

**Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary  
School and the Implications for Policy Implementation**

**By**

**Mthunzi Maphumulo**

**214548696**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Education in Educational Leadership, Management and  
Policy**

**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**College of Humanities**

**School of Education**

**Edgewood Campus, South Africa**

**January 2024**

**Supervisor: Professor Phumlani. Myende**

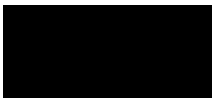
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## DECLARATION

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**This thesis has been submitted with our approval**



**Supervisor: Prof PE Myende**

**11 January 2024**

**Date:**



**Supervisor: Prof TT. Bhengu**

**11 January 2024**

**Date:**

## ETHICAL APPROVAL



22 June 2023

**Mthunzi Norwell Maphumulo (214548696)**  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear MN Maphumulo,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00003461/2021

**Project title:** The practices of Learner Progression Policy in five secondary schools: Voices of the affected learners.

**Amended title:** Experiences of progressed learners in a secondary school and the implications for policy implementation.

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 21 June 2023 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title

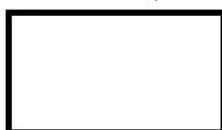
**Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.**

**PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully








.....  
**Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)**

/dd

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587

Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

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INSPIRING GREATNESS

## **DEDICATIONS**

- Firstly, I dedicate this thesis to Dad, Mr Sokalezwe Maphumulo. I know you were looking forward to seeing this to completion and more, but God decided it was never going to be. Wherever you are, Mashimane, despite everything, I am finally submitting.
- I also dedicate this thesis to my mother, Nonhlahla Maphumulo, without her support after Dad passed on, I saw no reason to continue any further. Besides, I would also like to mention a few people who played a huge role, and they include Prof Desmond Govender, Dr Vusi Msiza, Prof. Mlamuli Hlatshwayo, Mr. Lebohang Mathobela and all my friends and family. Thank you!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to the following people:

- My supervisors, Prof. P.E Myende and Prof. T.T Bhengu. I would like to thank them for having faith in me, especially during the times when I thought everything had been lost and when I stopped everything because of the passing of my Dad. Prof Myende enquired from me why I did not submit my dissertation, and for Prof Bhengu to question the quality of my submission. Such gestures from my two supervisors meant a lot to me, and I am hoping that this submission will result in a Phd and some publications.
- My sincere gratitude goes to school principals, departmental heads and teachers of the participating schools for sharing information with me that made this study a success.
- To my friends for encouraging me and motivating me to finish this study.
- To Prof. Govender, thank you for believing in me and everything you have done for me since 2018; I will always be grateful.
- To my friends, in Edgewood and outside, thank you for everything you did for me.

## ABSTRACT

This study delved into the Learner Progression Policy implemented by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa. The research design and methodology encompassed a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews, and data were generated from six participants from two schools in Umlazi district in KwaZulu-Natal province. The study was underpinned by two theories: the Learning Mastery theory and the Complexity theory. The Learning Mastery theory, as proposed by Bloom, focuses on how the Learner Progression Policy challenges learner capabilities and emphasises the need to ensure that struggling learners progress with adequate support as the policy demands. As proposed by Kauffman, the Complexity theory explores the challenges of implementing education policies in complex systems such as schools, with a specific focus on the Learner Progression Policy. The study explored the experiences of progressed learners and the implications of policy implementation, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities presented by the policy. The findings reveal diverse practices in policy implementation across schools, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing these practices. The study provides valuable insights into the Learner Progression Policy and its implications for schools in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Progression, Policy, Implementation, Educational Challenges.

## ABBREVIATIONS/ ACRONYMS

DBE - Department of Basic Education.

DH – Department Heads.

DOE - Department of Education.

ECD - Early Childhood Development.

EELC - Equal Education Law Centre.

EMS – Economics Management Science.

EU – European Union.

FET – Further Education and Training.

GET – General Education and Training.

IESA - Inclusive Education South Africa.

LPP - Learner Progression Policy. M.

Ed - Master of Education.

NCS – National Senior Certificate.

NPPPR - National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements.

NRC – National Research Council.

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

PLs - Progressed Learners.

SBST - School Based Support Team.

SIAS - The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support policy.

UKZN – University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of the Learner Progression Policy (LPP) by the Department of Basic Education in 2005, there were prospects that learners who have been progressed to the next grade would receive the necessary support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and schools in general. The practices of policy implementation differ in many institutions. Policymakers see the Learner Progression Policy as the panacea for problems inherent to secondary schools in South Africa (Pretorius, 2014; Spaul, 2013). Finding the balance between input and outcomes for schools has been an ongoing problem. Efforts by the government to improve education in the country have been diminished by existing poverty despite improvements in the South African education system and the resources challenged towards education. Policy practices may determine how the policy will address what it was intended to do.

Even though improvements are being acknowledged, one must remember that schools are not equal. With schools not being equal, policy practice will differ from school to school. Munje and Maarman (2016) argue that the plight of poor schools in South Africa is deteriorating and needs different ways to understand and address the problems as identified. The government and researchers alike have made numerous efforts to understand better the issue of practising policy in different school settings to achieve similar results as intended by the policy. To achieve this, support systems need to be in place for our schools, such as the advancement of enhanced access to education, which includes but is not limited to building new education infrastructures, training of teachers and policy implementers, support, and monitoring mechanisms (DBE, 2016).

Part of the policies implanted with the Learner Progression Policy was the inclusive education policy, one of the policies being practised in different schools, which might have different results. Causes of underperformance and the lack of support in under-resourced schools have resulted in copious interventions by the South African government for over 20 years to reallocate the necessary resources to meet poor and under-resourced school needs. Debatably,

learner underperformance in schools has not yet been addressed satisfactorily and remains a cumbersome and contentious issue that has resulted in some underperforming learners being progressed. This study investigated the experiences of progressed learners and the implications in two schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, Umlazi District.

