on progressed learners

The progression policy is not without challenges, particularly about its implementation. According to a study by Tshiovhe (2018), there are concerns regarding the progressed learners' wellbeing, cognitive abilities, and the support during the teaching and learning processes. Learner progression imposes a burden on the already challenged learners by pushing them into the next grade with increased learning demands. Hence, this has a negative bearing on their aspirations, motivation, learning opportunities and performance. According to Kader (2012), progressed learners are more likely to struggle with their work and if adequate support is not provided to them, they are more likely drop out of school.

Although the intention of the progression policy is to restore confidence and self-esteem in learners as they would be moving with their age-cohort, the opposite is true. According to Nkosi and Adebayo (2021), the progression policy impacts negatively on progressed learners as they lack confidence, and they develop signs of low self-esteem. They find it challenging to compete with their Grade 12 counterparts. Though the progressed learners are faced with the emotional challenges, the progression policy does not make clear provision for emotional support for the progressed learners. Hence, the progressed learners become discouraged, frustrated, and possibly drop out of school (Mbanjwa, 2014). In most cases, it should be noted that progressed learners are mostly labelled negatively by teachers and their peers. Hence, they carry that stigma throughout their schooling, thus further negatively affecting their performance and compounding the already existing challenge (Mbanjwa, 2014).

2.4.4 Support for progressed learners

The reality for many progressed learners is that they are functioning below grade level and may have a level of learning potential that is lower than their peers (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). In essence, this is the case for progressed learners who experience

cognitive barriers. According to Munje and Maarman (2016), the progression policy relies on learner support being provided by their teachers in the new grade. However, the policy fails to consider teacher capability to offer the required support (Munje & Maarman, 2016). Progression without support creates adverse effects for the learner and these would be felt in the long run. It should be noted that over 66% of the progressed learners do not finish Grade 12. According to Nel et al. (2016), most of these learners struggled academically and have progressed without support.

According to Kolobe and Mihai (2020), the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the classroom to support progressed learners yields positive results. The findings further indicated that ICT has a potential to reduce failure rates which ultimately minimizes the number of learners who need to be progressed without meeting the promotional requirements. In my view, based on my personal experience as a teacher, ICT is not a solution to schools with inadequate infrastructure. There are many schools that are without internet connection. Furthermore, schools, particularly in Gauteng Province, are negatively impacted by vandalism. Hence, jeopardizing the prospects of intervention intended for progressed learners.

A study by Mogale et al. (2022), revealed that curriculum support offered at classroom level, without support and monitoring, compromised evaluation, and closed opportunities for improvements. Moreover, the support strategies were meant to address challenges for all learners and not particularly for progressed learners. The same sentiments were echoed by Mohale and Modipane (2021), that the support strategies presented by department (district) were directed to the whole grade cohort and not tailor-made for the progressed learners. In addition, the findings of Muedi et al. (2021) showed that support that there are no adequate support measures put in place to assist the progressed learners to catch up with their counterparts. There are no documented strategies from the department to help teachers support the progressed learners. Based on the findings of Kolobe and Mihai (2021), a tailored database is likely to give directive for suitable intervention for the identified progressed learners so that the district-school curriculum support enhances quality teaching and learning. Thus, the district offers support in the form of Saturday classes and holiday camps. However, this

form of support is directed to all learners in the grade, and not only to the progressed learners.

On the other hand, it is difficult for the teachers to give full support to the struggling progressed learners as they are overloaded with an overwhelming workload. In addition, teachers are compelled to be on par with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP), and therefore rush to complete the syllabus rather than focusing on the progressed learners (Letshwene & Du Plessis, 2021). According to Ngema and Maphalala (2021), there is no room to bridging the content gap, by focusing on the prerequisite of the content knowledge as a form of support, due to time constraints and overcrowded classrooms. Therefore, progressed learners are expected to deal with the current content knowledge without closing of existing content gaps. However, studies by Tshiovhe (2018), Letshwene (2016), and Munje and Maarman (2016) indicated that though some teachers provide support to progressed learners by giving them homework and extra tuition where possible, the focus is on the current curriculum content and not the work they did not master in the previous grade.

The school-based support team (SBST) and the district-based support team (DBST) are established to support learners with learning challenges (Fourie, 2017). According to Fourie (2017), there is limited to no collaboration amongst the SBST and the DSBT for the school level curriculum. In addition, when schools submit the schedule of the progressed learners to the district, there is minimal follow-up from the DBST to support the progressed learners.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The study used two theoretical frameworks, the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (the primary theory), and the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (the secondary theory). The researcher strongly believes that these two theories were relevant and helped to answer the stated research questions (refer to section 1.4). The theoretical framework designed for this study enabled the researcher to understand the factors that influence the development of the adolescent. Furthermore, it is noted that there were other factors that interfered with the learning

process. Hence, it is imperative to take into cognisance such factors that include the appraisal of the challenges by the progressed learners and the factors that influence learning based on the systems theory. Thus, it is necessary to look at the theories both individually and integrated.

2.5.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory focuses on the interconnections and dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to O'Toole (2014), this model divides the environment into different ecological systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. This study focused on the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem as they affect the progressed learner. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory places a developing person, in this case, the progressed learner, in an encapsulated ecological system (Hilmi & Razali, 2021).

According to O'Toole (2014), the microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles and relationships experienced by the developing person. The structures in the microsystem include the school, peers, family, and neighbourhood. Furthermore, there are bio-directional influences, and these have the greatest impact on the child (Hilmi & Razali, 2021). For this study, it implies that the progressed learners are greatly impacted by structures such as school, peers, teachers, their families and communities. On the other hand, the mesosystem focuses on the connections and processes between two or more settings, such as the relationship between the school and the parents (Tudge & Rosa, 2020). For this study, it implied that the relationships between the parents of the progressed learners and the teachers was paramount to the success of the progressed learners. The other system is the exosystem. The exosystem refers to the parts of the environment which impact an individual's development, the connections and connectedness between environments. (Hilmi & Razali, 2021). For this study, the support given to teachers by the Department of Education is directly affecting the learning and performance of the progressed learners. Lastly, the macrosystem involves cultural and societal beliefs, decisions and actions which influence an individual child's

development (O'Toole, 2014). The policies that government implements, including the progression policy, fall within this system affecting the learning and performance of the progressed learners.

Through Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, this study explored the challenges of the progression policy on FET phase learners, particularly those progressed to grade 12, and how they are supported by the systems that surround them. According to Panopoulos and Drossinou-Korea (2020), the effectiveness of teaching interventions depends on factors defined according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

2.5.2 Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping transactional model

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) used the term "coping" to describe the "cognitive and behavioural efforts" a person employs to manage stress, generally categorized as emotion-focused or problem-focused coping. This model is based on the premise that the experience of distress (the outcome of the stress process), and the individual's behaviours to deal with a trigger for the stress process, that is, a specific person–environment relationship (also called the 'stressor' or 'demand'), is dependent on the individual's cognitive appraisal of this trigger (Ibaraki, 2022). Problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events (Krohne, 2002).

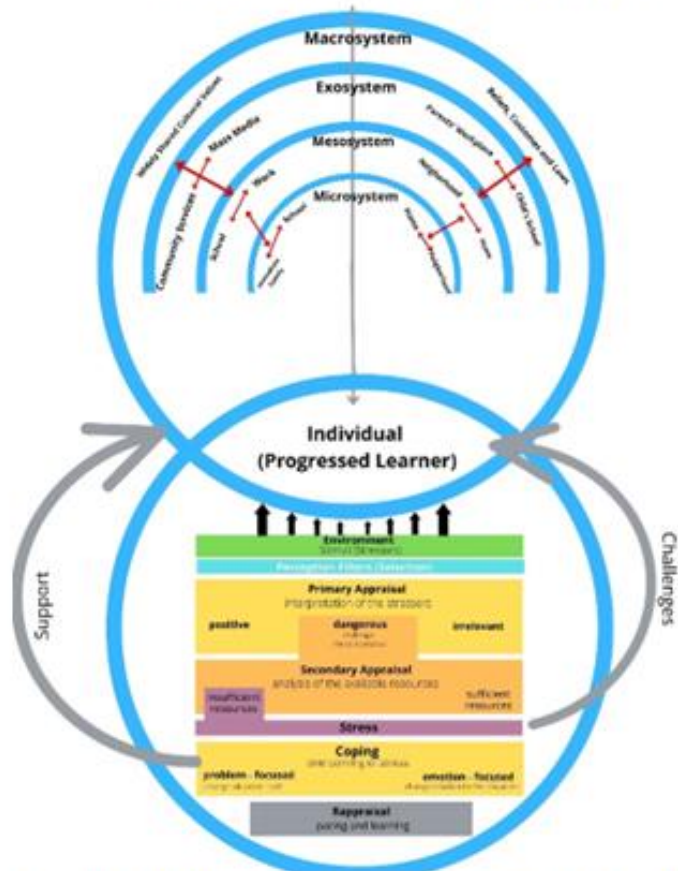
According to Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2018), the problem-focused coping is the use of specific activities to get the task accomplished, whereas emotion-focused coping is the use of activities to feel better about the task. If the progressed learners applied, for instance, the method of problem-focused coping for a task that was beyond their accomplishment, they would only frustrate themselves and become distressed. Given such an impossible task, they could do better to discuss feelings with a friend or classmate. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), problem-focused coping includes confrontative coping, seeking social support, time management, and problem-solving whereas emotion-focused coping includes self-control, seeking social support, distancing, positive appraisal, and accepting responsibility.

The relationship between the progressed learners and the learning environment was emphasised within the context of stress, and it was viewed as a transaction between the progressed learners and the environment. Furthermore, the psychological stress or challenges refer to the person-environment relationship which is deemed important by the persons and their wellbeing, but which exceeds their available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this study, the researcher used the transactional model of stress and coping as a further lens to explore the influence of the progression policy on FET phase learners, thus considering the challenges experienced by the progressed learners and the resources available for them.

2.5.3. Integration of the ecological systems theory, and the stress and coping transactional model

The ecological theory, and the stress and coping transactional model were essential for guiding the researcher and for understanding the topic of the study. There is a connection between the ecological theory, and the stress and coping transactional model. In this study, the ecological theory provided the insight that individuals interact with different systems. In the context of this study, the different subsystems in the microsystems that the progressed learners interact with, include the parents, peers, and school (teachers, friends, classmates, school governing body). In the mesosystem, the school, parents, and community subsystems interact with each other for the benefit of the progressed learners. This entails for example, that there must be a harmonious relationship between the teachers, school governing body and the parents. On the other hand, the stress and coping transactional model helped the researcher to understand that the progressed learners were faced with challenges in the grade they are progressed to. Hence, it was imperative to note that the systems in the ecological theory were necessary to buffer the challenges experienced by the progressed learners. The systems in the ecological theory were the source of support that the progressed learners could draw strength from when dealing with academic and psychological challenges.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
Support system available for progressed learners



Lazarus & Folkman's Transactional Stress & Coping Model
Challenges experienced by progressed learners

Figure 2.1: Integration of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and the Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping transactional model [Accessed and adapted from Becvar and Becvar (2017)].

In the study of Haugan et al. (2021), high level of stress, perceived stress, and emotion-focused coping were associated negatively with academic competencies. In contrast, high level of psychosocial resources such as family, school, peers, social support, self-esteem, and intellectual ability and higher proportion of problem-focused coping were predictors of better social and academic competencies. It was found that higher proportions of problem-focused coping predicted decreased levels of adaptational problems, and it was in turn predicted by lower levels of perceived stress

and higher levels of resources (Haugan et al., 2021). Furthermore, resources enhanced problem-focused coping through their influence on appraisal of stressors. Hence, resources provided by the systems in the ecological theory were considered imperative to assist the progressed learners coping with the perceived stress of being progressed in the current grade and ultimately anticipating improved academic performance.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The literature, according to Letshwene and Du Plessis (2021), indicated that if the learners did not perform well in the lower grades, it is going to be a challenge for them to comprehend and grasp the curriculum content of the grade they have been progressed into. Moreover, the curriculum content in the FET phase is progressive, and so for a learner to master the content in grade 12, a mastery of the previous grade is a prerequisite.

Although there is an indication that the progressed learners can pass matric despite not having met the minimum pass requirements in grade 11, there is a need to explore what the core challenges faced by the progressed learners are. This is because only fewer than fifty percent (50%) of the progressed learners have passed matric since the inception of the progression policy. Therefore, this study intended to seek the views of learners who were the beneficiaries of the progression policy, relating to challenges and support which is the gap identified in the existing literature in this study. According to the existing literature, the findings regarding the influence and effect of the progression policy are based on teacher's perspective rather than on the perspective of the progressed learners. There is a gap in the support strategies made available with the specific intention to assist learners who have been progressed to the next grade. Thus, there is a need to conduct an in-depth investigation using semi-structured interviews, with progressed learners, to understand the problem from the viewpoint of learners themselves who are also impacted by the effects of school disruptions and curriculum content trimming due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that, to date, the intervention strategies used by the Department of Basic Education to support the

progressed learners have not resulted in much improvement in performance, thus necessitating the need for further investigations aimed at addressing the challenges.

This chapter has discussed the literature pertinent to the study. The chapter commenced by exploring the South African education system's current state before discussing the reasons attributed to poor learner performance. The learner progression policy was examined, focusing on how the policy came into being, its implementation, its challenges, its influence on learner performance across all South African schools and support for the progressed learners. Chapter 3 will focus on the research design and methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Primarily, this study sought to explore the influence of the South Africa progression policy on learners in the FET phase. To achieve this, the researcher took various steps and procedures (methodology) that helped to unravel the challenges and complexities of the learner progression policy.

Research methodology refers to the procedures that should be followed in executing the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research methodology chosen, guided the study in terms of employing the most appropriate research design, research strategies, data collection methods, data analysis and having a high regard for ethics.

This chapter clearly specifies the research design and data gathering techniques which were applied in the research study. The chapter outlines in detail the procedures that were followed, and it indicates that the approach that was used regarding the data collection and analysis, was relevant to the research questions.

Table 3.1: Summary of the research methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN	Case study
SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS	Purposive sampling: <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Ten progressed learners in grade 12 (five boys and five girls)❖ Three grade 12 teachers
DATA COLLECTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Semi-structured individual interviews❖ Document analysis
DATA DOCUMENTATION	Audio recordings

	Transcriptions
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	Inductive thematic data analysis
QUALITY CRITERIA	Trustworthiness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Transferability ❖ Dependability ❖ Credibility ❖ Confirmability ❖ Authenticity
ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Informed consent ❖ Voluntary participation ❖ Confidentiality ❖ Protection from harm, non-maleficence

3.2 PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

3.2.1 Pragmatic perspective: social constructivism

In this study, the researcher was guided by the social constructivism paradigm which asserts that knowledge is not only created through interactions of the individuals and their worlds or experiences but also co-created through interactions with other individuals within a specific social community (Jha, 2012). Here the predominant purpose was getting valid research findings as far as the research problem was concerned i.e., exploring the influence of the progression policy on performance of the FET phase learners. The social constructivists imply that both cognitive and social processes are essential in the creation of meaning and knowledge (Jha, 2012). For social constructivists, the reality is multiverse and subjective, as opposed to the single and objective truth (Fuller & Loogma, 2009). It entails that those human beings create their meaning and knowledge. Learning is perceived as a social process (Mansour, 2013).

3.2.2 Methodological paradigm: qualitative research

The study intended to apply qualitative research procedures to collect and analyze the data needed to align with the social constructivist epistemology. Qualitative research is a scientific method that involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of non-numerical data (Mishra, 2017). It focuses on the meanings, concepts, symbols, and descriptions of things. In addition, qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Therefore, the qualitative approach provides for in-depth and further understanding of research participants based on their responses, motivations, and feelings in their natural settings (Myers, 2019). According to Myers (2019), qualitative research is naturalistic and attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural settings. Qualitative research aims to get a better understanding through first-hand experience, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations. It aims to understand how the participants derive meaning from their surroundings, and how their meaning influences their behaviour (Mishra, 2017). This research approach is relevant to the study because the study aims to explore the challenges experienced by progressed FET phase learners following the progression policy. The researcher explored first-hand experience by interviewing the learners and teachers.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN: EXPLORATIVE CASE STUDY

Case study research represents a much broader category of analysis. Doing case study research means conducting an empirical investigation of a phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), case study research is a method with strong philosophical foundations which provides a framework for exploratory research in a real-life context.

Case study research focuses on an individual representative or a group (Creswell, 2017). According to Gerring (2006), a case study may seem difficult to undertake but it is one of the most in-depth methods of doing research as it involves a deep dive and thorough understanding of the methods employed in gathering and employing the data.

Cohen et al. (2017), stated that the objective of a case study may be exploratory, descriptive, interpretive or explanatory. This study adopted the exploratory case study approach. According to Yin (2018), an exploratory case study is an approach that explores the situations in which the interventions being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes. Hence, in this study, a case study design was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to convey the complexity of the progression policy phenomenon in the FET phase. Furthermore, a case study design was appropriate to this study because according to literature, case studies have proven valuable to researchers in examining the interdependency between event, context and individuals, particularly in educational settings (Creswell, 2017).