The Learner Progression Policy (LPP) in South African schools has been applicable since Curriculum 2005. It started in the General Education and Training (GET) phase (Grade R-9, which is divided into three phases, namely the foundation phase, intermediate phase, and the Senior Phase, and has slowly been moved to the Further Education and Training (FET, Grades 10-12) phase in 2013 (Department of Basic Education, 2018). Even though the Learner Progression Policy might have good objectives, one cannot discount the different practices of the same policy from different schools. Learners in secondary schools who fail to meet progression requirements will be required to repeat the same grade, but they cannot repeat the same grade twice in the same phase as the progression policy will not allow that, and they will be progressed to the next grade hoping that they will be able to catch up and be in same age group cohort until Grade 12. Some schools will use age to progress a learner to the next phase.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of progressed learners and the implications of policy practice in two schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, Umlazi District. The study allowed me to point out that the Learner Progression Policy, despite well intended practices, application, and monitoring challenges, negatively affects progressed learners. As per the Learner Progression Policy, teachers are expected to offer progressed learners support so they to catch up and be on the same level as their classmates. Often, this does not happen because teachers will be focusing more on finishing the syllabus, which is different from what the policy says should be happening. Also, the policy is unclear on who should give support at what time and on what basis. There is no official handover from teachers about students who have been progressed to understand which support they need to offer that individual learner and which areas to focus on. This leaves room for teachers to practise the Learner Progression Policy in the best way possible in their environment.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Progression refers to the movement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R, despite the learner not meeting promotional requirements for that grade (Munje & Maarman, 2016). Since the introduction of the Learner Progression Policy, many learners have benefitted,

and some have not, due to different applications of the policy from school to school. Progression policy can be used to prevent a learner from being in the same phase for over four years (DBE 2011). Studies conducted about practices of the Learner Progression Policy have not focused on whether learners receive the support as outlined in the policy from schools. In the progression policy, requirements are provided to guide learner promotion (Munje & Maarman, 2016). The practices of the Learner Progression Policy should ensure that apart from preventing learners from spending four years in a phase, learners can progress with the same age cohort. According to the Department of Basic Education (2012), progression policy specifies that since learners are likely to repeat the new grade, they must be given the necessary support to assist them in progressing to the following grade.

The Learner Progression Policy should be done to promote learner dignity, self-esteem, and the need to encourage socialisation by age. The intentions of the department are clear, but no one goes back to schools to check if what is being outlined by the policy is being practised. Hartley (2006) regarded the Learner Progression Policy as one of South Africa's key conversion vehicles within the education sector. However, we should not ignore the fact that some learners are disadvantaged by poor schools that are a product of 40 years of inferior education (Hartley, 2006). Maarman (2009) argues that the Learner Progression Policy is one of those policies that have contributed to unequal educational opportunities in South Africa due to poor practices and a lack of monitoring and evaluation. The Learner Progression Policy was intended to ensure that the number of learners who leave schools before the exit grade (Grade 12) in schools is limited. This allows the department to ensure that they retain more learners who have enrolled in public schools.

The Learner Progression Policy ensures that the learner is allowed to progress with the age cohort. The system will not be able to prevent promotion to the next grade or phase, even though the minimum requirement for promotion might not be met. This depends on how the Learner Progression Policy is applied in a manner that will not disadvantage learners. The assumption made about the Learner Progression Policy is that the learner will be assisted in acquiring the necessary knowledge that he or she lacks in the new grade (DBE, 2012). This is not usually the case, as this study demonstrated that different practices of the Learner Progression Policy can have different results from what the policy intends and bring to light the experiences of progressed learners and the implications. The Learner Progression Policy suggests that learners from different backgrounds in schools are benefitting from this policy,

but we need to understand that learners from former Model C schools (Quantiles 4 and 5) might be able to have extra tuition classes that they attend to ensure that they are ready for the next grade. We cannot say the same about the learners from poor schools (Quantiles 1 and 2) who must battle with congested classes and poverty at home, which will not allow for the attendance of extra tuition classes.

Learner progression in the South African context is viewed as an efficient indicator of quality education. Branson et al. (2014) argue that automatic progression is preferred in South Africa because it is viewed as being synonymous with learner dropout. This is also confirming that the Learner Progression Policy is not practised uniformly in different schools. Learner dropout in South Africa is one of many problems within the South African education system, but we cannot use it alone as a validation of the introduction of the Learner Progression Policy. While dealing the Learner Progression Policy and learner dropout, we also need to check if those learners who are progressed are remaining in school because they want to or are just trying to reach Grade 12 and then forget about the school. We need to acknowledge the challenges and implications that come with different practices of the Learner Progression Policy from different schools. We need to recognise their lived experiences due to different practices of the Learner Progression Policy is essential to determine whether the policy is effective or not.

Retention and promotion both have no full potential to fully assist learners at risk or provide satisfactory answers to learner challenges and underperformance (Jameson & Renshaw, 2012). The debate around learner progression and retention will continue until we can determine that both can be linked to learner performance. In poor schools, those in Quintiles 1 and 2, poor learner performance is bewildering, considering the increased efforts from the government and teachers regarding resource allocation and the introduction of learner progression policies.

The Department of Basic Education (2012) also distinguishes between progression and promotion, which means the movement of a learner from one grade to the next when that learner meets the minimum required level of achievement per subject in a particular grade, as well as complying with the promotion requirements of that grade (National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the NCS Grades R-12, DBE,2012). The combination of subjects is to be passed according to NPPPR (2021), as outlined in Table 1.1.1 A.