Another justification for the use of the case study design is its provision of a holistic and in-depth approach to addressing the research question which gives the study extra credibility to the outside observer (Gerring, 2006; Meyer, 2001), and it is easily adaptive (Siggelkow, 2007; Verschuren, 2003). Moreover, it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information as it employs quotes from key participants, anecdotes and narratives composed from original interviews. The case study design utilized both interviews and document analysis for data collection (Cohen et al., 2017).

This study used the exploratory case study approach, with the aim of exploring the influence of the South African progression policy on FET phase learners.

3.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND THE RESEARCH SITE

Sampling is a process of selecting research participants (Creswell, 2014). Determining the correct sample for a study enables the researcher to claim confidently that the research findings are representative of the whole population (Johnson & VanderStoep, 2009).

Sampling can be categorised as being either a probability or non-probability sample strategy (Creswell, 2014). A probability sampling strategy accompanies a random selection process while non-probability sampling uses a specific sampling selection. This study relied on the non-probability sampling technique where the research participants did not have an equal chance of being selected.

This study used a purposive sampling strategy, which is a non-random approach to selecting participants and generating results (Etikan, 2016). Purposive sampling is a strategic approach to sampling in which information-rich cases are sought out to address the research purpose and questions (Gentles et al., 2015). This approach helped the researcher to save time and money by selecting the population that matched the phenomenon. Moreover, it is imperative to be cognisant of the fact that purposive sampling has been chosen based on the target population's geographical proximity, easy accessibility, and willingness to participate (Etikan, 2016).

The advantage of purposive sampling is that it has a low margin of error (Hamed, 2016). This is because the information is collected from the specified source (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher interviewed learners with the same identifiable scholastic characteristics, namely that they have been progressed to the current grade. The teachers interviewed have experience in teaching progressed learners. Another advantage is that purposive sampling was not costly since the participants were readily available and the researcher relied on the assumption that the members of the target population were homogeneous so inferring that the research findings were not different from those obtained from a random sample (Gentles et al., 2015).

One weakness of using purposive sampling was that the participants could manipulate the data that was being gathered, which is based on saturation (Creswell, 2014). To avoid this, the researcher strived to be objective in interacting with the participants to minimize the possibility of obtaining judgement errors. Another weakness of this sampling procedure was that there was a high possibility of bias causing a problem of outliers to self-selection (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Outliers are irrelevant elements that are not within the scope of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hamed, 2016).

Ten progressed grade 12 learners were purposively selected, five boys and five girls. The participants are aged between 17 and 21 years. Grade 12 learners were selected based on their awareness that they are in their final year of secondary school yet did not master the prerequisites in grade 11. In addition, three grade 12 teachers with a minimum of three years teaching experience were purposively selected to be

interviewed, one male and two females. One of the female teachers was a deputy principal with more than twenty years teaching experience. The other two were post level one teachers, with teaching experience of less than ten years.

Table 3.2 Criteria for selection of participants

INCLUSIONS:	EXCLUSIONS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only voluntary consented participants. • Only learners who did not meet the minimum pass requirements but were progressed to grade 12. • Five boys and five girls were selected to check gender responsiveness. • Only teachers with a minimum teaching experience of three years teaching grade 12. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who met minimum pass requirements in grade 11. • Teachers who are not currently teaching grade 12 and those with less than three years teaching experience in grade 12.

This study was conducted in a secondary school in Soshanguve Block WW, Pretoria. The school is in the Gauteng province, Tshwane West District and is classified in a quintile 2 category i.e., a no fee- paying school. Many learners that attend at the school are from the surrounding areas in Soshanguve such as Block UU, WW, XX, VV and nearby informal settlements. The school is not fully resourced as the library and laboratory facilities have been converted into standard classrooms. The school has overcrowded classrooms (average of 60 learners per classroom) and an enrolment of 1209 learners.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

It is through data collection that the researcher manages to collect the information required to address the research questions and defend the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, the researcher should be regarded as the most significant instrument for data collection and analysis (Juraj, 2015). During this study, a conducive environment that enabled data collection and analysis to take place in an interactive manner was ensured by the researcher, even though the interviews were conducted online.

3.5.1 Qualitative semi-structured interviews

In this study, data collection was done through semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview is an interview in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. Rather, the interviewer will ask more open-ended questions allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than in a straightforward question and answer format (Yoon & Doyle, 2018). This allowed the researcher control over the line of questioning and enabled the researcher to gather historical information to the study (De Vos et al., 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted online to avoid contact with the participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher intended to get an in-depth understanding of the context of the area of interest under study through semi-structured interviews (Levitt et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews helped the learners and teachers to elaborate on their responses to the interview questions. However, it is worth mentioning that data collection was done during the period when learners were preparing for the preparatory examination.

The researcher used predetermined semi-structured questions that were thematically arranged in an interview schedule to ensure that various relevant themes pertaining to learner progression were well covered in the interviews. The semi-structured interview schedule was prepared beforehand and circulated to the participants in advance to give participants an idea of the questions that would be asked during the interviews conducted by the researcher, putting them at ease. The researcher used the semi-structured interviews to uncover how the progression policy influenced the progressed

learners and to uncover the challenges they are faced with due to the implementation of the progression policy. In addition, the semi-structured interviews with both the teacher and the learner participants helped the researcher to find out whether the available support measures are beneficial or not.

Although an interview schedule with predetermined questions was used, the researcher approached the interviews with enough flexibility to give considerable latitude to the participants not only to pursue a range of aspects pertaining to the progression policy, but also to allow them to shape the content and the nature of the interview (Bogdan & Biken, 2003). During the interviews, the researcher adopted the role of a 'miner' who views knowledge as buried metal that needs to be unearthed. The researcher tried to dig nuggets of data or meaning out of the participant's pure experience, unpolluted by any leading questions.

The interview consisted of predetermined questions (cf. Appendix F) that allowed for probing and clarification of answers (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). This method yielded direct quotations from participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and perceptions about progression. The interviews enabled the researcher to explore the avenues that emerged during the interview process, and the participants could provide a picture of their experience and perceptions about the challenges regarding the progression policy, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the available support measures.

Thirteen online semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. Ten learner participant interviews, lasting between 17-20 minutes each, were conducted with five boys and five girls who were progressed to grade 12, and three interviews, lasting between 25-30 minutes each, were conducted with educators who teach Grade 12. All interviews were audio recorded.

3.5.2 Document Analysis

Another data collection method used was document analysis. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic (Flick, 2018). Document analysis

as a data source, unlike other research instruments involving research subjects, is non-reactive (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Furthermore, analysing documents incorporates coding content into themes. Document analysis was done on the policy documents that are central to learner progression, that is, the South African progression policy of 2013 and Circular S7 of 2020 Revised Promotion Requirements for grade 10 to 12.

Triangulation was used to bring together the data collected from interviews, with three teachers and ten progressed learners, and the document analysis to ensure that the results complemented one another (Fuller & Loogma, 2009). According to Flick (2018) triangulation implies the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena.

3.6 DOCUMENTATION

For data documentation, audio recordings during interviews were used with the consent of the participants. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the intention of the participants.

3.6.1 Audio recordings

An audiotape recorder was used to record the responses of all the participants. The researcher was fully engaged with the participants while bearing in mind that the recordings will assist with the raw data.

3.6.2 Transcriptions

After the completion of interviews, a meticulous verbatim interview transcript was performed. Furthermore, the researcher completed the verbatim transcription timeously to avoid biasness. For objectivity and accuracy, the researcher compared the verbatim transcriptions against the audio recordings. In this way, credibility and validity of the study were ensured (Levitt et al., 2018).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

“Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) is the range of processes and procedures whereby researchers move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations investigated” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Creswell (2014), it involves a process of making sense out of data by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said, and what the researcher has read and seen.

In this study, the researcher conducted inductive data analysis whereby the data collected through interviews and document analysis were organized and categorized in pursuit of identifying relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher further strived to get an understanding of the meaning of the identified relationships. Furthermore, thematic analysis was utilized to be aware of the relationship that existed between words, messages, meaning and themes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The task of the researcher in data analysis included reading and re-reading the data to identify the emerging themes and discover potential meanings (Kelly, 2002). The researcher further coded the identified meaningful data into categories (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Moreover, the researcher also considered data that did not match the already identified themes and codes. In addition, the verbatim transcripts of the teacher and learner interviews, and the document analysis were used to establish themes and sub-themes. Thematic analysis helped to generate insight into the data collected, which consisted of the interview recordings and transcripts, and policy documents. The thematic analysis provides a supple and relevant research instrument which can give a rich description and an elaborate account of data (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Therefore, the flexibility of this method allowed the researcher the back-and-forth movement between the themes to remain with the relevant content (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Furthermore, categories to be coded were then identified. According to Creswell (2014), coding is done to describe the context of the study, the participants, the themes, and subthemes for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the process of coding, the themes and subthemes were not static as they constantly changed. It is imperative to

acknowledge that the meaning in the categories was co-created by the researcher and the participants. The researcher, therefore, presented the coded categories to the participants for verification (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The procedure followed for data analysis is indicated in Table 3.3

Table 3.3: Data analysis procedure

STEP	PROCESS
1. Familiarising with data collected	Raw data was prepared and organised. The researcher became familiar with the data collected by reading and rereading the transcriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
2. Generalising initial codes	Preliminary codes were identified, they were aspects of the data that appeared interesting and meaningful. These codes provided an indication of the context of the conversations (Leavy, 2017).
3. Searching for themes	The researcher sorted relevant data extracts according to overarching themes (Leavy, 2017).
4. Reviewing themes	The researcher reviewed the identified themes, whether to combine, refine, separate, or discard initial themes (Creswell, 2014). Data within themes was unified meaningfully (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
5. Defining and naming themes	The researcher refined and defined the themes and potential subthemes within

	the data. Subsequently, the researcher named the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
6. Producing the report	The researcher developed an interpretable report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, member checking was conducted whereby the participants had the opportunity to check for accuracy. In chapter 4, the researcher discussed the interpretation of the data in accordance with the themes and subthemes.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness is vital in qualitative research. It refers to the method whereby information is gathered, organized and categorized (Maree, 2015). It is the method that the researcher uses to show that the findings in the research study are valuable. To maintain the trustworthiness of the study, the following criteria were used: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Conformability and Authenticity (Lincoln, & Guba, 2017).

The researcher played a critical role during the data collection phase. The researcher is regarded as a research instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The researcher created rapport with the participants aimed at soliciting unbiased data. It is imperative to take into consideration that, before presentation and analysis, the researcher arranged and checked all qualitative data collected to ensure authenticity in terms of trustworthiness. This was achieved by ensuring rigour in this study.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is regarded as the most important criterion in establishing trustworthiness. According to Maree (2015), credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. As noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2017), the case study's limitation is a possibility of research bias and subjectivity. The presence of the researcher may cause the research participants to change their behaviour resulting in them not giving honest responses (Hawthorne effect) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). This limitation, however, was counteracted by using an external coder to ensure the reliability and validity of the data (Maree, 2015). Moreover, the researcher met with the prospective participants beforehand and built rapport with them to alleviate doubts and fears they might be having regarding their participation in the study. This process was important because it helped the participants to be at ease during the interviews, so encouraging them to give honest responses. After collecting data, the researcher verified with the participants whether what had been captured during the interviews was correct. This helped the researcher to fill in gaps identified from the earlier interviews.

3.8.2 Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (2017), transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Thus, the researcher should provide evidence bearing testimony that, given the same conditions, the research results could be replicated to other localities, periods, contexts, and populations (Lincoln & Guba, 2017). In this study, the behaviours and experiences of the research participants, as well as the context of the research, was clearly described to make the research meaningful to an outsider (Mansour, 2013). Additionally, the researcher's discussion of the research findings would clearly indicate and advance the theoretical understandings that are relevant to multiple situations, thus ensuring transferability.

3.8.3 Dependability

To ensure dependability, of the findings over time and different context, the researcher monitored the quality of the data collection methods and transcriptions. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). In other words, dependability entails the solidity of the research results over a period. This depends on the researcher's ability and skills to make inferences and interpretation based on the data gathered and analysed for the research. It is important to ascertain that the research findings are compatible with the data collected.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Here, the overarching objective by the researcher should be to ensure that researcher biases are minimised, if not eliminated, to avoid spoiling the results of the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explain that for the research to achieve this criterion, steps must be taken to help ensure, as far as possible, that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. For this criterion to be satisfied, the findings of the study were confirmed by the supervisor as an external reader. In this study, the researcher maintained an audit trail showing all the processes from data collection up to interpretation of the data. Guidance and support from the supervisor, as the data was discussed with her, helped the researcher to report research findings that reflected the experiences and perceptions of the participants. All the records with unique themes emanating from the data collection process are kept (Levitt et al., 2018).

3.8.5 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the degree to which researchers capture the multiple perspectives and values of participants in their study, and foster change across participants and systems during their analysis (Levitt et al., 2018). To ensure authenticity in this study, the researcher remained true to her own personality, values, and spirit, regardless of the pressure that the researcher was under to act otherwise. There was honesty with the self and with others, and responsibility for own mistakes was taken.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher observed ethical guidelines, in conducting the research, by doing what is right (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this regard, the researcher was guided by the ethical guidelines stipulated by the University of Pretoria and the Health Professional Council of South Africa. The researcher received ethical clearance (approval code EDU119/20) from the Faculty of Education's Ethical committee (Refer to p. iii). In addition, approval for data collection (approval code 2021/184) was granted by the Gauteng Department of Education (Appendix E).

3.9.1 Informed consent and permission

First and foremost, the participants were informed about the nature of the study and about expectations during their participation in the study (Creswell, 2014). It was clearly highlighted to them that participation in the study is voluntary and that it is within their rights not to participate if they wish not to do so. Therefore, in this study, no one was forced to participate or sign any assent/consent form (Tracy, 2019). This study involved learners who are still minors. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the researcher to ensure that appropriate assent/consent forms were signed by both learners and their parents or guardians.

3.9.2 Voluntary participation

The researcher had several debriefings with the participants to enlighten them about the study, including the aim and the reasons thereof. The purpose of the debriefings was also to explain why they were potential participants for this study. Participants were informed that participation was strictly voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time of the research process, without being victimized. Therefore, no one was coerced into taking part or in any way prevented from withdrawing from the study.

3.9.3 Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity

During the research process, it was vital that any information that the participants provided or divulged would be treated confidentially. The principle of anonymity implies

that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity (Cohen et al., 2011).

To enhance anonymity, pseudonyms were used (during data collection, analysis and the final text of this thesis) instead of the participants real names and the name of the research site (both the school and district). Their real names are not conclusively linked to the data and are known only to the researcher.

3.9.4 Respect, integrity, debriefing and no deception

Maree (2015) opines that participants have their rights and dignity which should be respected. They have the right to privacy and confidentiality, amongst other various rights, which should be respected. The critical paradigm within which this study is located, as well as the nature of the topic, sensitized the researcher to the basic human rights of the participants and the researcher's responsibility to protect those rights. The researcher, therefore, had to maintain values and norms affecting human dignity.

The researcher also had a responsibility not to trample on but to respect the research site during the data collection process. The school had to be assured that its daily activities and settings would not be disturbed (Creswell, 2014), and that the researcher would not place unethical and/or unreasonable demands on either the participants or members of the school community. A letter of informed consent on the school's right to withdraw from the study, at any time without being victimized, was issued. Participants were interviewed after school hours, when it was convenient, to make sure that their teaching and co-curricular responsibilities were not interrupted.

3.9.5 Non-Maleficence

At each stage of the study, the researcher ensured that all the participants were not exposed to any harm or undue risks.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The chapter has presented a detailed description of the research procedures in this study. The research procedures discussed consisted of the research strategy, target

population and sampling procedures, research instruments, data collection techniques and analysis, ways of ensuring data authenticity as well as ethical considerations. Limitations of the study were also outlined. The presentation of the results and discussion are presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 focused on the research design and methodology applied in the study. Chapter 4 presents and discusses data collected from the interviews with learners and teachers and the findings from the policy documents. Appendix C shows the interview guides and documents. The research findings are presented and guided by the research questions, and the aims and objectives of the study. The demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data to draw up relevant themes applicable to the research. The generated themes are illustrated by *verbatim* responses from the research participants. Codes were used to guarantee the anonymity of the participants in the study. The interviewed learners were code-named L1, L2...up to L10, and the teachers were code-named A1, A2 and A3.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

(a) Learners

The interviewed learners consisted of five girls and five boys who have been progressed from grade 11 to grade 12. The researcher aimed to have balanced participation to avoid views and perceptions that might be gender biased. Figure 4.1 shows the age group of the participants. To ensure anonymity, the interviewed learners were code-named L1, L2 up to L10.

Table 4.1: Learners' demographic information

LEARNER	AGE (YEARS)	GENDER
L1	18	Male
L2	19	Male
L3	18	Male
L4	18	Female
L5	18	Male
L6	18	Female
L7	17	Female
L8	21	Male
L9	18	Female
L10	20	Female

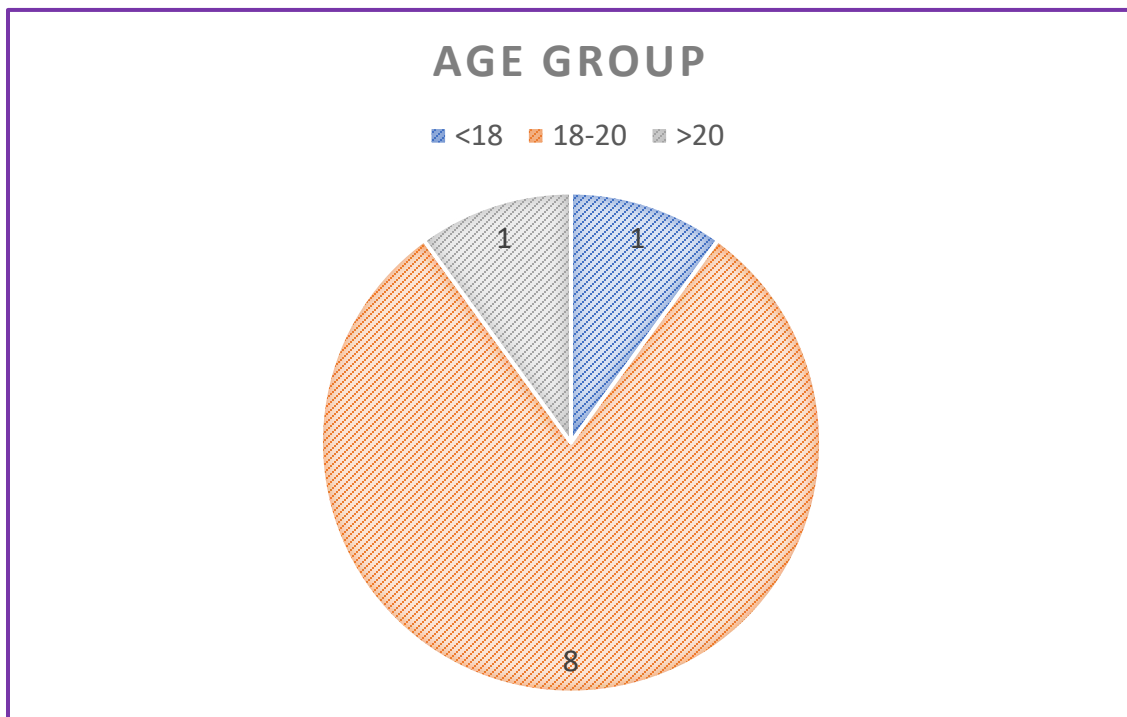


Figure 4.1: Interviewed learners' age groups

As shown in the Figure above, most of the interviewed learners fell into the 18 to 20 years bracket, except for one participant who was below 18 years and another one above 20 years.

b) Teachers

The three interviewed teachers consisted of one male and two females. This composition of participants reflected the gender composition of the school where female teachers were twice the number of male teachers.

Regarding age groups, experience, and qualifications, the three teachers were distributed as shown in the table below:

Table 4.2: Teachers' demographic information

TEACHER	AGE GROUP	EXPERIENCE	HIGHEST QUALIFICATIONS	GENDER
A1	31-40yrs	6-10yrs	Postgrad (BEd. Hons)	Male
A2	41-50yrs	1-5yrs	Postgrad (PGCE)	Female
A3	Over 50yrs	Over 20yrs	Postgrad (MBA)	Female

As shown in the table above, one of the teacher participants (A1) is in the age group 31-40, with teaching experience between 6-10 years and holds a post-grad degree in education. Another teacher (A2) is in the age group 41-50 years, has five years of experience in education administration and holds a PGCE. The remaining teacher participant (A3) is above 50 years old, has over 20 years of experience and holds an MBA qualification.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data presentation was guided by the central aim of this study, which intended to answer the research questions provided in chapter one.

THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

- ❖ What is the influence of the South African progression policy on learners in the FET phase?

THE SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ❖ What are the challenges experienced by progressed learners in the FET phase?
- ❖ How are progressed learners supported to cope in the FET phase??

Four dominant themes emerged from the collected data:

- ❖ The effects of the progression policy on the progressed learners
- ❖ Academic challenges faced by progressed learners
- ❖ Psychological challenges faced by progressed learners
- ❖ Support for progressed learners.

These themes guided the presentation of data and the subsequent discussion in this chapter. It is important to note that the themes and their related sub-themes are interconnected, which means that the discussion of one theme impacts the other. Below (Figure 4.2) are the identified main themes.

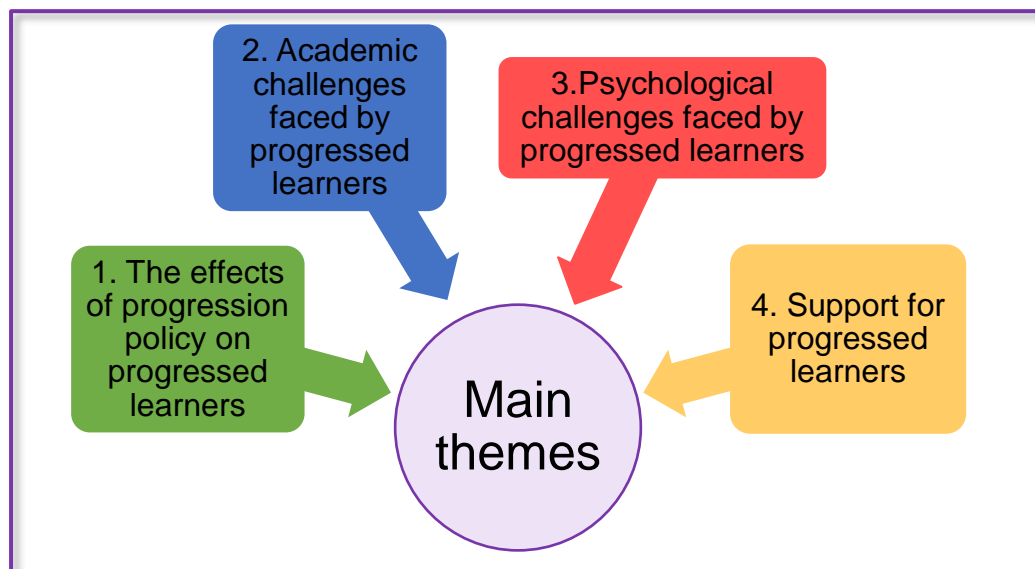


Figure 4.2: Overview of the main themes identified

4.3.1 Theme 1: The effects of the progression policy on grade 12 progressed learners

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Lack of commitment and motivation by progressed learners

“The learner progression policy where learners are moved to the next grade even though they did not meet the minimum pass requirements” (Stott et al., 2015, p. 5) affects the progressed learners’ commitment and motivation. This finding revealed that, since the implementation of this policy, the progressed learners no longer put effort into their schoolwork. Furthermore, they are demotivated in their learning. The teachers expressed concern about the fact that they helplessly watch learners not committed to their studies and not even eager to be promoted to the next grade. *“It is sad to watch our learners not committing to their studies”*, said teacher A1¹.

This was supported by teacher A2, *“... could be that most learners do not take their schoolwork seriously...”*. The learners were cognisant that they would not repeat the same grade and would consequently be moved to the next grade regardless of their poor performance. This resulted in poor performance in all grades. The impact was felt more in the FET subjects, as learners lacked knowledge of the basic concepts. However, the participants in this study are currently in grade 12, and the progression policy is no longer applicable. Such findings corroborate the assertion of Munje and Maarman (2016) and Beree (2016) stating that the learner progression policy instils a passive and demotivated attitude amongst learners owing to its leniency. In addition, this finding supports the view of Stott et al. (2015) and Mngadi (2021) which states that implementing the learner progression policy makes learners lose motivation to work harder because they will be progressed to the next grade without effort. Furthermore, Makhanya (2021) confirmed that the effects of the progression policy on learners are demotivation, being impassionate and lack of commitment to their studies. This was evident from some of the learners who said that they were too lazy to study in grade 11. Learner L3 said, *“I did not do well in grade 11 because I spent most of my time on social media”*. L10 added, *“Honestly, I failed because I was too lazy to do my schoolwork”*.

¹ All quotes in chapter 4 are *verbatim*.

Unexpectedly, from the findings of this study, two progressed learners' attitudes have changed, as they demonstrate a positive attitude towards their schoolwork. This change is indicative of significant improvement. The fact that they failed to meet the promotion requirements in grade 11 motivated them to achieve more. L6 commented, "*I am ready to work seriously to pass with a bachelor's*". "*I know I am a bright child*", L9 added. "*I will not waste time on social media again, and I want to pass grade 12*". The findings revealed that L6 and L9 indicated that they were feeling better about their performance because there was some improvement owing to their effort and the continued effort of their teachers. "*I am now happy about my performance; I have improved because I am putting more effort*", said L9. These findings correlate with perspectives of the stress and coping transactional model which was the secondary theory that guided this study. Some of the progressed learners adopted a problem-focused coping style, which occurs when an individual seeks to reduce their experienced stress by doing something to alter the source of stress. They put extra effort on their studies, which improved performance. This concurs with the report by Minister Angie Motshekga on the matric results of the 2020 class. It was noted that there had been a significant improvement in the pass rate for progressed learners despite not having received adequate support from the department because of the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic (DBE, 2020).

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Overloaded teachers and lack of methodologies to teach progressed learners

Responding to how the teachers were coping with the demands of handling both the progressed and promoted learners in the new grade, the general sentiment was that teachers were failing to cope. The following responses were noted:

"... having both groups in one class is difficult and requires a change in approach almost with everything that needs to be covered. Versatility has been a weapon all these years", remarked teacher A1.

Teacher A2 mentioned, "*... not very good as I have to treat each group of learners according to their performance, and I am not given two separate annual teaching plans*

for different groups. I have to use same allocated times for both learners while making sure to give progressed learners extra work to be able to pass at the end of the year”.

Teacher A3 stated, *“...The learners that are promoted are ready and have a better understanding of subject content and ready to learn new content to develop on the prior knowledge, those that are progressed are behind and they don’t have necessary prior knowledge, therefore as a subject teacher you have the responsibility to teach the content of three grades prior to the one they are in to make them understand although the time it is not sufficient to cover their desired content to catch up, meanwhile, those promoted are disadvantaged”.*

The teachers felt that they were doing their best to assist, but the progression policy seemed to exacerbate the already existing problem of learner performance. Teacher A3 indicated that progressed learners needed attention more than their counterparts, and the process resulted in little or no improvement to the learners' performance. Teacher A3 said, *“It is unfortunate that we are aware that the progressed learners need our attention more than the promoted ones. However, as teachers it is difficult to come to the party since we are overloaded. We are not coping with too many classes”.* Teacher A1 said: *“Progression of learners should be revised as it is not helping the education system, but the solution was designed not to keep learners in the same grade for many years. In the long run, its impact disadvantaged the same learners, and when they reach high school, they realize the pressure they have and end up dropping out of school at an early age, some even before they can complete grade 9”.*

The above sentiment was echoed by teacher A2 whose response was: *“I feel that learners should not be progressed because it is extra job for the teachers, as they have to be given special attention and the department is not doing much to assist teachers in handling them. I honestly do not know how to handle these learners. It is just frustrating”.*

The above responses showed that dealing with progressed learners was difficult, given that teachers had to deal with learners that have different weaknesses that require special attention and treatment. In addition, the time needed to teach progressed learners the content they have missed in the previous grade strained teachers. This

finding supports the study of Mngadi (2021) which states that teachers are not adequately trained and developed for methodologies that will effectively benefit progressed learners. This finding further agrees with the recommendations in the study by Muedi et al. (2021) stating that the Department of Education should develop intervention strategies that are oriented for the progressed learners.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Academic challenges faced by progressed learners

According to Dube and Ndaba (2021), most progressed learners perform poorly in many subjects, especially sciences. Their academic struggle has stimulated the need to find ways to enhance their performance. This theme highlights the challenges progressed learners encountered as noted by the interviewed teachers and the learners themselves. It was revealed, in the interviews, that progressed learners have a mammoth task to ensure that they put more effort into their schoolwork since most of them were not coping. In most cases, teachers forced them to attend extra lessons and do extra homework to be on par with the other group of promoted learners.

Responding to the question on how the teachers felt about their school's performance, there was a consensus that, academically, the progressed learners performed below par. Consequently, this affected the overall pass rate for the school. As echoed by teacher A3, *“the progressed learners are struggling with the workload, and this will drop the year-end matric results. Unfortunately, we cannot help because we are overloaded”*. Teacher A1 supported this sentiment saying, *“the progressed learners are not coping, many of them do not write activities because they do not understand what is required of them. You cannot believe that there are those who cannot read but are in grade 12”*.

This concurs with the findings of Nkosi and Adebayo (2021), stating that most progressed learners are unable to read and write. In addition, they need to endeavour to comprehend the content as it is built on what they did not master in the previous grade. Makhanya (2021) further supports that the progressed learners are overwhelmed as most of them are unable to complete the remedial activities given to them by their teachers. The factor of overcrowded classrooms, as hinted by the teachers, perpetuates the academic challenges because struggling learners do not get the individual attention

as per their need. This is supported by the findings of Ngema and Maphalala (2021) who indicated that the teaching of progressed learners is constrained by overcrowded classrooms.

The learners attributed their poor performance to different factors. They mentioned that they did not take their schoolwork seriously as one of the factors. Most of the interviewed learners indicated that their failure to meet the pass requirements was caused by not studying. L2 responded, *“Being lazy to study and not paying attention in class...”*

Due to the mounting pressure on them to perform, half of the progressed learners admitted that it is not easy to cope with the workload in grade 12. They confessed that the teachers were giving them too much work in all the subjects, which was challenging to handle. *“I find it difficult to understand when the teacher is teaching because they move fast and give too much work saying that we are in grade 12”*, said L4.

The rest of the interviewees were very optimistic and indicated that it was tough, but they were coping by ensuring that they created more time for schoolwork. For example, L5 said, *“...I am putting more effort this year because I want to pass grade 12”*. Some even mentioned that they had realized where things had gone awry in the previous grade and were now prepared to work harder and produce better results.

When asked to explain the aspect they find difficult in learning at school, one learner said, *“being taught with teaching methods that are unable to accommodate your level of understanding”*. This was echoed by L2, who went further to reveal that *“some teachers did not care whether the learner understood or not...”*. Shortage of school stationery, like textbooks, was cited as another problem at school since the learners had to share textbooks. This was commented on by L8, *“It is difficult to study because in other subjects we share textbooks...”*.

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Content knowledge gap (not mastered Grade 10 and 11 curriculum content)

Content knowledge generally refers to the facts, concepts, theories, and principles that are taught and learned in specific academic courses, rather than to related skills such

as reading, writing, or researching that student also learn in school (Grossman, 2012). The study revealed that there is a gap in content knowledge with progressed learners. “A learner is required to encounter, study, practice, and master the curriculum content” (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021, p 203). Therefore, they experience academic challenges as they had not mastered the grade 10 and 11 curriculum content. It also transpired in the interviews that some learners failed their grades owing to not getting adequate support from the school. Progressed learners indicated that there was a time when they spent almost a month without a grade 10 Mathematics teacher and that has affected their conceptual understanding up to this point. L7 responded, *“I am struggling with Mathematics because we were without a Mathematics teacher in grade 10 for about a month or two”*. L3 said, *“I did not understand grade 11 work, now grade 12 is more challenging for me”*.

Concerning the reasons for the poor performance of the progressed learners in their previous grades, the three teachers attributed the poor performance of progressed learners to a lack of a sound foundation in the previous grades. They indicated that the learners did not have a proper grounding in terms of being equipped with the basic concepts of the subjects in the previous grades. *“There is no way these learners can master the curriculum in grade 12. They have never passed, they were progressed since grade 10, even in GET”*.

This finding is supported by other researchers who have observed that if learners do not perform well in the lower grades, it affects their understanding of the subject in the FET phase (Letshwene and Du Plessis, 2021; Reche et al., 2012). Moreover, it is a fact that the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) is a progressive curriculum that starts from grade 10 to 12. It entails that the progressed learners may have difficulty grasping the grade 12 content. In addition, when progressed learners have poor subject content knowledge from a previous grade, performing well in the current grade is unlikely (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021; Reuben, 2015). According to Reuben (2015), it is obvious that the ill-preparedness of learners at lower grades will result in some difficulty when learners are studying in higher grades. Furthermore, this notion is supported by Ramputla (2020)

who pointed out that progressed learners' chances of passing grade 12 are nearly impossible as they lack the prerequisite content knowledge from the previous grade.

According to Munje and Maarman (2016), the circumstances under which the progressed learners have to acquire the content knowledge is ignored by the progression policy. Furthermore, the policy fails to consider capabilities to offer the required support (Munje & Maarmam, 2016). Some teachers force progressed learners to attend extra lessons and do extra homework to be on par with the group of promoted learners (Beree, 2017).