Phase	Promotional requirements
Foundation Phase (Grades R-3).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adequate Achievement (Level 4) (50%-59%) in one official language at Home Language.</li> <li>2. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in Mathematics.</li> </ol> <p><i>As far as possible all learners should progress from Grade R to Grade 1 provided that they are in the correct age cohort.</i></p>
Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete all School-Based Assessments.</li> <li>2. Adequate Achievement (Level 4) (50%-59%) in one official language at the Home Language level.</li> <li>3. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in the second required official language at First Additional Language level</li> <li>4. Adequate Achievement (Level 4) (50%-59%) in South African Sign Language at Home Language level</li> <li>5. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in Mathematics.</li> <li>6. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in any other two of the remaining approved subjects.</li> </ol>

<p>Senior Phase (Grades 7-9)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adequate Achievement (Level 4) (50%-59%) in one language at Home Language level.</li> <li>2. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in the second required official language at First Additional Language level.</li> <li>3. Adequate Achievement (Level 4) (50%-59%) in South African Sign Language at Home Language level.</li> <li>4. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in Mathematics.</li> <li>5. Moderate Achievement (Level 3) (40%-49%) in any three of the other required subjects.</li> <li>6. At least an Elementary Achievement (Level 2) (30%- 39%) in any two of the other required subjects.</li> </ol>
<p>Further Education and Training Phase. (Grades 10-12).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete all School-Based Assessments.</li> <li>2. Achieved 40% in three subjects, one of which is an official language at Home Language level and has complied with the school-based Assessment component in the relevant subjects.</li> <li>3. Achieved 30% in three subjects and has complied with the school-based Assessment component in the relevant subjects.</li> </ol>
<p><i>Information sourced from DOE (2021) and NPPPR (2021) as amended.</i></p>	

**Table 1.2.1 A**

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

There are many policies aimed at refining different problems related to school practices in the South African education system. The South African government embarked on the long expedition of remodelling our education system that apartheid policies have grappled with. Despite the existence of these policies, there are still many problems that are not yet deciphered and that are still affecting many schools. One of the biggest crises the education department is still facing is how different policies are practised in schools. The Department of Basic Education, which was known as the Department of Education before, introduced in 1998 the policy that limited grade repetition to once within a phase (DoE, 1998). This policy was to

ensure that learners are progressed to the next grade if they had failed that grade more than once. The practice of the Learner Progression Policy will determine if what is intended by the policy will be achieved in schools. Supporters of the Learner Progression Policy indicate that studies show that repetition of any grade has social and academic costs and very few long-term benefits to a learner (Stott et al., 2015). It is known that some students would rather change schools than repeat the same grade in the same school. The negative effect of grade repetition includes the possibility of dropping out of school before completion (Jimerson, 2001). It might also lead to behavioural problems, including truancy from school by learners (Jimerson et al, 1997). This will have a negative effect on learners and lead to a number of them dropping out.

Some scholars argue that grade repetition has an important role in a child's development and capability to perform better. Munje and Maarman (2016) pointed out that studies have proven that what matters more to progressed learners is the support structure. This is because the lack of proper coping processes and structures, both for those who are allowed to repeat the grade and those that were progressed, could result in learners performing worse due to a lack of appropriate support structures. Stott et al. (2015) pointed out that the economic costs of repetition are high. These will include the costs of having additional learners in the system and lower learning potential, such as learners having to drop out. In the South African context, South African schools are already belligerent, with a high number of learners in one classroom, which then again limits the number of times a teacher can interrelate with one learner on a face-to-face basis. With the issue of congested classrooms, teachers would rather focus on the syllabus than having one-on-one sessions with learners.

#### **1.4 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of progressed learners and the implications of policy implementation in two schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, Umlazi District. By investigating the practices of the policy in different schools, we can determine the experiences of progressed learners and the implications associated with being progressed. Teachers in South Africa are expected to teach different grades, especially in secondary schools, with learners who have varied abilities (Pinar, 2014). The Department of Basic Education (2018) indicated that repetition rates are very high between Grades 9 and Grade 11, with Grade 10 recording the highest level. This is where the different practices of the Learner Progression Policy are applied differently from school to school with different outcomes. It should be noted that in Grade 10,

that is where students enter the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, and they must choose their subject specialisation (stream). This means that if, for example, they struggled with Mathematics in the previous grade or the Accounting part of their Grade 9 Economics and Management Science (EMS), they will struggle in Grade 10 in the commerce stream, especially if they were progressed. Progression does not mean that a learner will acquire a National Senior Certificate in Grade 12 (Reddy et al., 2015). Learner Progression Policy might have good objectives, but schools' different practices will not have the intended outcome as outlined by the policy and we need to understand the lived experiences of progressed learners.

Progression may lead to learners becoming despondent and dropping out of school (Reddy et al., 2015). This may be a result when they do not receive support from the teachers and schools, which questions the practice of the Learner Progression Policy in schools. This was the case in some of the schools where I did my teaching practice. Progressed learners were viewed as extra work by the teachers whom the government employed to give them extra tuition classes during weekends. Reddy et al. (2015) noted that progressed learners might create extra pressure on teachers who are employed to give them extra support. This is evident, especially in more impoverished schools (Quintiles, 1-2), where you can find over fifty learners in one classroom. This number will not allow teachers to put extra effort into progressed learners, which compromises the expected practice from the Learner Progression Policy. This will have a negative impact on progressed learners, and they will not have a good experience with the policy. Learners dropping out of school because they have repeated a grade in their schooling history will be reduced in the context of poverty if the school has a feeding scheme (Stott et al, 2015). It becomes a problem if learners will only remain within the schooling system to have a meal that is being offered in school. That is why it is also important to check if the government did not introduce the Learner Progression Policy to cut costs and limit the amount spent on one learner in the same grade.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

While I was doing my teaching practice in one of the secondary schools in the Umlazi District, I noticed that teachers had arrangements with the district office of the education department to take progressed learners for extra classes. The agreement was, after teachers arranged with the district office, to have extra classes on Saturdays and sometimes in the afternoon during weekdays to help learners who had progressed from different grades catch up and be on the same level as their peers. Teachers who were tasked with leading that programme were always

complaining about not receiving payments for their efforts and the workload of teaching during their normal working hours and then having to teach progressed learners on weekends and in the afternoon. The findings of this research were significant in understanding the lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications of policy practices.

## **1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the study:

Main objectives:

- To explore the experiences of progressed learners in selected secondary schools.

Subsidiary Objectives:

- To identify the that progressed learners in selected secondary schools attach to being a progressed learner.
- To examine the effect of being a progressed learner on learners' academic performance.
- To draw lessons from the progressed learners' experience about the meanings of their experiences for implementation of the Learner Progression Policy.