4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Progressed learners not coping with grade 12 workload

Reading and writing abilities continue to threaten the achievement of grade 12 progressed learners. The teachers noted that most progressed learners could not read and write which was a severe challenge. “*Not all progressed learners can read and that yields problems when coming to class activities. Most progressed learners seem to be demotivated when coming to their schoolwork, they are not committed to their schoolwork*”, said teacher A2. In addition, “*some progressed learners are older than their peers in the same grade and what made the situation undesirable for them was that their cognitive level of thinking was lower than their younger classmates and they mostly became bullies to learners and teachers*”, A1 responded.

Furthermore, it was highlighted in the interviews that learners could not answer questions because they did not understand what they were reading. However, when an explanation was provided, they could answer. The unfortunate part is that the teacher is not permitted to explain any concepts during examinations. The reality is that most of the progressed learners failed to cope with the situation and dropped out of school. Teacher A3 further noted, “*Progressed learners are not able to cope with the pace in Grade 12 as we are obliged to be on par with the Annual Teaching Plan. Progressed learners are not able to work on their own, to prepare in advance. There are some progressed learners who are still not competent in reading*”. Teacher A1 concurred with this statement.

It was noted that learner progression imposed a burden on the already challenged learners by pushing them into the next grade with increased learning demands, injuring their aspirations, motivation, learning opportunities, and performance. This finding is consistent with what was found in the literature, that is, that progressed learners are more likely to struggle academically and may be more vulnerable with regards to quitting school if adequate support is not provided to them (Kader, 2012). The findings revealed that enhanced support, to assist progressed learners with coping in the new grade, is lacking.

4.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Challenges of teaching progressed learners and their counterparts in the same classroom

The teachers highlighted that teaching promoted and progressed learners in the same class was challenging, as the progressed learners' ability to grasp content is lower than that of their counterparts. *"It is difficult to give the progressed learners attention necessary because as teachers, we are rushing to complete the ATP..."* said teacher A2. The reality was that not all progressed learners could read and write, which caused difficulties when it was time for class activities. This exacerbated the task of educators experiencing work overload, rushing to complete the syllabus, and dealing with progressed learners who are struggling to cope in grade 12.

All three of the interviewed teachers pointed out that the school environment was not conducive for the teaching and learning needs of progressed learners. They indicated that the teaching and learning environment was not designed to accommodate progressed and promoted learners in the same class. Teachers were overwhelmed because there was insufficient, or no support given to them by the school. As pointed out by teacher A3, *"It is surprising how some programmes are introduced at school, like the progression of learners without initiative to make sure that required intervention to accommodate the changes like creating an initiative that will assist learners who are progressed"*. The findings of this study suggest that schools have little to no provision of support for both the teachers and the progressed learner groups. Hence, it becomes the responsibility of the teachers to devise the means to assist the progressed learners. This finding aligns with the findings in the study by Muedi et al. (2021). Moreover, the

authors further stated that teaching the progressed learners in the same class with their promoted counterparts does not assist the progressed learners, and therefore, there is still a need to have intervention strategies available to support learners who have been progressed.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Psychological challenges faced by progressed learners

In this study, it was found that progressed learners are faced with psychological challenges, such as stress and depression, the stigma of being a progressed learner, and being discriminated against by both the teachers and fellow learners. L2, L3, L5, L6, L7 and L9 stated that psychological problems such as depression, stress, discrimination and being undermined by fellow learners contributed to poor performance. L1 indicated that she is suffering from depression due to the death of her parent. She stated, *“I am suffering from depression because I lost my mother this year, and I have to deal with grade 12 studies”*. L6 mentioned that *“Some learners take me down. They aim to pull me down, saying that because I did not pass Grade 11, I will not make it to Grade 12. They also do not want to be in group work with a progressed learner, saying they do not want low marks because of the progressed learner”*. This suggests that progressed learners experience psychological challenges for which there is no assistance. This goes against Assessment Instruction 44 of 2018, by the Department of Basic Education, which instructs schools to develop support aimed towards providing a form of intervention that would help the learners in all aspects of the educational curriculum, including general behaviour and psychological support. The findings in the study of Munje and Maarman (2016) indicated that although it is a requirement of the progression policy that learner support be provided by teachers in the new grades, it fails to take into account the coping process required by the learners and the variance in the degree of learner needs regarding the challenges. Furthermore, the findings of Mogale and Modipane (2021) confirmed that the policy fails to consider teacher capability to offer the required support to the progressed learners. This was further supported by the studies of Ramputla (2020) and Khobe (2021) who reported that teachers experienced extreme challenges as they fail to cope with the

implementation of the progression policy. Furthermore, they also stated that teachers do not receive training on how to support the progressed learners.

4.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Low self-esteem, stress and depression

When asked what challenges they were facing as a progressed learner in the school, one learner felt strongly that other learners looked down upon her because she was progressed. The learner (L3) said, “...*some learners think that I am stupid because I am progressed*”. The other learner participants expressed the same sentiments indicating that it was difficult to ask other learners for help because they felt left out. In some cases, they get depressed and become emotionally affected, as expressed by L7, “...*I am feeling depressed and emotionally exhausted because I am labelled a progressed learner at school*”. L9 responded, “*It feels as if I have been written off as a learner with dreams. I now have low self-esteem*”.

According to Minister Angie Motshekga, the progression policy came into being to assist learners in progressing to the next grade, intending to promote learners’ dignity, self-esteem, and the need to encourage socialisation by age (DBE, 2016). Moreover, the minister described psychological support as an important measure that could help to boost the morale of progressed learners. However, from the participants’ statements above, there is limited provision for psychological support for progressed learners. This finding agrees with a study by Nkosi and Adebayo (2021) who reported that the challenges of the progression policy are learners’ lack of confidence and lack of self-esteem. From this sub-theme, it can be deduced that progressed learners may struggle to compete with their counterparts because they do not believe in themselves. This finding further aligns with what was highlighted by Beree (2016) who stated that the progression policy does not make adequate provision for emotional support for the progressed learners.

4.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Discrimination by fellow learners and teachers

It was, furthermore, mentioned that there was discrimination amongst learners at school, making it difficult for progressed learners to learn. Peer pressure and the influence of bad friends were also mentioned as severe problems that learners encountered when learning at school.

“Some discriminations were evident when some learners refuse to be engaged in groupwork with a progressed learner, citing that they will also score low marks ”, said L6.

“Sometimes I lose hope in studying due to depression and my emotional instability because of discrimination by other learners”, added L7.

Some learners showed discontentment with the seating arrangement in the classroom. L2 responded: *“It’s not okay because they categorize us. There are some teachers who say we must sit according to our performance. I feel they discriminate. It is not fair”*. L10 said, *“Some teachers pay attention only on the smart learners, ignoring us”*.

The overall findings in this sub-theme are in line with what is noted by the DBE (2016), that the progressed learners are negatively labelled and carry that stigma throughout their schooling. This negatively affects their performance and thus, further compounds the already existing challenges. Additionally, Mbanjwa (2014) asserted that the learners become discouraged, frustrated, and possibly drop out of school.

The findings under the “psychological challenges face by progressed learners” theme are in accordance with the perspective of Lazarus and Folkman’s stress and coping transactional model. Learners are continually tested, evaluated, and observed on their competence in the classroom, which is academic achievement (Haugan et al., 2021). This opens many opportunities or situations where one’s identity can potentially be threatened or challenged. Furthermore, school is a place where basic psychological needs such as confidence, autonomy, competence relationships can or cannot be fulfilled and are regularly thwarted (Berjot et al., 2012). How learners react to threats such as being discriminated against can affect their academic achievement, and more generally, their psychological adjustment. It was revealed in this study that the

progressed learners felt discriminated against by teachers and fellow learners. They further expressed that they have low self-esteem and experience feelings of sadness or depression. Similar findings have been reported by Haugan et al. (2021) who stated that high level of stress and perceived stress resulted in low academic competencies. This indicates that the progressed learners have made a series of appraisals and decided that they do not have the resources to deal with the threat. Thus, ultimately resulting in the inability to cope in the classroom.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Support for progressed learners

In this theme, both teachers and progressed learners highlighted different forms of support that is available for progressed learners. However, it was indicated by the teachers that the support given was not enough. Furthermore, progressed learners have different views regarding the support of their parents and communities, teachers, and peers. A detailed perspective regarding the support of progressed learners is indicated in the subthemes outlined hereunder.

4.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Peer learning

The study results showed that learners learn better from their peers. They indicated that it becomes easy for them to understand when they do activities with other learners.

L4 answered, “... *class discussions with my classmates, working together and learning from one another*”.

“*I find working in a group easily because my peers are more understanding*”, responded L2.

“*I would say afternoon studies with my classmates having a class discussion like helping each other with what we understand and what we do not understand*”, commented L9.

These findings are supported by research that showed that peer learning could positively affect pupils (Miquel & Duran, 2017). It is further supported by Topping (2018) who reported that peer learning can yield significant gains in academic achievement in the target curriculum. Furthermore, the affective component of peer learning might also

prove to be very powerful (Topping, 2018). Hence, it entails that a trusting relationship with a learner who holds no position in authority might facilitate self-disclosure of ignorance, enabling subsequent reflection and correction. Ultimately, the progressed learners are motivated to learn from their peers.

4.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Support from teachers and the district

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering positive or negative attitudes in the learning and performance of progressed learners. Teacher A1 pointed out, *“Positive attitude towards the learners and giving them the required attention improves the class mood and in turn motivates those that are struggling. Negative is seen more when teachers do not invest in the learners that are struggling and, as a result, learners are scared to indicate that they are struggling”*.

Teacher A2 indicated that teachers could not provide adequate support as they did not have enough time to give the progressed learners special attention. Otherwise, they treat them like promoted learners because they are in the same class as the promoted learners.

However, teacher A3 was not specific about what teachers do to foster positive or negative attitudes in the learning and performance of progressed learners. She only mentioned that *“teachers can do all their best to teach the progressed learners and that it should always be considered that the teacher in a particular grade and subject does not teach progressed learners only. As a result, the effort of the teacher might not be sufficient to meet the needs of the progressed learners”*.

However, as highlighted by teacher A1, she must conduct extra classes, as she is now working with the ‘second chance matric rewrite programme’. During regular classes, she concentrates more on helping the learners gain techniques in answering questions and applying what they know. Teacher A1 said, *“Yes, but to a minimal, as I have already mentioned that as teachers we are overwhelmed. I mainly focus more on helping the learners gain technique in answering questions and apply what they know”*.

Teacher A2 also mentioned that after giving the learners formal tasks, item analysis is done to help with remedial teaching. Thus, focusing on questions that the learners did not perform well in answering, “... *after giving them formal tasks I do item analysis that will help me do remedial teaching by concentrating on questions for which they did not perform well*”. Teacher A2 further elaborated that they offer learners extra lessons in the morning, afternoon, and Saturdays at school. “*At school, we offer them extra lessons in the morning, afternoon and Saturdays*”, remarked teacher A2.

The same sentiments were echoed by teacher A3 who emphasized that all progressed learners need extra classes and extra lessons to catch up with the curriculum. However, it should be noted that, in most cases, the extra lessons are only done in grade 12 because, often, the same grade 12 teacher is needed in the lower grades, making it difficult for those grades to get the extra support needed. “*All learners need extra classes and extra lessons are provided to all learners in the afternoon and sometimes Saturdays. During school holidays that's when there are lessons designed for progressed learners by the Department of Education to catch up, but that is mainly done in grade 12 and the same teacher teaching grade 12 also needed in the other grade and that sometimes becomes impossible to cater for other grades with regards extra classes without relying on standard teaching time*”, remarked teacher A3.

In terms of support measures given to progressed learners, it was revealed in the interviews, with the progressed learners, that they were generally receiving considerable support from teachers. They indicated that they were taken to study camps where they would mix with learners from other schools and were taught by different teachers. Nine out of the ten interviewed progressed learners agreed that the measures put in place by the school and government to support progressed learners were beginning to bear fruits. The following were some of the responses from the progressed learners:

“*After we attended the camps, I improved a lot in my studies and the topics I used to struggle to understand are now clear to me*”, responded L1.

“*Yes, there is a lot of improvement because I passed very well last term*”, said L7.

“Yes, there are some things I did not understand in my school, but I began to understand them ever since I attended study camps”, commented L6.

This finding is in line with the study by Beree (2016) who reported that progressed learners must be provided with support. However, it was brought to the teachers' attention that the support from the district was not meant for the progressed learners but all grade 12 learners. Furthermore, the teachers indicated that, for the holiday camps, the district divided the learners into high achievers and at-risk learners, but this did not address the content gap faced by the progressed learners.

In addition, some of the interviewed progressed learners confirmed that teachers were eager to see improvement in their performance. The committed teachers offered up their free time to do remedial work and present extra classes to struggling learners. A1 said, *“I offer extra classes in the morning, afternoon, and Saturdays, but it is not enough because I see different groups. I have many classes because due to Covid we have small sizes but more classes”*. It should be noted that such support from teachers was not provided across all the subjects. Some teachers did not have the time to do extra classes due to their heavy workloads, as indicated by three of the teachers interviewed. A2 responded, *“I want to have extra classes for the progressed learners but given the number of classes I teach, it will not be possible”*. A3 concurred. Earlier studies have also reported that teacher workload impacts learner performance (Letshwene, 2016; Mngadi, 2021; Muedi et al., 2021; Nkosi and Adebayo, 2021).

When asked what they thought could be done to help improve their performance in grade 12, the interviewed progressed learners pointed to the support measures mentioned above, i.e., extra classes, camps, and working hard on their part. In terms of peer support, the progressed learners hailed their peers or friends for instilling positive attitudes towards their learning and performance. They pointed out that peers encourage them to study and sometimes helped each other in areas where they differed in academic strengths. One progressed learner felt strongly about the support they received from friends. Learner L1 said, *“My peers play a positive role in my performance because they give me the strength to study and have more interest in schoolwork, thus encouraging me to work extra hard”*.

Regarding teachers, the message across the board was that teachers play a critical role in the learning and performance of the progressed learners. The progressed learners indicated how essential teachers were in their lives. *"Teachers are concerned about my work. Whenever I struggle with my schoolwork, they ensure that everything is explained in detail until I understand"*, said learner L4. In addition, learner L5 said, *"...if I do not understand, I am free to ask anything and get help with what I need"*. Furthermore, most learners echoed the same sentiments, that is, that they get support from their teachers. Only learner L9 was at variance with others, pointing out that teachers did not care about them and were not concerned about their performance. Learner L9 said, *"None, they do not care about us..."*.

According to Jaworski & Huang (2014) and Çayak & Karsantik, (2020), teachers are the critical stakeholders in education. The interviewed learners acknowledged that there could be no teaching and learning without teachers. Teachers meant everything to them as far as teaching and learning were concerned. According to the learner participants, the role and support from teachers were appreciated, though not sufficient. The teachers committed their time to teach during regular hours and could sometimes go the extra mile to help the progressed learners through extra classes during weekends and holidays. The teachers also encouraged and/or motivated the learners to study. These actions taken by the teachers are supported by Circular E22 of 2016, cited by Kika and Kotze (2019) and Tshiovhe (2018), which stipulates that progressed learners should be afforded psychological support, curriculum support, alternative career paths, and additional learning opportunities, amongst other support measures. However, earlier studies confirm that progressed learners are not afforded adequate support according to their individual needs (Kolobe and Mihai, 2021; Muedi et al., 2021; Munje & Maarman, 2016; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). The support is meant for the whole grade, thus ignoring the individual needs of the progressed learners.

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Support from parents and the community

It is imperative for parents and the community to play a leading role in the education system. According to teacher A1, *"... community plays a big role because these are the immediate living areas that learners spend most of their time. If the environment is not*

positive or does not support learning, students won't identify with learning which then affects performance". Teacher A3 concurred, *"...parents can play a vital role by being involved in enforcing and making sure their kids are studying at home and give them all the support they need. And organize peer studies and tutoring in order to support their children"*. However, the study findings showed that this is not always the case, as noted by teacher A2. Teacher A2 observed that most parents are working and, as a result, do not have time to provide adequate support. Members of the community also indicated that guiding learners was not their duty as they are not the responsible parent. Teacher A2 commented, *"Most parents and the community don't play their role as most parents are working and they do not stay with their children, as a result, they end up lacking parental support. Members of the community are not able to guide most learners as they feel that they are not their parents"*.

The above assertions were supported by teacher A3, who agreed and said, *"Unfortunately, from this community, learners do not get the necessary support from their parents and communities. Parents do not come to meetings to understand the challenges of their children. The community is not helpful as there are lot of taverns around here, and they close very late. The children are using drugs because they are easily accessible in the community"*.

Concerning the role of families in the learning and performance of the progressed learners at school, there were mixed responses from the interviewed learners. The reason for this inconsistency might be that the learners come from different family structures. Learner L7 remarked, *"My mom shouts at me saying I am lazy to do the house chores and hide behind books. They must also give me enough time to focus on my studies every day"*. Learner L4 said, *"There is no one in my family who is concerned about my education, they never ask me about it"*. However, most learners indicated that they felt the community was not supporting their education because most of the schools around the Gauteng province have been subjected to theft and vandalism by members of the community. The participants further highlighted that the communities did not overtly encourage them to study, provided limited moral support and displayed difficulty in disciplining them as indicated by learner L6, *"Honestly there is nothing tangible to*

show that the community has the best interest of us struggling learners at heart. The same community that is expected to support our education is vandalizing our school regularly". Learner L 9 commented, *"They steal computers and valuable school equipment"*.

Only a handful of the interviewed learners believed that the community and their parents were doing well in support of their learning, as noted in the following responses:

L10; *"Community supplies us with libraries to study during weekends. Family supports me with money so that I can google the difficult homework and tasks"*.

L3; *"They ensure that I attend school and do my homework"*.

L2; *"Pushing me to always study hard so it's a very supportive role. My parents do not judge me, they do not compare with my brother. They are always there to support me"*.

None of the participants disputed that their families wanted to see them reach their full potential. Families, thus, play a critical part in supporting their children, both morally and financially. However, as indicated in the interviews, the level of support differs from family to family. As indicated above, the participants would want to see their families and communities investing in their education by supporting them with the resources needed to learn, i.e., textbooks and electronic gadgets for online learning. However, such expected support is not readily available owing to many barriers, e.g., financial difficulties. The participants, furthermore, indicated that the members of the community mostly do not support learners as they do not have the mandate as the responsible parent.

Most learners claimed that their families and the community were not behind them in supporting their education as they expected. *"They must give me time to study. I will cook, clean the house, and do all they want me to do when I finish writing. Now they must just give me space and time to focus on my studies and make them proud with improved performance that will take me to the University"*, remarked learner L8. The participants mentioned that the communities seldom encouraged them to study, seldom provided moral support and could hardly discipline them. Only a handful believed that the community was doing well in supporting their learning.

Consistent with the findings of Grossen et al. (2017), none of the interviewed learners disputed that their families wanted to see them succeeding academically. Hence, families were seen as playing an integral part in supporting their children, both morally and financially. However, as indicated in the interviews, the level of support differed from one family to another. The study findings indicated that support from families and communities is of critical value. This is in line with the comments of Munje and Maarman (2016) who contended that such collaboration between schools and families could effectively promote good classroom behaviour, class participation, good academic performance, learner attendance, and reduced high-risk behaviours. If this happens, our schools will be able to churn out valuable graduates, particularly in work, business and well-rounded in all aspects of life. This assertion was also revealed in the findings of Mabena et al. (2021) who stated that parents' involvement in education instils interest in their children towards school, and the lack of parental involvement makes children less interested in learning. According to Ngema and Maphalala (2021), lack of parental involvement is perceived as one of the constraints to the learning of progressed learners. This is further supported by the findings of Makhanya (2021) who reported that lack of parental involvement makes it difficult for the progressed learners to be supported.

The findings from this study, regarding support for progressed learners, correlate with the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory guiding the theoretical framework of this study. The above findings are all factors in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, that influence the development of the child (O'Toole, 2014). In the microsystem, the progressed learner needs to get the necessary support from the parents. Based on what the interviewed teachers said, parents are not involved in their children's development (learning), thus perpetuating the challenges the learners face. The mesosystem, which is the interaction between the teachers and the parents, is seen as the prerequisite for effective teaching intervention. From this study, it was revealed that there is a challenge due to the limited interaction between parents and teachers in pursuit of supporting the progressed learners. This poses a challenge to the progressed learners. The exosystemic level is the influence of external factors that exert the influence on the development of the child (Brahmbhatt, 2020). It was revealed that

the teachers do not receive any support or adequate guidance from the government on how to teach the progressed learners. The teachers indicated that it is frustrating because they did not receive any training on how to teach the progressed learners. They are still using old methodologies. The macrosystem is the outermost layer wherein the child has no say, however, the influence on the child is observable (Hilmi & Razali, 2021). In this study, the macrosystem refers to the policymakers, particularly the DBE. The teachers indicated that the progressed learners do not get the necessary support they deserve as stipulated in the provisions of the progression policy. It is therefore a challenge for the progressed learners to develop and thrive in their learning. Based on the findings in relation to the Bronfenbrenner' systems theory, it is consequently clear that most systems have failed, to some extent, in providing support for the progressed learners.

4.3.5 Analysis of the progression policy

According to Stott et al. (2015), the DBE introduced a policy to govern learners' progression from one grade to the next, thus allowing for the progression of learners who have failed to satisfy the minimum promotion requirements to move to the next grade. The learner progression policy provided guidelines on the progression of learners (DBE, 2016).

Besides limiting learners to spending no more than four years in a phase, the policy endeavours to ascertain that child do not trail behind their age cohort but should move with their age group (Kader, 2012). Furthermore, the progression policy aims to curb learner dropout. However, studies have shown that learners who are progressed are the ones who are likely to drop out of school because they are out of touch with what is happening in the classroom and do not have the foundational knowledge to be in that grade (Kika & Kotze, 2019; Letshwene, 2016; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). The teacher participants in this study confirmed that the progressed learners lack foundational knowledge of the subject matter, and most of them become frustrated in grade 12. However, the teachers did not indicate that learners dropped out in grade 12 because they were out of touch with what was happening in the classroom.

The policy advocates that, if a learner fails to meet the required standards but has been retained once in the current phase, that learner should be supported and be progressed to the next grade without stipulating specific support programmes or strategies for the progressed learners (Beree, 2016). In contrast, literature confirms that the requirement of the progression policy that states that progressed learners should be supported, is not fulfilled (Makhanya, 2021; Munje & Maarman, 2016; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021).

4.3.6 Analysis of circular S7 of 2020 revised promotion requirements for grade 10 and 11

According to Circular S7 (DBE, 2020, P 3), “COVID-19 lockdown and the extended closure of schools has had a significant impact on schooling, learning and assessment. Furthermore, the additional loss of time due to rotational attendance, COVID-19 infection disruptions has resulted in a variable completion of the Annual Teaching Plans” (DBE, 2020). Hence, the promotion requirements for 2020 and 2021 were not affected as stipulated in the National Protocol for Promotion Policy. In addition, there was no examination for the FET phase in 2020 and 2021. The full-scale examinations in grades 10 and 11 were replaced by the controlled tests which were set only on the curriculum content covered (DBE, 2020, P 4). The DBE further revised the assessment weighting for the FET phase in 2020 and 2021. The School-Based Assessment (SBA) weighting was changed from 25% to 60%; the examination (controlled test) was changed from 75% to 40% (DBE, 2020).

It is now imperative to be cognisant of the fact that the progressed learners, now in grade 12, had never been exposed to a full-scale examination in grade 11. Their preliminary examination will be their first examination since grade 10. Most importantly, it should be borne in mind that it is not only non-mastery of curriculum content in grade 11, but to a large extent, some parts of the curriculum content were not taught due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, this contrasts with what was stated by the interviewed teachers. They indicated that there is little to no support provided by the school and the district for the progressed learners. A study by Muedi et al. (2021) confirms what the interviewed

teachers highlighted, that is, that the government did not make provision for retraining teachers on how to teach the progressed learners. On the other hand, the strategies in place, extra classes and winter camps were highly welcomed by the learners. However, this was contrasted by the teachers saying that the focus was on all grade 12 learners, in general, and not specifically for the progressed learners. Other research findings confirm that there are no specific strategies in place to assist progressed learners specifically (Bojuwoye et al., 2014; Makhanya, 2021; Mogale & Modipane, 2021; Muedi et al., 2021).

One unanticipated finding was that all three teachers concurred that they thought that the Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO) policy was a subsidiary of the learner progression policy. Progressed learners could write the examination in two sittings over a period of eighteen to twenty-four months. Unfortunately, this policy was discontinued in 2019, which meant that learners who progressed from 2020 would not be allowed to write their subjects over two years as had previously been the case. This finding is supported by Mogale and Modipane (2021) who reported that the MEO should be a prerequisite for the progressed learners. This finding suggests that the information regarding the learner progression policy and MEO needs to be discussed in-depth with teachers to ensure that everyone is following the correct procedures.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the presentation and discussions of data collected from the progressed learners, teachers, and policy documents. The presentation and discussion of the findings were done according to the themes that emerged from the research questions. The four dominant themes derived from the data were: the effect of the progression policy on grade 12 progressed learners; academic challenges faced by progressed learners; psychological challenges faced by progressed learners; and intervention strategies to support progressed learners.

The researcher firstly explored how the implementation of the progression policy affected progressed learners. Furthermore, the academic and psychological challenges faced by progressed learners were explored. Finally, the researcher explored the

support measures provided to progressed learners by peers, teachers and the district, and their parents and communities.

The researcher found that the progressed learners were severely affected by the progression policy as they were not committed to their learning, and they lacked motivation. Furthermore, it was found that progressed learners were academically challenged because of the content gap from previous grades. These learners also find it challenging to handle the grade 12 workload. The available intervention strategies are not designed to cater specifically for the progressed learners, but rather all grade 12 learners. However, teachers indicated that they were willing to assist the progressed learners to perform optimally but were not able to do so due to work overload. The progressed learners did indicate that they appreciated the efforts by their teachers.

The progressed learners valued the assistance from their peers. Some interviewed learners indicated that doing activities through group work and studying together helped to improve their academic performance. Although some learners responded that they have support from their parents and the community, there were those learners who indicated that support was lacking.

The teachers highlighted the fact that there was a need to reintroduce the MEO, allowing struggling progressed learners to write their final examination over eighteen to twenty-four months.

Despite learners indicating that they are depressed, feeling discriminated against and being looked down on by fellow learners, it was found that there is limited emotional support provided to progressed learners.

The recommendations will be discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The presentation and analysis of results and findings were dealt with in the previous chapter. The results and findings of the study were made clear in chapter four by explaining the themes and subthemes derived from the data obtained through interviews and from documents analysis. This chapter is intended to draw up conclusions and recommendations based on the research questions and objectives as enunciated in chapter one. More importantly, the results and findings outlined in chapter four provided the basis for the conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter, which are aimed at offering a valuable contribution to the education sector.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to explore the influence of the progression policy on the progressed learners in the FET phase. The study therefore considered the challenges the progressed learners were faced with, and the provision of support to mitigate these challenges.

The introduction, rationale and preliminary literature review of the study were outlined in chapter one. In addition, that chapter looked at the purpose of the study, the research questions, and it clearly spelt out both the primary and secondary questions. Also included in this chapter were the working assumptions, a clarification of concepts and the theoretical framework that provided the foundation of the study. The pragmatic perspectives were also captured in chapter one, aimed at guiding the study by providing the lens through which the study would be viewed. Additionally, a brief description of the research methodology was presented, aimed at outlining the various steps and procedures that would be followed to unravel the challenges and complexities of the learner progression policy. Finally, chapter one also put into perspective the ethical considerations that guided the study.

Chapter two discussed the literature pertinent to the study. A detailed literature review was carried out, aimed at providing an understanding of the progression policy for FET learners and its impact on the performance of progressed learners. The chapter started by exploring the current state of the South African education system before discussing the reasons attributed to poor learner performance. The learner progression policy was examined, focusing on how the policy came into being, its implementation, its challenges and its effects on learner performance across all South African schools. The literature review was based on previous research findings in line with the research questions. This assisted the researcher in understanding the contemporary challenges facing the South African education system.

Chapter three presented the research procedures that were followed in this study. This refers to the various steps that would help unravel the challenges and complexities of the learner progression policy. The research procedures that were followed consisted of the research strategy, the target population and sampling procedures, research instruments, data collection techniques and analysis, ways of ensuring data authenticity as well as ethical considerations. In addition, limitations to the study were outlined. The research study design and data gathering techniques that were applied, were clearly specified in this chapter.

Chapter four dealt with the presentation and analysis of the qualitative data collected from the progressed learners, teachers and the policy documents. The presentation and analysis of the results were done in line with the themes that had emerged from the research questions. Four dominant themes emerged out of the data, namely insufficient intervention strategies to support progressed learners; academic challenges faced by progressed learners; psychological challenges faced by progressed learners; and support for progressed learners.

As the final chapter, chapter five provides a summary of the complete study, conclusions and recommendations according to the study results and findings presented in chapter four. The conclusions and proposed recommendations in this

chapter are basically intended to provide some insight into the challenges and effectiveness of the learner progression policy.

5.3 FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the presentation and analysis of findings detailed in chapter four, the following conclusions were made with regards to the research questions. The research questions were addressed, beginning with the secondary questions to support the primary research question.

5.3.1 Addressing the secondary research questions

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the progression policy on the progressed learners in the FET phase, particularly grade 12. Chapter one laid out the secondary research questions aimed at addressing the purpose of the study. The following secondary research questions were addressed:

5.3.1.1 Secondary research question 1: What are the challenges experienced by progressed learners in the FET phase?

The participants in this study indicated that, as progressed learners, they are faced with academic and psychological challenges. They highlighted that the grade 12 workload is overwhelming. Hence, they are not coping with the curriculum content demand. Some of the participants indicated that they do not understand what is taught. On the other hand, teacher participants revealed that there are progressed learners who cannot read and write. It was further revealed that there is a gap in content knowledge that had not been mastered in grades 10 and 11. Hence, it is difficult for the progressed learners to understand the grade 12 curriculum content. The progressive nature of the grade 10 to 12 FET curriculum results in the progression policy negatively impacting the progressed learners as they need content mastery of the preceding grades in order to master the grade 12 curriculum content.

The learner participants described teachers rushing to complete the syllabus without worrying about the fact that the progressed learners are struggling academically, more

than their promoted counterparts. They further indicated that it is difficult for them to grasp the learning content as expected because teachers are moving too quickly, and thus, they feel left out.

In addition, it was indicated that progressed learners are faced with psychological challenges. The participants mentioned that they are stressed, depressed and are discriminated against by fellow learners and teachers. It has become a norm that progressed learners are labelled negatively, and that stigmas affect them throughout their schooling thereby eroding their confidence and consequently, negatively affecting their performance. The learners end up being discouraged, frustrated, and are very likely to drop out from school.

5.3.1.2 Secondary research question 2: How are progressed learners supported to cope in the FET phase?

Progression, according to Stott et al. (2015, p 5), is defined as “the movement of a learner from one grade to the next, despite not having met the minimum pass requirements”. Furthermore, it is specified in the policy that there must be provision of support to assist the learners who have been progressed to the next grade, in pursuit of the need to promote learner dignity, self-esteem, and the need to encourage age-appropriate socialization (DBE, 2012).

This research question intended to find out whether the progressed learners were getting adequate support to assist them in coping academically and psychologically, and so, subsequently, improving their performance. Learner progression has generally been viewed as a well-intended policy, but without adequate support, it results in adverse effects on learner performance and wellbeing.

In this study, the interviewed teachers indicated that they were not able to do much in terms of supporting the progressed learners through affording them special attention because they did not have enough time for extra support. The teachers were eager to see learner performance improving, but such improvement could possibly be achieved only if more support programmes to help the learners were put in place, considering that

the standard allocated teaching time was not adequate. The teachers ended up treating progressed learners in the same manner as the promoted learners since they were together in one class. A few teachers tried to help by using WhatsApp groups and extra classes to keep learners engaged with schoolwork and so enhance their understanding. However, this was inadequate intervention from the teachers' side because they have an overwhelming workload. Moreover, the same teachers expected to offer support to the progressed learners are not supported by the Department of Education with directions on how to teach the progressed learners.

The findings revealed that if the progressed learners could be placed in their own class, with an annual teaching plan that is tailor-made and/or different from the one used by promoted learners, there would be a marked improvement in terms of performance.

Parents and the community play a pivotal role in the education system. It was noted, in the teacher interviews, that most parents do not participate adequately in their children's school activities and parental meetings as most of them are working full-time and, as a result, are not able to give enough support to their children. On the other hand, members of the community are not able to guide most learners as they feel that they are not their parents. In addition, most of the interviewed learners agreed that they felt that the community was not behind them in support of their education. For instance, most of the schools around the Gauteng province have been subjected to theft and vandalism by members of the community and this displayed their lack of support for the children's education.

The parents and the community should be there to encourage the learners to study and offer them moral support. Most of the interviewed learners said that they were not receiving moral support from the community, but a handful believed that the community was doing well in support of their learning. None disputed the fact that families wanted to see their children reaching their full potential and so they played a critical part of supporting their children, both morally and financially. Families and the community should be there to support the education of their children by providing resources, such as textbooks and electronic gadgets for online learning.

5.3.2 Addressing the Primary Research Question

5.3.2.1 Primary research question: What is the influence of the South African progression policy on learners in the FET phase?

According to Munje and Maarman (2016), the success of the implementation of the progression policy depends on learner support provided by teachers in the grade progressed to. However, factors such as learner needs and challenges, the number of learners that need support in each grade at a time, and the coping mechanisms by each learner were not considered by the policy.