## **1.7 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Main Research Question:

- What are the experiences of progressed learners in selected secondary schools?

Subsidiary questions:

- What meanings do progressed learners in secondary schools attach to being a progressed learner?
- How does being a progressed learner in secondary school affect learners' academic performance?
- What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of progressed learners about the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy?

## **1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPT**

Three key concepts are briefly elucidated in this section: progression, learner capability, and education policy.

### ***1.8.1 Progression***

Progression is a form of automatic promotion of a learner in school without meeting the specified grade promotion as specified by existing policies (Munje & Maarman, 2015). Progression describes in words and examples what it means to move over time towards more expected understanding and into the next phase higher than the previous phase. Nichols (2010) described progression that can be described by many different names, including progress variables, learning trajectories, and progressions of developmental competence. The Department of Basic Education (2012) defines progression as the advancement of a learner from one grade to the next grade despite that learner not meeting all promotional requirements. Progression should happen in time and in manageable ways to allow teachers to understand where a learner needs to improve. Progression should be based on research about how learners develop competence in schools. Having described what progression is in the school context will help us better understand the following concept: learner capability.

### ***1.8.2 Learner capability***

Munje and Maarman (2016) refer to capability as a combination of functions from which a person can choose one combination. Learner capability can now be defined in this context as what a learner will be capable of doing or of being. Learner capability is an ability to learn, especially in the school context, since this study was about learners in schools. Learners should be able to grasp what is being taught in class and apply the knowledge learnt in the future. Learner capability should be characterised by learners being able to use competencies in unfamiliar and familiar circumstances, learner self-efficacy, creativity and collaboration (Blaschke & Hase, 2016). Displaying the capability to learn means that learners will be able to learn more things, even though all learner capabilities will not be the same due to cognitive expansion. Learner capability should allow learners to learn new skills in the intricacies of the world. Learners in this day and age need to be highly skilled and capable. They need to be able to respond to knowledge discrepancies by knowing where to fill the gap, which will show their capabilities to learn.

### ***1.8.2 Education Policy***

Education policy should be high on the agenda for many governments across the world. The focus should be given to the outcomes of education policy and their implications for economic

prosperity and social citizenship. Bell and Stevenson (2006) define education policy as the principles and government policymaking in the educational sphere. It includes a collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of the education system. Education occurs in many forms for different purposes. Education policy can directly affect people within the education sector of all ages. Therefore, each learner's experience should decisively be shaped by the wider policy environment within the education sector. We also need to understand how education policy is formed, what drives it and how it will impact schools and higher education institutions within the country (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Education policy should be aligned with the need to develop human capital. Bowles and Gintis (2000) argue that education policy based on human capital closely reflects the needs of the industrial society for workers, and the role of the state is to ensure that the workforce is available. Education policy can also be argued not only to have a social function but also to the matters of welfare and the ideologies within the community.

## **1.9 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

The report consists of five chapters, a brief outline of which follows.

### ***1.9.1 Chapter One***

This chapter presented the introduction and background to the study. This was followed by a problem statement purpose and rationale, which informed the circumstances that motivated the researcher's interest in this phenomenon. The significance of the study followed, highlighting the importance of this study. The overview of the study followed, and then the objectives of the study, key research questions, definition of key concepts, location of the study and chapter summary.

### ***1.9.2 Chapter Two***

Chapter Two presented a review of the literature of this inquiry. Prominent debates around progression policy in South Africa and the world were discussed. This chapter also discussed the theoretical framework that underpinned this study.

### ***1.9.4 Chapter Three***

This chapter focused on the research design and methodology used to conduct the study. In this chapter, the researcher provided explanations and justifications for research design and methodology choices. The limitations of the study were listed as well.

### ***1.9.5 Chapter Four***

This chapter focused on the presentation and discussion of the data, presented under the themes and direct quotes used to substantiate the claims.

### ***1.9.6 Chapter Five***

This chapter provided a summary of the findings and concludes the study. This chapter made recommendations and listed implications for further research.

## **1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter provided the introduction and background to the study, the issues surrounding the experiences of progressed learners in secondary schools, and how it was affecting them. The rationale listed the experiences that have resulted in the researcher gaining interest in the topic with a statement of the problem, aims and objectives of the study, the research question, and the significance of the study. A brief clarification of key concepts was provided. Chapter Two focused on a thorough review of the literature, including a conceptualisation of the key concepts and the theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the literature on learner progression was discussed. Guided by the research questions, the literature review focused on how progressed learners experience school life, what it means for learners to be progressed, and how the policy implementation impacts progressed learners' academic lives. Literature from developing countries and developed countries was used to check how progressed learners from these countries are compared to South Africa. The literature review focused on the following main areas: conceptualisation of the learner progression, the concept of policy and policy implementation in schools, and how progressed learners in secondary school's experience school. The literature further captured the meanings progressed learners attach to being progressed and how the learner progression policy impacts their academic lives. The theoretical framework, which entailed the two theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, were discussed after the literature. These theories were complexity theory and learning mastery instructional approach theory. Issues emerging from the literature were discussed, and a chapter summary was also provided.

#### **2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF LEARNER PROGRESSION**

The Department of Basic Education describes learner progression as a progression of a learner to the next grade where a learner did not meet the requirements to be promoted to the next grade (DBE, 2012). A learner who fails to meet the minimum promotional requirements twice in one grade cannot be retained in the same grade more than twice. That learner will be allowed to be progressed to the next grade without meeting the requirements to be promoted. Some schools will progress a learner depending on how many times that learner has been in that phase. Schools are postulated to provide progressed learners with additional support to address the specific subject deficiencies as identified. This will allow progressed learners to cope with the demands of the next grade. Le Roux (2016) defines learner progression as a means of advancement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R, despite the learner not complying with all promotional requirements. A learner may only be progressed once in a phase (Le Roux, 2013). For a learner to be promoted, there are minimum requirements that the

learner must meet, as outlined by the Department of Basic Education. If a learner does not meet those requirements, the progression policy allows for that learner to be progressed to the next grade.

OECD (2013) describes learner progression as a way learners move through learning in different subject areas. Learner progression can give educators a road map to identify skills and knowledge that the learner might need. Learner progression is less frequently used in many education systems. OECD (2013) argues that learner progression serves as a reference in summative assessment and central assessment in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, central Australia, and Norway. In many countries, assessment results may be used to detect under-achieving pupils and decide on how they can be progressed and which areas of their learning need improvement. Mitchell (2003) argues that the concept of learner progression should underpin learning, teaching, curriculum, and assessment. It should not be viewed as something that only applies when a learner has failed to meet the minimum requirements to be promoted to the next grade. Learner progression must be an alternate model which is backed up by research. Learner progression should be about competencies in learner development and be based on research (Nichols, 2010). Using research to map learning, learner progression can help identify where learners need to improve and help learners to move forward.

Learner progression should be designed and tested to verify if the intended results through progression are achieved (Shepard, 2018). Learner progression cannot be advanced using traditional approaches. Learner progression should give adequate attention to the learning side of things. Learner progression should respond to the needs of learners, not the needs of the school or government. Learner progression does not treat content separately from research that has been conducted to assess how progressed learners do in their next grade (National Research Council, 2007). Learner progression must be used as a tool to support learning in schools. Clements and Sarama (2008) point out that learner progression in schools is sometimes called learning trajectories. This is one of the respected and most used examples in building learner curricula in many countries. Learner progression should be effective in supporting teaching and learning in schools. If used correctly, learner progression should be beneficial to learners and schools. Learner progression must be an effective intervention explaining how key processes such as assessment should produce intended outcomes (Bennet, 2011). Assessment must be grounded in a theory of teaching and learning, which in turn will invigorate learner progression that is informed by research.

## **2.3 POLICY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS**

### **2.3.1 POLICY**

A policy can be defined as a set of rules, principles, guidelines, or framework that is adopted or designed by an organisation such as a school to achieve short and long-term goals (OECD, 2017). Bayeni and Bhengu (2018) define policy as a tool to designate different behaviours for some actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. They further define policy using three dimensions: policy as an authority prescript, policy as a prescriptive process and policy as an interactive practice (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). Engelbrecht et al. (2016) define policy as representing goals or plans and procedures that individual organisations set forth to achieve organisational goals. Policies are formulated to direct and exert influence on all major decisions made within the organisation and keep all activities within a set of established boundaries. For policy to work, it needs to be implemented and effective. There are different types of policies that we need to understand in this study to ensure that when zooming in on the Learner Progression Policy, we can draw a conclusion on how the policy impacts on progressed learners. We also need to understand what policy and the processes in policy formulation are. In giving meaning to policy, the following categories or stages of policy need to be looked into: policy as text and policy as discourse.

### **2.3.2 Policy as text**

Ball (1993) categorises policy into two categories: policy as text and policy as discourse. Policy as text is based on literary theory, which sees policies as representations coded and decoded in complex ways (Vidovich, 2001). Policies are not recognisable and accessible unless presented in written documents (Ralarala, 2019). It can be argued that it is not a policy which can be seen or evaluated, but the written words or the document. What is contained in that document is the formulation, in writing, of the intent of the government or course of action to follow. The policy is not just a mere text, but it is the product of mediation and negotiated process between policymakers, the context in which the policy will be implemented and who will be implementing that policy (in this case, schools) (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). All these groups do not see the policy as just a text or written document. Policy changes from time to time and is reviewed and revised constantly to ensure that it responds to the challenges of that particular time. Policy is both contested and changing, it is always in the state of becoming, of was and never was and not quite (Codd, 1988). Language and “text” used in policy formulation

processes are, therefore, deliberate and purposeful and, as such, carry fundamental implications regarding interests. The question will then be whose interest is being advanced? Policy as texts are the central points of interaction between the politics of policy production and the politics of policy interpretation in any context. Policy can be viewed as negotiated documents produced through consensus and contain the results of negotiated micro-political mediations (Cahill, 2015). This means that policies are negotiated consistently by those who are involved in the policy formulation process.

### **2.3.2 Policy as Discourse**

Ball (1993) refers to policy as a discourse where policy is recognised as a negotiated space infused with ideologies and grand narratives of both the constructors and consumers of policy. Ideology is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it (Cranston & Duplan, 2023). A grand narrative is a broad, overarching story or metanarrative that attempts to explain the nature of human existence, history, and culture (Yilmaz, 2019). Policy as discourse is a means through which ideologies are expressed, communicated, acquired and reproduced (Zanotto, 2020). Policy as discourse acknowledges that social problems are identified and addressed through the activities of interest groups. According to Ball, for example, the Learner Progression Policy will be the result of negotiation and discourse between the government, teachers, and learners. The policy will be based on how learners and teachers interpret it. Policies are negotiated products of people, communities, and ideological positions. Discourse is about who can speak, what can be said and thought, where and with what authority. Policy as discourse may have the effect of redistributing voice, that it does not matter what people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful (Ball, 1993). In this case, the voices of progressed learners should be the one that is loud enough for all stakeholders to check on how the Learner Progression Policy affects progressed learners.

### **2.3.3 Policy as Enactment**

Having looked at policy as text and policy as discourse, it is important to look into policy as enactment in the context of the Learner Progression Policy. Wilkinson and Penney (2020) argued that learners should be considered as policy actors in the processes of translating and enacting policy in schools. Teachers and learners are not merely the subjects of policy but actors of policy as well (Löfgren et al., 2018). Policy enactment involves getting the green light or permission to implement a policy (Fernandes, 2013). You cannot implement a policy if it has

not been authorised by the government. Which stakeholders are involved in policy enactment depends upon the level of enactment, in a district, district officials will be expected to enact that policy in their district, and it will only be limited to that particular district. The Learner Progression Policy was enacted at the national government level because it was going to apply to all government schools in South Africa. Policies can be enacted at multiple levels, from school districts to the Department of Education in the province and in the national government, When the Learner Progression Policy was enacted in 2005, the aim was to decrease the number of learners that drop out of school and ensure that learners stay in the schooling system (DoE, 2008) until they reach Grade 12. However, the enactment of the policy did not anticipate that the same policy might have a negative impact on progressed learners later in their schooling life and even after their secondary school education.