The study findings highlighted that the progression policy has an impact on progressed learners both academically and psychologically. The progression policy imposes a burden on the already challenged learners by pushing them into the next grade with increased learning demands. The finding, from this study, indicates that some of the progressed learners are unable to read and write. In addition, it was highlighted, in this study, that the progressed learners in general perform at a lower level than their promoted counterparts due to a lack of mastery of curriculum content of the previous grade. Hence, they fail to cope with the grade 12 demands. Both interviewed teachers and progressed learners confirmed that indeed there is a content knowledge gap which leads to the poor performance of progressed learners as they have difficulty understanding the new content.

In addition, the progression policy has a psychological impact on the progressed learners. Their inability to cope in the grade that they are progressed to, causes them stress, depression and low self-esteem. Moreover, it places a stigma on the progressed learners as they are labelled “at-risk” learners. They are aware that they perform less effectively than their counterparts. Therefore, that means they are less competent and ultimately lose confidence. They perform below par because they do not believe in themselves. It was revealed by learner participants that the progressed learners are looked down upon by fellow learners. This hampers them from active participation, and subsequently, has a negative impact on their performance.

It was revealed from this study that progressed learners are sometimes lazy, lack commitment, and take advantage of the leniency of the learner progression policy. The policy could be accused of instilling a passive and demotivated attitude amongst the progressed learners. The progressed learners have an awareness that they are moved to the next grade even though they did not pass. Unfortunately, this is not the case in grade 12 as they cannot be progressed to tertiary education. Hence, this results in most of the progressed learners not achieving a pass in grade 12.

Contrary to the above, for two of the interviewed progressed learners, the progression policy affected their performance positively. They indicated that they had appreciated being progressed, being given a second chance, and were motivated to study harder. Furthermore, they indicated that their performance has improved slightly, though it is still lower than required.

In summary, the findings highlighted that although the progression policy is regarded as a superior tool in the education system and provides learners with the relevant intervention strategies necessary to achieve policy objectives, it primarily negatively affected the progressed learners' performance. The findings of this study confirm that the progression policy influenced the overall grade 12 progressed learners' performance. Progressed students were more likely to exit school without a grade 12 certificate, which defeated the purpose of the progressions policy. Stress, low self-esteem, depression, and discrimination were highlighted as problems for the progressed learners, making it difficult for them to cope. In addition, it was revealed that progressed learners have difficulty in understanding the grade 12 curriculum content and keeping up with the current workload due to the content gap. On the other hand, it was found that teachers are experiencing challenges in teaching the progressed learners in the same class as their promoted counterparts. Furthermore, this study revealed that teachers are not equipped with the necessary skills to support the progressed learners. This makes it difficult for them to attend to the individual needs of progressed learners. It was also revealed that overcrowding and overwhelming teacher workload perpetuated the inability of teachers to support progressed learners. The study also confirms the issue of indolence. It was revealed that some of the learners were

inclined towards being unwilling to work hard and exert themselves despite having the ability to do so. Teachers mentioned that some learners did not exert themselves and simply thought that there was a chance that they could be progressed once again. The study revealed that the support provided for the progressed learners is inadequate. Furthermore, it was indicated that there is a minimal collaboration between the SBST and the DBST, which are essential in offering support for the progressed learners. The reality for many progressed learners is that they are functioning below grade level, and they are struggling academically as compared to their promoted counterparts.

5.4 REVISITING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework was presented and explained in chapter 2. This study was guided by the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (primary theory) and Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping (secondary theory). The frameworks were adopted to identify and discuss the impact of the progression policy on progressed learners, the challenges experienced by the progressed learners, and the support available for them at different levels. I will now discuss the findings of this study according to these frameworks. Moreover, I will discuss the recommendations on how to address the challenges experienced by the progressed learners, the intervention strategies and the support. The findings are presented in relation to the elements of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, that is, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, as well as those of Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress and coping.

5.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

The microsystem is the innermost level, closest to the progressed learner, and it includes, among other things, the teachers, peers, parents and siblings. This level has the strongest influence on the progressed learners. The findings from this study indicated that the progressed learners are not as fully supported by their families as was expected. Regarding the school, the progressed learners generally agreed that the school environment is conducive for learning, and they further indicated that they get support from their teachers in the form of extra classes during the afternoons and on

weekends. However, the support was not sufficient as the teachers are overloaded. It was revealed that the support from teachers, parents and peers is vital for the progressed learners to cope in grades they are progressed to.

The mesosystem is the level that connects the structures of the child's microsystem (Basham et al., 2010). In this study, the interaction between the parents and the teachers resembles the mesosystem of the progressed learners. The teachers indicated that parental involvement in their children's education is lacking. It should be noted that parent-teacher relationship has an impact on learner performance.

The macrosystem is seen as the outmost level in the child's environment. It consists of, among other things, the culture, customs and the laws (Basham et al., 2010). The impact of the macrosystem has a multiple effect on the entire interactions of all the layers. In this study, the impact of the progression policy was explored. It was revealed that the progression policy influences all the systems, teachers, school, peers, and it ultimately has an impact on the progressed learners. The findings revealed that teachers were not content with the current ATP structure, which compels them to complete the syllabus within the stipulated time frames. Furthermore, the progressed learners are propelled to SBA tasks including the examinations that are also meant for their promoted counterparts. On the other hand, teachers are expected to teach learners of different cognitive levels in the same classroom. Teachers further indicated that it is difficult to give the progressed learners the necessary support. In addition, the findings confirmed that there is support for the progressed learners by the department of Basic Education, but it was explained by the teachers that the support strategies are inadequate.

According to Hilmi and Razali (2021), the exosystem contains environmental elements that have a profound influence on child development. The progressed learners are influenced by the departmental policies on promotion, the progression policies.

The essence of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in this study is that all systems should be in harmony for the learning of the progressed learners. Thus, interaction

between the parents, teachers, school, DBE and communities is imperative for the learning of the progressed learners.

5.4.2 Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping transactional model

The transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman is a process model. It implies that the focus is on how the person interprets an event as being harmful, threatening or challenging. The relationship between the progressed learners and the learning environment is emphasized within the context of stress, and it is viewed as a transaction between the progressed learners and the environment. Furthermore, the psychological stress or challenges refer to the person-environment relationship which is deemed important by the persons and their wellbeing, but which exceeds their available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this study, it implies that the stress experienced by the progressed learners, in grade 12, is negative and exceeds their ability to cope. The learner participants revealed that they are not coping with the content demands in grade 12. They further indicated that they experience psychological challenges, e.g., depression and low self-esteem, and that they are discriminated against by teachers and fellow learners. This affects their academic performance.

On the other hand, coping refers to the cognitive and the behavioural attempts made by persons to manage the demands of the environment but are appraised as exceeding the resources they possess (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the adaptation response is determined by the primary appraisal of the stressing event and the secondary appraisal of the available strategies. The transactional model has two functions of coping, they are emotional-focused and problem-focused.

In this study, the emotional-focused coping strategy implies that the progressed learners should acknowledge and tolerate the fact that they are progressed, that they are experiencing difficulties due to many factors, i.e., environmental challenges and learning problems, and that they will most probably be overwhelmed by the curriculum content demands in grade 12. This study showed that depression, low-esteem and emotion-

focused coping were associated negatively with academic competencies. Progressed learners indicated low levels of psychological resources such as family, peers, social support, and self-esteem. In turn, this could have resulted in distress, depression, feeling discriminated against by fellow learners and some of the teachers yielding with resultant poor academic performance.

The problem-focused coping strategy focuses on the problem. In this study, the problem is that the progressed learners were unable to cope with the content demands in the grade they have been progressed into and the gap they had in content knowledge. However, resources for the progressed learners to enhance problem-focused coping through their influence on appraisal of stressors were lacking. Hence, resources that are considered imperative to assist the progressed learners to cope with the perceived stress of being progressed in the current grade were minimal and negatively affecting academic performance.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings of the study enunciated in chapter four, and the conclusions highlighted above, this section attempts to propose recommendations based on three fronts or end points, namely progressed learners, the school level and department of education level. The following recommendations are suggested:

5.5.1 Recommendations for the progressed learners

The findings from this study confirmed that the progressed learners are not coping in the grade that they have been progressed to. Based on the coping strategies in the Transactional Model, the following are recommended for the progressed learners:

5.5.1.1 Cognitive reframing

Cognitive reframing may help the progressed learners to shift the way they see a problem, focusing on seeing a solution, and having a different perspective. For example, instead of focusing on not being good enough to be in grade 12, they should

see the good part of being progressed into the current grade so that they will complete school with their age- cohort.

5.5.1.2 Positive thinking

Positive thinking can also help to reduce their feeling of depression and stress. The progressed learners should be optimistic that they have qualified for progression, which implies that they have the potential to achieve in the current grade. Subsequently, it will empower and motivate them to work harder instead of feeling overwhelmed. Furthermore, it is important for the progressed learners to participate in extramural activities. These activities will rejuvenate their mind and body, and thus, improve their cognition. Good psychosocial support in the form of counselling is recommended, i.e., the psychosocial support that recognizes children's needs and abilities while helping learners to maintain their resilience, encourage ways of coping and promote positive aspects of life.

5.5.1.3 Time management

Following the problem-focused strategy, the progressed learners may benefit from developing good time management skill and so, drawing up a workable study timetable is highly recommended. Furthermore, it is recommended that the progressed learners re-assess themselves with the previous assessment papers to track their own improvement.

5.5.2 Recommendations for the school

5.5.2.1 Learner motivation

This study revealed that there is a need for constant motivation for the progressed learners. It is imperative for the school to empower progressed learners to take an active stance in their learning. Hence, progressed learners can be capacitated to talk about the issues that affect them without holding back. The school should capacitate progressed learners with skills drawn from the stress and coping transactional model's perspective such as time management and learning techniques including metacognition strategies, active listening and how to manage the stressful encounters.

5.5.2.2 Teacher motivation

Considering the findings of this study, teachers feel demotivated in dealing with the progressed learners. Teacher motivation plays a very important role in the performance of the learners. Teachers can be motivated by being supported with the provision of teaching materials. Furthermore, a conducive working environment tends to motivate teachers. Moreover, the support and recognition by the school management team play a significant part in teacher motivation. It could be argued that a motivated teacher in turn motivates the learners. Progressed learners require substantial motivation from the teacher for them to achieve academically. Motivation is generally known for boosting productivity, reducing absenteeism, curbing stress and low employee turnover (Letshwene, 2014). Therefore, a motivated teacher tends to produce good results because motivation helps the teacher develop a passion for the job. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the school management team to do all they can to motivate teachers towards good results, particularly through improving the teachers' working conditions, particularly the workload. This may ultimately benefit progressed learners as well.

5.5.2.3 School, teachers, parents, and community working together

Teachers, parents, and the community should work together so that a conducive learning context is created and maintained. Thus, learning and teaching would take place optimally, leading to good academic results at the end of the year. Therefore, it should be the duty of all stakeholders in the school environment to ensure that teaching and learning occur without unnecessary disturbances. Effective communication between all stakeholders should be encouraged since this helps in fostering an environment conducive to learning. In other words, proper guidelines should be collaborative and put in place by the parents and school, guidelines that promote good behaviour by the learners and a culture of studying both at school and at home. It has been noted that a lack of parental involvement in children's education poses a significant risk to the academic performance of their children. It should also be noted that collaboration between schools and families effectively promotes good classroom behaviour, class participation, good academic performance, learner attendance, and a reduced chance of high-risk behaviours. In addition, when parents and schools work

together, they can mould a child to achieve the highest possible goals in all aspects of life.

5.5.2.4 Reducing teacher workload

Throughout the interviews, teachers indicated that they have been required to take on the extra load of attending to progressed learners. Despite that, it still rested upon the teachers to ensure that the progressed learner's needs were attended to. Teaching is often referred to as a calling, therefore it is recommended that teachers should interact with the progressed learners in a sensitive, caring and humane manner in a bid to bring them up to par with the rest of the class. The study recommends the use of teacher assistants to relieve teachers in creating maximum opportunities for the progressed learners. The school need to allocate classroom duties to teacher assistants, this will help reduce teacher workload.

5.5.2.5 Ensuring a healthy relationship between progressed learners and their peers

The research findings in chapter four pointed to the challenge of discrimination of progressed learners by their peers. If learners are properly grounded in moral issues, tolerance, honesty and respect for authority, such problems would be lessened. It is the responsibility of the school to instil good human relations and tolerance amongst learners.

5.5.2.6 Pastoral care and support

It was revealed from this study that some teachers reminded learners that they have been progressed to the current grade. In addition, the learner participants indicated that they were discriminated against by their teachers because they are progressed learners. How learners react to the threats such as being discriminated against could affect their academic achievement, their motivation to learn, and particularly their psychological adjustment. It is recommended that the teachers should always uphold their pastoral care role. Teachers should ensure that they are the ones protecting the progressed learners from emotional threats.

5.5.2.7 Maximum functionality of the school-based support team (SBST)

The school should ensure that the SBST is functional to ensure that the progressed learners are fully supported. This would enable the school to identify progressed learners who need to be referred for psychosocial support. From the stress and coping transactional model's perspective, it is envisaged that workshops and seminars on techniques in managing stress and time management for progressed learners will go a long way to equip them with ways of coping with stress. It is recommended that the SBST should have programmes intended for engaging the progressed learners.

5.5.3 Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education (DBE)

The DBE is called upon to deliver progressive but sustainable measures to deal with progressed learners.

5.5.3.1 Refinement of the progression policy

Based on the findings from this study, supported by literature, the progression policy is not benefiting the learners in its current form, it is recommended that the DBE amend the policy to intensify support for the progressed learners. It has been revealed from this study, and confirmed by extensive literature, that the support for progressed learners is inadequate. Hence, it is imperative that the department should introduce support programmes that will benefit the progressed learners to cope with the curriculum demands of the grade.

5.5.3.2 Separating progressed learners from their promoted counterparts

It became clear from the study findings that separating progressed learners from their promoted counterparts could be a good idea. Teachers indicated that dealing with both progressed learners and promoted learners in the same class was a serious challenge. If there is a way of separating the two without imposing a serious drawback in the achievement of educational goals, that would be preferable. It is, therefore, highly recommended that the DBE should consider the progressed learners as a class for remediation from the first day of the academic year. This will help to afford them the

necessary tailor-made intervention strategies to address both the academic and psychological challenges anticipated.

5.5.3.3 Differentiated teaching and learning

It is further recommended that the DBE should have different SBAs. Furthermore, the SBAs should be presented multiple times until the desired results are achieved. In addition, it is recommended that the department make provision for a progressed learners ATP. The ATP should be structured in a way that high-order curriculum content is excluded to cater for better understanding. In addition, it should allow room to present learning content in smaller chunks than is currently the case. In this way, it may be easier for progressed learners to grasp the learning content.

5.5.3.4 Intervention strategies tailored for progressed learners.

The Department should develop intervention strategies specifically to help the progressed learners. This implies that, even during the SSIP, the progressed learners should be accommodated in a different centre. It is also recommended that the DBE should provide the progressed learners with digital devices, such as tablets, that are preloaded with audio-visual lesson presentations. More importantly, the lesson presentations should be examination oriented.

5.5.3.5 Collaboration of the school-based support team (SBST) and the district-based support team (DBST)

The overall wellness of the progressed learners should be prioritised by the DBE. It is, therefore, recommended that the progressed learners are provided with regular counselling to help them to cope with the psychological challenges they might experience. To address this, the department can equip the SBST with the necessary skills in identifying and screening the learners in need. Furthermore, it is recommended that the DBST respond promptly to the SBST referrals. In addition, considering that the progressed learners were also impacted by the effects of COVID-19, referrals could be made to the district counsellor or educational psychologist.

5.5.3.6 Continued professional teacher development

The findings from this study and previous studies indicate that teachers feel under supported by the department because there is no training provided on dealing with progressed learners. In a way, this suggests that teachers see that the progressed learners need high care. It is imperative for the department of education to equip teachers with relevant methodologies on how to teach the progressed learners. Hence, it is recommended that the Department of Basic Education facilitates professional development workshops on differentiated teaching and assessment. This will equip teachers in defining realistic teaching goals with teaching steps, implementing scaling-up activities that will benefit the progressed learners.

5.5.3.7 Reinstating the multiple examination opportunity programme (MEO)

Teacher participants from this study reiterated that the progressed learners are now disadvantaged by the discontinuation of the MEO. Thus, the workload and the curriculum content gap make it difficult for the progressed learners to pass end of the year examinations. Therefore, it is recommended that the Department of Education reconsider reinstating the MEO. This may enable the progressed learners, who do not cope with the content, to write the matric examination in two phases.

Based on the findings of the study, the following theoretical developments are proposed to increase the understanding of the influence of the progression policy on the progressed learners in the FET phase.

- Additional study is required on the use of the ecological framework in an African context, in this case, township schools.
- Further study of the application of stress and coping model on the progressed learners.

5.6 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

With the extensive literature search conducted, the researcher found that the majority of studies were focused on teachers' experience of the South African progression policy.

This study collected data from both teachers and the learners progressed to the current grade. Therefore, in this study progressed learners had a voice. The study gained a holistic understanding of the influence of the progression policy on the progressed learners. This study further explored psychological challenges that are faced by progressed learners. Most of the literature reviewed focus on the academic challenges faced by progressed learners. There is a need for emotional and psychological support to be provided for progressed learners, tailor-made to address the psychological challenges they face.