Policy practice refers to the design and evaluation of policies and programs (Fernandes, 2013). Policy practice involves gathering accurate information, delivering recommendations, and securing funding for desired programmes to be implemented. Jansson (2019) defines policy practice as an effort to change policy in the legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones, or defeating the policy initiative of other people. Policy Practice involves purposefully participating and contributing to policy formulation with the view to amending policies that are unfair and unsuitable for people (Pawar, 2019). Beyond formulating and amending existing policy, policy practice involves changing and challenging people who are oppressive and discriminatory. The Learner progression policy needs people who will ensure that the policy does not negatively impact progressed learners and that they are given a fair chance to do well in school and the grade they were progressed to.

An effective policy should outline what must happen in the organisation, the direction, limits, principles, and guidance for decision-making. Many organisations make the mistake of viewing policy as a necessary 'evil', thinking that policy should be there on paper without it being implemented and to serve its purpose.

#### **2.3.4 Policy formulation**

In policy formulation, some steps need to be developed and followed to ensure that the policy will address what it is intended to address. The policy formulation process is part of the process of developing policies and involves different stakeholders, such as governments and other key

stakeholders, asking and answering questions about how society can deal with various kinds of problems and conditions affecting citizens and organisations (Howlett & Ramesh, 2016).

The policy formulation process typically follows the following steps: 1) problem emergence, 2) agenda setting, 3) consideration of policy options, 4) decision making, 5) implementation, and 6) evaluation (Adelle et al., 2012). This study focused more on policy implementation as it speaks directly about how the Learner Progression Policy affects progressed learners. The implementation side of the policy formulation process is important because for policy to be effective, it needs to be implemented. Then, we can evaluate if the policy had a negative or positive impact in stage six, which is policy evaluation. This idea of using steps for policy formulation provides a general framework for understanding policy development and points to several of the activities that should be done before the policy can be implemented and evaluated (Howlet et al., 2020). The reality is that policymaking is not as simple and linear as models developed by scholars might suggest. Some stages are often compressed, skipped, or changed their order entirely.

### **2.3.5 Education Policy**

There is often a misunderstanding of how education policy is formulated, what drives it, and how it impacts schools. Education policymaking is a dynamic process in which the national government exerts power and deploys resources in conjunction with regional, local, and institutions (Bell, 1999). When the government first introduced the Learner Progression Policy, the Department of Basic Education had to ensure that resources were available for the policy to be implemented successfully. The government had to ensure that teachers were trained and sensitised on what the policy entails and what the expectations were. It is important to recognise that policy, especially education policy, is systematic rather than random. Education policy is goal orientated, and it is complex, requiring the coordination of several courses of action and not one discrete activity (Blakemore, 2003). The limitation of seeing education policy as a product is that it disconnects it from the policy process. The policy formulation stages presented in this chapter point to a policy trajectory that flows downwards from the central government. This reflects the importance of the national government in shaping education policy in the country. As indicated before, the Learner Progression Policy was formulated and implemented to reduce grade repetition in schools. Such policy trajectory (top-down approach) is never a

clear cut, it can be contested and challenged as it is developed and will be shaped and reshaped by pressure from below as well as pressure from above.

### **2.3.6 Policy Implementation**

Policy implementation is the stage of the policy process where policy is put into effect. Policy implementation involves translating the goals and objectives of a policy into an action (Khan, 2016). The context for policy implementation is crucial. When implementing policy, many other implementation efforts may be occurring at the same time in different parts of the system. Policy implementation is a stage in the policy process that involves actions needed to put laws or policies into effect or to solve a problem (Ruseva & Petrova, 2020). Represents the stage where government executes an adopted policy as specified by the legislation or policy action.

For policies to be effective, enacted policies need to be implemented. Policy implementation in education passes through several levels in which different actors hold different views from those who make it (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). Policy implementation should be viewed as an intervention to challenges that have been identified in schools. As was highlighted in this chapter, the policy as text cannot resolve the challenges it was formulated to address unless that policy is enacted and implemented. Challenges faced by schools daily in South Africa require immediate intervention, and education policies need to be implemented (enacted) to address these challenges. Such challenges often lead to intervention through policy development and implementation (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). The implementation of such intervention can be very complex across the world. For example, in the process of improving public schools in Belgium, a teacher evaluation policy was implemented. Schools tried hard to adhere to the policy as prescribed, but the implementation differed from school to school (Tuytens & Devos, 2014). A European study on issues of education policy implementation highlighted that education stakeholders have different attitudes that might lead to conflicts among education providers and education users (Katiliute & Jucevičienė, 2005). In a study conducted in Nigeria on educational policies and problems of implementation, the problem of policy implementation became visible during the planning stage that comes after the formulation of a policy (Okoroma, 2006). This indicates that the gap between the formulation and implementation of the policy requires attention, as the desired effects of the policy are often not met due to how the policy is implemented.

The implementation of the progression policy in Madagascar, for example, was also a challenge, as half the parents were not involved in their children's education (Glick et al., 2005). This is also a problem for progressed learners in South Africa as they are not often supported at home and school as required by the policy. A study conducted by Mogale and Malatji (2022) revealed that support for progressed learners in schools was within the umbrella of Inclusive Education, this resulted in the confusion between inclusive education and curriculum support for learners identified for progression. In their study, Mogale and Modipane (2021) also highlighted that the support offered to progressed learners was not sufficient as required by the policy, but teachers were only interested in completing the syllabus. The learner progression policy was implemented to minimise unnecessary school dropouts for the first time in South African schools in 2013. Due to how the policy was implemented, the policy was cited as a contributing factor to the dropout rate in the Grade 12 results in 2015, compared to the 2014 results (DBE, 2016). Although the implementation of the progression policy addressed the challenge of retention and drop-out rates in schools (Department of Basic Education, 2016), how the policy is implemented requires a need to understand progressed learners' experiences. Arguably, a few studies have been conducted on the learner progression policy (*The implementation of the progression policy in secondary schools of the Limpopo province in South Africa* by Mogale and Modipane, 2021., *Progressed Learners' Participation in Developing Curriculum Support Programmes: A Critical Pedagogy Approach* by Mogale and Malatji, 2022). I believe that most did not look at how progressed learners are affected by the policy and what are their lived experiences. This study described the experiences of progressed learners in two secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, Umlazi District. This is still an emerging phenomenon within the South African education system. I noted that there is no difference between South Africa and other countries, such as Madagascar and Belgium, in the implementation of the policy in schools because the policy specifies stipulations. The implementation process on the ground remains inconsistent.

The main principle of the Learner Progression Policy is that a learner cannot spend over four years in one phase. In exceptional cases, a learner may be permitted to repeat more than once per grade/phase (Equal Education Law Centre, 2018). To understand progression, we need to understand the differences between progression, promotion, and retention. Progression means that the learner has not met the prescribed minimum standards as described by the Department of Basic Education 2015 (Guidelines for the Implementation of Promotion and Progression Requirements for Grades 10-12.) to be promoted to the next grade but is being moved on to the

next grade with support. Promotion means that the learner has met the minimum requirements to be promoted to the next grade and the learner has passed the grade. Retention means that the learner will remain in the same grade for another year, and it is agreed that the learner will benefit from repeating the grade for the second year. It is important to note that learners must be progressed with support such as extra classes to the next grade as a requirement by the department.

Where a learner has already repeated the grade or they will not benefit from repeating a grade, the learner can be progressed to the next grade with the necessary support tailored for that learner (EELC, 2018). This means that the learner must have individual support developed for him/her to ensure that they cope in the grade they were progressed to. Progressed learners must receive support to learn, and this may include support in the classroom with the curriculum, as well as support with assessments. A learner cannot be progressed to the next grade without the provision of support (DBE, 2015). If there is agreement among all subject teachers during the promotion/progression meeting that the learner should be retained in the current grade, then a meeting must be held with the parent/guardian so that the advice is carefully and clearly explained by the school and understood by the parent/guardian before the learner's school report is handed to them.

## **2.4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEARNER PROGRESSION POLICY**

This section covers the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy in schools. It looks into how the implementation of the LPP might have an impact on progressed learners and how this policy can affect progressed learners. This section focuses on what the literature says about the experiences and meanings progressed learners have under the LPP.

### **2.4.1 Experiences of progressed learners in schools**

Progressed learners may experience school life very differently than those learners who managed to meet the minimum requirements and pass their grades. This is because progressed learners will need to work even harder to understand the content taught in the new grade and keep up with the demands of that grade. Reviewed literature captures the challenges in policy implementation and how progressed learners experience school life (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). Challenges faced by progressed learners include the lack of support from teachers and the school, the lack of support from home, and the pressure to do well in the new grade. The

comparison of 2014, 2015, and 2016 Grade 12 results in South Africa indicates that progressed learners are still viewed as a burden to the education system, which adds to how they experience school life. Werts and Brewer (2015) pointed out that the application of policy while overlooking the lived experiences of progressed learners increases the ineffective implementation of the policy and adds pressure to already struggling progressed learners.

Understanding the experiences of progressed learners in policy implementation will play an important role in ensuring that progressed learners experience school as those who have not progressed, and the expectations and pressure will be minimised.

The progression policy suggests that various consultations need to be carried out with teachers, parents, and learners during implementation (DBE, 2015). This was going to help in understanding how progressed learners' experiences in school life. What challenges are they facing, and what can be done to ensure that they do well in their studies and that teachers do not view them as an extra burden? There are many everyday challenges that learners face in schools in South Africa and other countries, these challenges some of which require immediate intervention by the government. Even with the increased government expenditure on education, the cost of schooling is still a barrier for many learners (Ally & McLaren, 2016). Many learners still need to travel long distances to access schools and cross rivers infested with crocodiles to access schools. When they get to those schools, they only find out that there is a shortage of teachers and other resources needed to run the school successfully. In 2016, schools in lower quintiles (Quintiles 1 and 2) received a certain amount of funding per learner, which was about R1175.00 per learner per year (Ally & McLaren, 2016). This means that the government was paying this amount for each learner, including those who were progressed.

These challenges are not experienced by progressed learners only but by all learners in general. Adding these challenges to progressed learners makes already difficult school life for them, and it is impossible for them to perform better under these circumstances. Despite no-fee schools becoming more accessible, school fees are still an obstacle and contribute to the dropout rate increasing, including for progressed learners, as parents end up not affording school fees (Ally & McLaren, 2016). The issue of funding to progressed learners became an issue to the point that some suggested that the government introduce the learner progression policy to try and minimise government spending on learners (Arendse, 2010). This idea that the Learner Progression Policy was introduced to minimise government spending refuses to go away, especially looking at how the policy is implemented and how there is little to no support

for progressed learners. Arendse (2010) stated that the availability of education relies upon the state granting the required resources to be able to maintain the basic infrastructure of the school and ensure that resources are available for teaching and learning and that all learners are not negatively affected, including progressed learners.

Parents/Guardians of progressed learners are said to be the final decision-makers if a learner should be progressed or not (DBE, 2015). This poses a challenge to progressed learners as studies by some researchers (Mogale & Modipane, 2022; Mogale & Malatji, 2021) conducted have indicated that most parents are not that involved in their children's education (Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). This leaves these decisions to teachers, who then decide whether a child should be progressed or not. The guidelines for the implementation of promotion and progression requirements for Grades 10 to 12 stipulate that schools must offer support and monitor the progress of learners (DBE, 2015). How are schools going to do that if there are not enough teachers and classes are overcrowded? Dikgale (2012) indicates that schools serving economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods are faced with overcrowded classes and are under-resourced. This might raise the question of when teachers give special attention to progressed learners given the type of situations they work in. This leaves progressed learners without any support or monitoring and adds to their challenges in school. The progression policy was blamed for the decline in Grade 12 results in 2015. The need existed to describe how secondary schools addressed the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy, and this resulted in schools limiting the number of progressed learners to Grade 12 to protect their Grade 12 pass percentage (Mogale & Modipane, 2021).