The study also focused specifically on grade 12 progressed learners, whereas majority of the relevant literature reviewed focused on the entire FET phase. Understanding the effects of the progression policy in grade 12 is crucial given that this is a final year, and the learners cannot be progressed to the next level. In contrary, they are not given any specialized support for them to pass the exit grade.

There is a need for the Department of Basic Education to refine the progression policy by providing schools with a support framework. The study highlights the need for further research to be conducted on reinforcing support from the stakeholders to work together to buffer the adversity faced by the progressed learners.

5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher has noted the possible limits of this study. Any generalization of the research findings beyond the specific population from which the sample was drawn may not be practical due to the narrow specifications of the target sample. The sample is from a township and does not represent the multicultural, multiracial, different socio-economic status and diversity of South African schools. Moreover, the timing of the data collection may have had a negative influence on the results because during the time of data collection participants were preparing for the preparatory examination.

The study only focused on progressed learners in grade 12 and learners progressed to grade 10 and 11 in the FET were therefore not included. Furthermore, teachers who are teaching progressed learners in other grades, other than grade 12, were also excluded.

Therefore, generalization of the findings of the study to other grades may not be possible. Thus, future research that could include grade 10 and 11 progressed learners as well as teachers from other grades is recommended to provide a more complete discussion.

5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study I have explored the influence of the progression policy on learners in the FET phase, particularly the grade 12 progressed learners. What was revealed from this study is that the interviewed progressed learners indicated that the progression policy affects them negatively. It was indicated that the progressed learners are experiencing both academic and psychological challenges. Furthermore, it was confirmed by the interviewed teachers that the progressed learners are affected negatively by the progression policy as they are unable to cope with the content demands in grade 12.

The findings in this study also indicated that the teachers try their best to offer support to the progressed learners, but this is not adequate because teachers are overwhelmed by a high workload. It was further noted, from this study, that parental support to progressed learners is generally still lacking. In addition, the community is not providing the expected support to the progressed learners as there are a series of school burglaries.

The SSIP intervention programmes offered by the district are appreciated by both teachers and learners. However, the teachers indicated that these support strategies are not specifically tailored for the progressed learners. Moreover, teachers are not trained with relevant methodologies to teach the progressed learners. On the other hand, this study revealed that there are no intervention support strategies from the Department of Education to address the psychological challenges experienced by the progressed learners.

Based on what has been dealt with in this study, it is imperative that there is a need for the government to fine-tune the learner progression policy so that the challenges facing

the progressed learners are fully addressed. By doing this, the objectives of the progression policy will be achieved as intended.

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APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL PERMISSION LETTER



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Psychology

The principal,

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Tebalelo Mercy Aphane and I hereby request your permission to conduct research with Grade 12 learners from your school.

I am a master's degree student at the University of Pretoria in the Department of Education Psychology. The topic of my research study is: ***The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase.*** I am working under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Finestone.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of the Department of Basic Education's Progression Policy on the performance of progressed learners. This study will also investigate the challenges experienced by progressed learners and will make recommendations from its findings.

This research will involve semi-structured interviews with ten progressed Grade 12 learners, five boys and five girls, from your school.

I will invite the participants to an information session. In this session I will explain the purpose of the study and the role of the participants. Since this study is voluntary, participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study without any explanation at any time. Only those participants who have agreed to participate in the study will be given assent forms to sign indicating they are willing to participate in

the study. Participants will be informed that they will not be reimbursed for their participation in this study. The study is mainly for educational purposes.

The outcome of this study will benefit the relevant stakeholders, for example, teachers, district officials and policy developers to understand how learners are influenced by the progression policy.

All information collected during the study will be kept confidential and password protected. The data will be made accessible to my supervisor and myself. During the reporting phase of the study, no names of learners or the school will be used. The researcher will use codes or pseudonyms to report on the findings.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated risks, the data collection may be done using technology. The research may use various social platforms such as zoom interviews, telephonic interviews or participants may complete the interview schedule and return to the researcher.

We would also like to request your permission to use the data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding for future research studies.

Mercy Aphane

(Student)

tebalelomercy@gmail.com

Dr. Michelle Finestone

(Supervisor)

michelle.finstone@up.ac.za

CONSENT FORM (EDU119/20)

I hereby give consent / do not give consent to Ms Aphane to interview the learners from my school to participate in the study on: ***The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase.***

Name and Signature of Principal

Date

Name of school/ School stamp

APPENDIX B: PARENTS CONSENT LETTER



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Psychology

Dear parent/guardian,

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Tebalelo Mercy Aphane and I hereby request your permission to allow your child to participate in a research study.

I am a master's degree student at the University of Pretoria in the Department of Education Psychology. The topic of my research study is: ***The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase.*** I am working under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Finestone.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of the Department of Basic Education's Progression Policy on the performance of progressed learners. This study will also investigate the challenges experienced by progressed learners and will make recommendations from its findings.

This research will involve semi-structured interviews, and your child will be one of ten progressed Grade 12 learners, five boys and five girls, who will be participants in this study.

I will invite your child to an information session. In this session I will explain the purpose of the study and the role of your child as a participant in the study. Since this study is voluntary, your child will be informed that he/she has the right to withdraw from the study without any explanation at any time. If your child agrees to participate in the study,

he/she will be given assent forms to sign indicating he/she is willing to participate in the study. Your child will be informed that he/she will not be reimbursed for his/her participation in this study. The study is mainly for educational purposes.

The outcome of this study will benefit the relevant stakeholders, for example, teachers, district officials and policy developers to understand how learners are impacted by the progression policy.

All information collected during the study will be kept confidential and password protected. The data will be made accessible to my supervisor and myself. During the reporting phase of the study, no names of learners or the school will be used. The researcher will use codes or pseudonyms to report on the findings.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated risks, the data collection may be done using technology. The research may use various social platforms such as zoom interviews, telephonic interviews or participants may complete the interview schedule and return to the researcher.

We would also like to request your permission to use your child's data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding for future research studies.

Mercy Aphane

(Student)

tebalelomercy@gmail.com

Dr. Michelle Finestone

(Supervisor)

michelle.finestone@up.ac.za

CONSENT FORM (EDU119/20)

I hereby give consent / do not give consent to Ms Aphane for my child to take part in the study on:

The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase

Parent/Guardian

Name and Signature of

Date

Name of Child and school

APPENDIX C: ASSENT LETTER FOR LEARNERS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Research title: *The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase*

I Tebalelo Mercy Aphane, an educational psychology master's degree student at the University of Pretoria under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Finestone. I hereby request you to participate in the research study. In this study I need ten learners who have been progressed to grade 12. You will be required to respond to semi-structured interview questions.

The topic of my research study is: ***The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase.***

The purpose of this study is to explore and investigate the impact of the progression policy on the performance of progressed learners. In addition, this study will take the challenges experienced by progressed learners into consideration.

I will invite you as the participant to an information session which will serve to explain all the relevant information about the research study. During this session, participants will be issued informed consent letter which will provide information concerning the research study. The informed consent letter will explain the fact that participation is voluntary and that no harm will be inflicted by participating in the research study. The informed consent will also explain that participants will not be reimbursed in any form for their participation in the research study. Moreover, the informed consent will assure participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time should they feel the need to do so. As a result, there will be no implications to participants if they choose to withdraw. Your identity will remain confidential, and you are assured that your responses will not be disclosed to a third party.

Assent by Learner

I..... understand that participation in the study is voluntary and my identity will remain confidential. The data collected will only be used for the purposes of this study.

I will be asked to respond to interview questions that will take approximately 20 minutes. I understand that participation in the study is not compulsory, and that I am free to quit participation at any time I want to. I also understand that I do not have to answer questions that I do not feel comfortable to answer.

No other person will know about what I said in the study, but only the researcher.

Mercy Aphane
(Student)
tebalelomercy@gmail.com

Dr. Michelle Finestone
(Supervisor)
michelle.finstone@up.ac.za

Name of learner

Signature

APPENDIX D: CONSENT LETTER FROM TEACHERS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Title: *The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase.*

I am Mercy Aphané, an Educational Psychology master's student at the University of Pretoria under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Finestone. I hereby request you to participate in my study. The topic of my research study is: ***The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase.***

The purpose of this study is to explore influence of the progression policy on the performance of the progressed learners. In addition, this study will take the challenges experienced by progressed learners into consideration. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be required to respond online to questions related to the impact of the progression policy on FET learners, specifically to those progressed to grade 12. It will not take more than 30 minutes to complete the interview.

I will invite you as a participant to an information session to explain all the relevant information about the research study. During this session, participants will receive online informed consent letters, which will provide information concerning the research study. The informed consent letter will explain the fact that participation is voluntary and that no harm will be inflicted by participating in the research study. This informed consent will also explain that participants will not be reimbursed in any form for their participation in this research study., Instead, the outcome will benefit the relevant stakeholders, for example, district officials, learners, teachers, and policy developers to understand how learners are impacted by the progression policy. Moreover, the informed consent will assure participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time should they feel the need to do so. As a result, there will be no implications to participants if they choose to withdraw. Your identity will remain confidential all the time. Your identity will not be disclosed to a third party. We also request your permission to

use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria and with relevant project funders. Further research may include secondary research data analysis and using data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

Given the circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic has placed on the health and wellbeing of people, this research will be fully conducted online.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mercy Aphane

tebalelomercy@gmail.com

Researcher:

Name of Researcher.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Supervisor:

Name of Supervisor.....

Signature.....

Date.....



Consent form for teachers

Research title: *The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase*

Name of Participant.....

Date.....Signed at.....

By signing this document, I consent that I have been given information about this research study titled “***The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase***” and discussed the research project with Mercy Aphane. I agree to participate in Mercy Aphane’s study, conducting this research as part of a Research Master’s in Educational Psychology under the supervision of Dr Michelle Finestone in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria.

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research, which included identifying the most significant risks or burdens. I have had an opportunity to ask Mercy Aphane any questions I may have about the research and my participation therein. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, that I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw the research at any time.

If I have any queries about the research, I can contact Mercy Aphane on 082 898n7633 or tebalelomey@gmail.com. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact Dr Michelle Finestone at the University of Pretoria on 012 420 5510 or michelle.finestone@up.ac.za

Participant:

Name of Participant	Signature	Date

APPENDIX E: APPROVAL TO COLLECT DATA FROM GDE



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	06 July 2021
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2021– 30 September 2021 2021/184
Name of Researcher:	Aphane T.M
Address of Researcher:	15 Karee Street Amandasig
Telephone Number:	082 898 7633
Email address:	tebalelomeracy@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The Impact of the progression policy on the performance of FET learners
Type of qualification	Masters in Educational Psychology
Number and type of schools:	1 Secondary School
District/s/HO	Tshwane West

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

(Signature) 06/07/2021
The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS

Gender	Male		Female
Nationality			
Age	<18	18 - 20	Above 20

Semi structure interview guide for progressed learners

LEARNER'S UNDERSTANDING OF PROGRESSION

1. How did you react when you heard that you had "failed" but were "promoted"?
2. What could be the reason(s) for your poor performance in the previous grade?
3. How are you coping with the demands of the new grade?
4. What are the things that you find easy when learning at school?
5. What are the things that make it difficult for you to learn at school?
6. How do you feel about your school performance now? Explain

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY PROGRESSED LEARNERS

1. What challenges are you facing as a progressed learner in this school?
2. If any, what impact do the challenges have on your academic performance?

SUPPORT GIVEN TO PROGRESSED LEARNERS

1. What can you say about the suitability of the school environment for learning and teaching?
2. Do your teachers provide any remedial teaching or extra classes for struggling learners? If yes explain
3. What other support measures are in place to assist progressed learners?
4. If any, has there been any improvement in your academic performance as a result of the support given?
5. What do you think can help you improve your performance in grade 12?
6. What do you think about the role, positive or negative, that your peers or friends at school play in your learning and performance?
7. What do you think about the role, positive or negative, that your teachers play in your learning and performance?
8. What role do you think your family and community play in your learning and performance at school?
9. What support do you currently receive from your teachers?
10. What other type of support from your teachers do you think will help you in your learning and performance?
11. What support do you want from your peers?
12. What support do you want from your family and community?
13. What support do you want from your family and community?

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Title: *The influence of the South African learner progression policy on learners in the FET phase*

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Teachers

Demographic Information

1. Gender: male female
2. Age group: 20 and below 31-40 41-50 50 and over
3. Administrative experience as a secondary school teacher: 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 Over 20 years
4. Level of education: Certificate diploma degree postgraduate (specify)...

Questions

TEACHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF PROGRESSION

1. As a teacher what is your feeling towards progressed LEARNERS?
2. What do you think could be the reason(s) for the learners' poor performance in the previous grade?
3. How are you coping with the demands of handling both the progressed and promoted learners in the new grade?
4. What are the things that you find easy when dealing with progressed learners in class?
5. What are the things that make it difficult for you to teach progressed learners?
6. How do you feel about your school's performance now?

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY PROGRESSED LEARNERS

7. What challenges do progresses learners face in the school?
8. If any, what impact do the challenges have on their academic performance

SUPPORT GIVEN TO PROGRESSED LEARNERS

9. What can you say about the suitability of the school environment for learning and teaching?
10. Do you provide any remedial teaching or extra classes for struggling learners?
11. What other support measures are in place to assist progressed learners?
12. If any, has there been any improvement in the academic performance of learners as a result of the support given
13. What do you think can help you to improve learner performance of progressed learners in grade 12?
14. What do you think about the role, positive or negative, that teachers play in the learning and performance of progressed learners?
15. What role do you think parents and the community play in the teaching, learning and performance of their children at school?

APPENDIX H: TRANSCRIPTIONS, CODING AND THEMES



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1. Examples of responses from Teachers

In the context of what the teachers felt towards progressed learners, one aspect that became clear was that progression of learners was a burden to teachers. The teachers were doing their best to assist but the progression policy seemed to exacerbate the already existing problem of learner performance. Teacher A3 indicated that progressed learners needed more attention and the process resulted in little or no improvement to the performance of the learners.

In the words of teacher A1:

“Progression of learners should be revised as it is not helping the education system but the solution was designed to not keep learners in same grade for many years but its impact in the long run disadvantaged the same learners and when they reach high school, they realise the pressure they have and end up dropping out of school at an early age, some even before they can complete grade 9”.

The above sentiment was echoed by teacher A2 whose response was:

“I feel that learners should not be progressed because its extra job for the teachers, as they have to be given special attention and the department is not doing much to assist teachers in handling them”.

Concerning the reasons for poor performance of the progressed learners in their previous grades, the three educators came up with varied responses. Teacher A1 attributed the poor performance of the learners to lack of a sound foundation in the previous grades, meaning that the learners did not have a proper grounding in terms of being equipped with the basic concepts in the subjects. Teacher A2 laid the blame on the learners and parents. She had to say this:

“Most learners do not take their schoolwork seriously because they know that they are going to be progressed once they meet progression requirements, and most parents do not give them support”.

Teacher A3 concurred with teacher A2 to blame learners for their poor performance but however, focused on poor examination preparation by the learners as the main culprit.

Responding to how the teachers were coping with the demands of handling both the progressed and promoted learners in the new grade, the general sentiment was that teachers were failing to cope. The following came out in the interviews:

Teacher A1..... *“having both groups in one class is difficult and requires change in approach almost with everything that needs to be covered. Versatility has been a weapon all these years”*

Teacher A2 *“not very good as I have to treat each group of learners according to their performance, and I am not given two separate annual teaching plans for different groups. I have to use same allocated times for both learners whiles making sure to give progressed learners extra work so as to be able to pass at the end of the year”.*

Teacher A3....*The learners that are promoted are ready and have better understanding to subject content and ready to learn new content to develop on the prior knowledge, those that are progressed are behind and they don't have necessary prior knowledge, therefore as a subject teacher you have the responsibility to teach content of three grades prior to the one they are in to make them understand although time it is not sufficient to cover their desired content to catch up, meanwhile those promoted are disadvantaged”.*

The teachers had mixed feelings regarding what they found easy when dealing with progressed learners. One positive thing mentioned in the interviews was that some progressed learners were willing to learn as shown by their daily attendance at school. However, it was also revealed in the interviews that dealing with progressed learners was difficult given that teachers had to deal with learners with different weaknesses that require special attention and treatment. In addition, the time needed to teach progressed learners' previous grade content missed strained teachers. The teachers

suggested that promoted learners should be separated from progressed learners and be placed according to their educational needs to make it easy for teachers. The startling reality was that not all progressed learners could read and write and that caused problems when it's time for class activities.

Responding to the question on how the teachers felt about their school's performance, there was a consensus that performance of the progressed learners was below par and affecting the overall pass rate for the school. As echoed by teacher A3..... *"I don't feel good because 21% of our learners are progressed as a result their performance had a negative effect on our term 1 results. I think if we do not have progressed learners our school would perform better"*.

The teachers expressed concern that they helplessly watch learners not committed to their studies and not even eager to be promoted to the next grade. The learners were aware that they would not repeat same grade twice and as such would be progressed to the next grade the following year regardless of their performance. This resulted in poor performance in all grades. The impact was felt more in the FET subjects as learners lacked knowledge of the basic concepts.

Highlighted in this section are the challenges progressed learners encountered as noted by the interviewed teachers. It was revealed in the interviews that progressed learners have a mammoth task to ensure that they put more effort in their schoolwork since most of them were not coping. In most cases teachers forced them to attend extra lessons, and to do extra homework for them to be at par with the other group of promoted learners. Reading and writing continued to pose a threat to the performance of progressed learners. The teachers noted that most progressed learners could not read and write which was a serious challenge. In addition, some progressed learners were older than their peers in the same grade and what made the situation undesirable for them was that their cognitive level of thinking was lower than their younger classmates and mostly became bullies to learners and teachers.

Reporting on the impact of the abovementioned challenges, it was highlighted in the interviews that learners could not answer questions because they did not know what they were reading but when an explanation was provided, they could answer. However,

the unfortunate part was that the teacher would not be available to explain anything during examinations. The sad reality was that most of the progressed learners failed to cope with the situation and ended up dropping out of school. This was viewed as unfair by teacher A3 who lamented the failure by the government to come up with different mechanisms of dealing with learners who fail to cope with the formal school system. Teacher A3 echoed , *“The education system introduced progression of learners as an unfair program since learners are not gifted same way, some can do better not in the normal school mainstream but skills programs and now that system of progression is introduced, all learners are seen as equals while they not ,maybe they should consider introducing skills enhancement subjects to accommodate the learners that are struggling academically than forcing all learners to pass the normal mainstream education”*.

All the three teachers interviewed pointed to the fact that the school environment is not conducive to teaching and learning. They lamented that the teaching and learning environment is not designed to accommodate both progressed and promoted learners in the same class. Teachers are overwhelmed because there is little, or no support given to them by the school. As pointed out by teacher A3, *“It is surprising how some programmes are introduced at school like progression of learners without initiative to make sure that required intervention to accommodate the changes like creating initiative that will assist learners who are progressed”*. So, there is no support provided to the teacher by the school, rather it should be the duty of the educator to devise ways to assist progressed learner and see them through.

As reported by teacher A1, she has to do extra classes, as she is now working with the second chance Matric rewrite program. During normal classes she concentrates more in helping the learners gain techniques in answering questions and apply what they know. Teacher A2 also mentioned that after giving the learners formal tasks, item analysis is done to help on remedial teaching, thus giving light to questions the learners did not perform well. Teacher A2 further elaborated that at school they offer learners extra lessons in the morning, afternoon, and Saturdays. The same sentiments were echoed by teacher A3 who emphasized that all progressed learners need extra classes

and extra lessons to catch up. However, it should be noted that in most cases the extra lessons are done in grade 12 but the same teacher teaching grade 12 is needed in the other grades making it difficult for those grades to get help.

In terms of other support measures given to progressed learners, teacher A1 professed that there is no support being offered. However, teacher A2 indicated that the department of basic education organized one special camp for them, and teachers were invited from other schools to help the progressed learners. Not much has been realized in terms of improvement in the academic performance of learners because of the support given because it was only that one special camp for the whole year which lasted for seven days. Unless the learners themselves put more effort in their schoolwork nothing would change. Teacher A3 mentioned the use of WhatsApp groups to send the relevant lessons and activities to learners to keep them working during weekends and school holidays when they not at school. There has been some marked improvement in grade 12.

There was a consensus among the interviewed teachers that improvement in learner performance of progressed learners in grade 12 can possibly be achieved if more support programs to help the learners are put in place considering that normal class time is not adequate. In addition, the interviewees concurred that if the progressed learners can be put in their own class with a different annual teaching plan from the one used by promoted learners, and they be given their own tasks that are specially made for them, there would be a marked improvement in terms of performance. Inviting motivational speakers could make a great difference as the progressed learners need someone who can tell them that they can make it if they put more effort in their schoolwork.

The three interviewees mentioned the MEO programme and indicated that it was a noble idea. It could be argued that those learners who are progressed to grade 12 are partially ready for the grade and if afforded the opportunity to write few subjects and then later write remaining the subjects, a great improvement could be witnessed.

In terms of the teachers' role in fostering positive or negative attitudes in the learning and performance of progressed learners, teacher A1 had to say this: *“Positive attitude*

towards the learners and giving them the required attention improves the class mood and in turn motivates those that are struggling. Negative is seen more when teachers do not invest in the learners that are struggling and as a result learner are scared to indicate that they are struggling”.

Teacher A2 indicated that teachers are not able to do much role as they do not have enough time to give them special attention. Otherwise, they end up treating them like promoted learners because they are in the same class with the promoted learners.

However, teacher A3 was not specific on what teachers do to foster positive or negative attitudes in the learning and performance of progressed learners. She only mentioned that teachers can do all their best to teach the progressed learners and that it should always be considered that the teacher in a particular grade and subject does not teach only progressed learners only and as a result the effort of the teacher might not be sufficient to meet the needs of the progressed learners.

The community has been hailed by teacher A1 and teacher A3 for playing a key role in moulding their children. According to teacher A, “..... *community plays a big role because these are the immediate living areas that learners spend most of their time, if the environment is not positive or support learning students won't identify with learning which then affects performance*”. Teacher A3 had this to say, “*parents can play a vital role by being involve by enforcing and making sure their kids are studying at home and give them all the support they need and organize peer studies and tutoring in order to support their kids*”. However, teacher A2 did not agree with teacher A1. Teacher A2 observed that most parents do not adequately play their parental role as most of them are working and as a result do not give enough support. On the other hand, members of the community are not able to guide most learners as they feel that they are not their parents.

2. Examples of responses from learners

In answering the question on how they reacted when they heard that they had “failed” but were “promoted, the learners’ answers were candid. They expressed that they were disappointed. In addition to expressing their disappointment, some went on to indicate that they were somehow glad that despite failing to meet the pass requirement they

were progressed to the next grade. In the words of one learner, *“I was disappointed at myself that I have failed but at the same time that I have been given a chance to improve whilst in the next grade”*.

The learners attributed their poor performance to a variety of reasons. One of the reasons mentioned was that the learners didn't take their schoolwork seriously. The majority of the learners interviewed indicated that their failure to meet the pass requirements was caused by not studying, instead spending more time on social media. Other learners also cited psychological problems as being the causes of their poor performance in school. For example, stress and depression due to death of parents has severely affected the learners' performance. The death of parents has left some of the learners heading homes. It also came out in the interviews that some learners failed as a result of not getting adequate support from the school. The learners lamented the fact that there was a time when they spent almost a month without a grade 10 Mathematics teacher and that has affected their conceptual understanding up to this end.

Due to the mounting pressure on them to perform, half of the progressed learners admitted that they find it difficult to cope with the demands of the new grade. They confessed that the teachers were giving them too much work in all the subjects which was difficult to handle. The other 50% of the interviews were very optimistic and indicated that it was tough, but they were coping by ensuring that they create more time for schoolwork. Some even mentioned that they have actually realized where they had missed it in the previous grade and were now prepared to make amends and produce good results.

In addition, the fact that they do activities with other learners makes it easy for them to understand, since they relate with each other at peer level. Below are some of the responses given by the learners:

“Cooperating when the teacher is asking questions and doing class discussions with my classmates, working together and learning from one another”

“I find working in a group easy because my peers are more understanding”

“I would say afternoon studies with my classmates having a class discussion like helping each other with what we understand and what we do not understand”

However, the other learners indicated that they find it easy to learn at school if they are given study time to go to the library for reading in addition to getting personalized assistance from the teachers.

When asked to explain the things they find difficult in learning at school, one learner said, “Being taught with a teaching method that is not able to accommodate your level of understanding”. This was echoed by other learners who went further to reveal that some teachers do not care whether the learner understands or not. It was also mentioned that there was a problem of discrimination amongst learners at school making it difficult for other learners to learn.

However, the majority of the progressed learners generally indicated that they are now feeling good about their performance because there is some improvement due to their effort and the continued effort of their teachers. Only a handful of the progressed learners still feel they will not make it despite the concerted effort by their teachers. One learner had this to say. *“I don’t feel good at all, because my marks are very low and I really want to pass my matric”*. Such learners are not happy because their marks or performance are not what they expected.

When asked on what challenges they were facing as a progressed learner in the school, this learner felt strongly that other learners look down upon her because she was progressed: *“.....some learners think that I am stupid because I am progressed”* The other learners expressed the same sentiments indicating that it was difficult for them to ask other learners because they felt left out. In some cases, they get depressed and become emotionally affected as expressed by one learner. It was also revealed in the interviews that parents are to blame because they are exerting too much pressure on their kids without giving them the necessary support, thereby exacerbating the problem. It also came out in the interviews that some of the progressed learners couldn’t read and right, thus posing a serious challenge. This learner felt that she is being pushed: *“...it becomes difficult for me to understand some topics because I did not understand them the previous year”*.

The interview questions on this theme were intended to find out from the progressed learners if they were given adequate support to improve their performance. One such question required the respondents to furnish the researcher with information on the suitability of the school environment for learning and teaching. There was a general consensus amongst the interviewees that the school environment was conducive for teaching and learning. It was mentioned throughout the interviews that the school had adequate resources needed for teaching and learning. The progressed learners blamed themselves for their failure to take schoolwork seriously. They all agreed that they were not studying even though the conditions at school were very favourable to learning.

Some of the progressed learners interviewed, confirmed that teachers were eager to see improvement in their performance. The committed teachers took their time to do remedial work and extra classes for struggling learners. It should be noted that such support from teachers was not provided across all the subjects. Some educators did not have the time to do extra classes due to their heavy workloads, as indicated by three of the progressed learners interviewed.

In terms of other support measures given to progressed learners, it was revealed in the interviews that the progressed learners were generally receiving considerable support from teachers, family and friends. They indicated that they were taken to study camps where they would mix with learners from other schools and were taught by different teachers. Nine out of the ten progressed learners interviewed agreed that the measures put in place by the school and government to support progressed learners were beginning to bear fruits. The following were some of the responses from the progressed learners:

“After we attended the camps, I improved a lot in my studies and the topics I used to struggle to understand are now clear to me”

“Yes, there is a lot of improvement because I passed very well last term”

“Yes, there are some things I did not understand in my school but ever since I attended study camps, I began to understand them”.

When asked what they thought could be done to help improve their performance in grade 12, they all pointed to the support measures mentioned above i.e. extra classes, camps as well as working hard on their part. In terms of peer support, the progressed learners hailed their peers or friends for instilling positive attitudes towards their learning and performance. They pointed to the fact that peers encourage them to study and sometimes help each other in areas where they differ in academic strengths. This progressed learner felt strongly about the support she got from friends: *“My peers play a positive role in my performance because, they give me the strength to study and have more interest in schoolwork, thus encouraged me to work extra hard”*.

With reference to teachers, the message across the board was that teachers play a critical role in the learning and performance of the progressed learners. The progressed learners could not find appropriate words to describe how important teachers were in their lives. *“Teachers are concerned about my work, whenever I struggle with my schoolwork, they make sure that everything is explained in detail until I understand”*, said one progressed learner. Only one interviewed learner was at variance with others pointing to the fact that teachers did not care about them and were not concerned about their performance.

Concerning the role of families and the community in the learning and performance of the progressed learners at school, there were mixed reactions probably because the learners came from different communities and family set ups. However, as indicated in the interviews, the level of support differs from one family to another. The participants indicated that they would like to see their families and communities encouraging and supporting them.

As mentioned earlier on, teachers are at the centre of the teaching and learning process. The interviewed learners professed that without teachers there could be no teaching and learning. Teachers meant everything to them as far as teaching and learning was concerned. According to the participants, the role and support from teachers was immeasurable. The teachers committed their time to teach during normal teaching hours and could sometimes go some extra mile to help the progressed

learners through extra classes during weekends and holidays. The teachers also encouraged the learners to study, offered them psychological support and motivation.

The participants further claimed that they needed more time with teachers for them to understand better. However, the learners on their own could meet and support each other as peers. As mentioned in the interviews, the learners have different strengths in different subjects. So, when they meet, they would be able to share and help each other thereby improving their performance. The interviewees further indicated that they would want their peers to help them with strategies on how to study to understand.

CODES	THEMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Burden for teachers ❖ Too much pressure on learners ❖ Not coping with the demands of grade 12 curriculum ❖ Extra work for learners ❖ Lack of adequate intervention strategies from the department ❖ Insufficient support from parents ❖ Separate classroom for progressed learners. ❖ Different ATP for progressed learners ❖ Willingness to attend school ❖ Learners not coping due to content gap ❖ Progressed learners not able to understand the questions ❖ Progressed learners not keeping up with the pace ❖ Alternative career paths ❖ Too much workload -impossible for 	<p>THEME 1</p> <p>4.3.1 Theme 1: The effects of the progression policy on grade 12 progressed learners</p> <p>4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Lack of commitment and motivation by progressed learners</p> <p>4.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Overloaded teachers and lack of methodologies to teach progressed learners</p> <p>4.3.2 Theme 2: Academic challenges faced by progressed learners</p> <p>4.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Content knowledge gap (not mastered grade 10 and 11 curriculum content</p> <p>4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Progressed not coping with grade 12 curriculum content</p> <p>4.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Challenges of teaching progressed learners and their</p>

<p>teachers to give attention to the progressed learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A need for intense intervention strategies for helping progressed learners ❖ Need to reintroduce the multiple examination opportunities ❖ Lack of commitment by progressed learners ❖ Inadequate support from the school ❖ Enjoying support from peers ❖ Teamwork, peer learning appreciated ❖ Low self-esteem ❖ Inability to offer extra classes by other teachers. ❖ Too much pressure from the parents 	<p>promoted counterparts in the same classroom</p> <p>4.3.3 Theme 3: Psychological challenges faced by the progressed learners</p> <p>4.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Low self-esteem, depression</p> <p>4.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Discrimination by fellow learners and teachers</p> <p>4.3.4 Theme 4: Support for the progressed learners</p> <p>4.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Peer learning</p> <p>4.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Support from teachers and the district</p> <p>4.3.4.3 Subtheme 4.3: Support from parents and the communities</p> <p>4.3.5 Further emerging themes</p> <p>4.3.5.1 Assessing the progressed learners multiple times</p> <p>4.3.5.2 Alternative career paths for the progressed learners</p>
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APPENDIX I: DOCUMENTS ANALYSED



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DOCUMENT	DATA ANALYSED	SUBTHEMES
Circular E22 of 2016	Districts and schools must have clearly articulated intervention strategies that include an early identification of low achievers or at-risk learners so that the school, district and province can develop and implement additional learning opportunities through meaningful extended day/year-long programmes outside of regular school hours to build the self-esteem of these learners and facilitate their social adjustment, or facilitate their access to alternate career pathways that are available locally.	<p>Psychological support</p> <p>Curriculum support</p> <p>Alternative career path</p> <p>Additional learning opportunities</p>
Government Policy on the Programme and Promotion requirements of the National Curriculum	The learner who is not ready to perform at the expected level and who has been retained in the first phase for four years or more and who is likely to be retained again in the second phase for four years or more, should receive the	<p>Academic support</p>

<p>Statement Grades R – Grade 12 of 2007</p>	<p>necessary support in order to progress to the next grade.</p>	
<p>Programme and Promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – Grade 12 2012</p>	<p>The policy assists learners to progress to the next grade, intending to promote learner’s dignity, self-esteem and the need to encourage socialisation by age.</p> <p>The progression policy provides that, in circumstances where learners display lack of preparedness for the next grade but qualify in terms of age should progress with the appropriate age group. This progression implies that learners will complete school with their age cohort. However, there are no specified support programmes or strategies for progressed learners</p>	<p>Psychological support</p>
<p>Circular E28 of 2017</p>	<p>DBE circular stipulated that progressed learners should be given 2 opportunities to right their final NSC examinations referred to as Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO). This option was only eligible to progressed learners from Grade 11 into</p>	<p>Any other alternative strategies put in place.</p>

	Grade 12. The implementation of this circular was discontinued in 2020.	
Assessment Instruction 44 of 2018	This circular instructs schools to identify underperforming learners who could be possible targets for progression. The circular further instructs schools to come up with support systems geared towards providing some form of intervention that would help the learners in all aspects of the education curriculum that include general behaviour and psychological support.	Curriculum support Psychological support
Circular S7 of 2020	This circular gives directive to the amendments of SBA Weightings for grades 10 and 11 and replacement of a full-scale examination by Controlled tests. Controlled tests to be only on the curriculum content taught.	Content gap in grade 12 Aspects of prerequisite content are lacking

Districts and schools must have clearly articulated intervention strategies that include an early identification of low achievers or at-risk learners so that the school, district and province can develop and implement additional learning opportunities through meaningful extended day/year-long programmes outside of regular school hours to build the self-esteem of these learners and facilitate their social adjustment, or facilitate their access to alternate career pathways that are available locally.

Curriculum support for progressed learners by the district, the school (SBST) and the parents.