The progression of learners in South Africa comes with many questions, not only from teachers but also from other stakeholders within the education sector. One of the teachers in a study conducted by Matiwane (2015) indicated that the progression of learners who have failed to meet minimum requirements to be promoted is not working for both teachers and learners and must be scrapped. These were some of the views provided by the teachers. The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support policy (SIAS policy) requires that teachers and school based support teams complete Support Needs Assessments (DBE, 2014). By identifying learners at risk as early as possible, intervention strategies can be activated, and a learner might be progressed with a clear plan on how he/she will be supported in the next grade. Without support and monitoring, progressed learners will continue to suffer in schools and end up thinking that dropping out is the best solution for them as they are not receiving any support.

The role played by school leadership and teachers for the success of progressed learners cannot be over-emphasised (Smith & Loock, 2019). School leadership should play a central role in ensuring that teachers who are tasked with supporting progressed learners have all the resources they will need. This will ensure that progressed learners will have better experiences in school and will view schools and their school life positively.

Many European countries have a problem with early school leavers, like in South Africa, where repeating a class can lead to a learner dropping out of school. European Union needed to know the drop-out rates and completion after learners had progressed through the Bologna process (European Commission, 2009). The study pointed out that 25 out of 35 European countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, prioritised stopping the number of drop-outs (Švec et al., 2015). The number of high drop-outs was a big challenge for the European Union, and it was highly prioritised in the European policy agenda (Švec et al., 2015). In Liechtenstein, the legislation provides for automatic progression through primary education. This is mostly happening in what can be described as the foundation phase or early childhood development in South Africa. Progressed learners in Poland are prioritised to ensure that they do not drop out of school and can continue with their education (Švec et al., 2015).

#### **2.4.2 Meaning of being a progressed learner**

With the different lived experiences that progressed learners have with their academic lives in secondary schools, it is important to look at what the literature is saying about progressed learners and what it means for them to be progressed. Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA, 2019) indicated that progressed learners are likely to repeat the grade they were progressed to if they do not receive the necessary support. This indicates that progressed learners are likely to perform below grade level without support since they know they will fail because they did not meet the requirements to be in that grade. This now creates a situation where now progressed learners might view themselves as not worth enough to be in that grade. The Progression Policy relies on learner support being provided by educators in the new grade (Munje & Maarman, 2016). Without support from the teachers, progressed learners will struggle, and that will not be good for their mental state and might view themselves as failures and choose to drop out of school. Learner Progression Policy fails to take into consideration issues such as coping required by learners and other learners' needs and challenges. This creates a perfect situation for trapping progressed learners into the cycle of repeating the grades they

are progressed to. With progressed learners not receiving support, we are creating a situation where now progressed learners will find it easy to get alternatives away from school, setting them up for total failure in life and destroying their confidence in their capabilities.

In most schools across the world, academic achievement is commonly measured through examinations and continuous assessment (Nkosi & Adebayor, 2021). This also includes progressed learners who should sit in for examinations without being given the necessary support and preparation to ensure they are ready for examinations of the new grade. The implementation of inclusive policy in Secondary schools in Kenya was unsuccessful because learners who were condoned (progressed) were not doing well in the new grade and were excluded during the implementation process (Abuya et al., 2015). This indicates that problems experienced by progressed learners in South Africa are not unique to them only but can be seen across different countries where such policies exist. There were challenges in the implementation of language in education policy in Botswana because of language barriers, especially for those learners who were progressed to the next grade (Mokibelo, 2016). Different socio-economic life of learners needs to be considered when developing and implementing such policies to ensure that progressed learners do not view themselves as a burden to teachers and schools.

Developed countries throughout the world seek intervention strategies to remedy the high dropout rate of learners. Some of the strategies they used include formulating progression policies that South Africa borrowed. There was a slight decrease in learner drop-out in about 90% of learners who were retained after the progression policy was implemented in Chicago (Allensworth, 2005). In Chicago, they refer to progression policy as social promotion and Allensworth (2005) noted that learners who were progressed in social promotion policy developed a need to be in school every day. This means that after the social promotion policy was implemented, learners developed new meanings about schools and a need for them to be there. The implementation of the progression policy for the school and academic performance in Madagascar was a challenge as half of the progressed learners were not supported at home, and parents did not understand why they needed to be progressed (Glick et al., 2005). Looking into literature from other countries, we can say that issues from the Learner Progression Policy are not unique to South Africa. Meanings and experiences created by progressed learners will always depend on the support they receive from school and at home.

### **2.4.3 Progressed learners' academic lives**

Entwisle and Alexander (1996), in their study, discovered that educators and the public had some reservations about the progression policy. If teachers and the public can have reservations about the progression of learners, one cannot help but wonder how that has a negative impact on a learner that has been progressed and what the implications are for progressed learners. Progressed learners are often viewed as an extra burden by teachers who are tasked with giving them support and ensuring that they are ready for the new grade. Most parents are not aware of the performance of their children, and, as a result, they are not able to offer support. Parents/Guardians must assist the learners in coping with the pressure of the new grade after being progressed because there is no guarantee they will pass the new grade (DBE, 2015). The parents supporting progressed learners will ensure that progressed learners' academic lives will be improved, as this will allow them to get support from home and at school. It is against this background that this study ought to describe the experiences of progressed learners and how the progression policy impacts their lives.

Motala et al. (2012) conducted a study on mapping drop-out, reputation grade, and age progression in two districts in South Africa. Their study indicated that progressed learners' lives did not change much after the implementation of the progression policy. Progressed learners appeared to have difficulties in their academic lives and attaining their Grade 12 (Grossen et al., 2017). As a result, the intention of the Learner Progression Policy was questioned on how it affected progressed learners. Musitha and Mafikatha (2018) highlighted that the progression policy can only be beneficial to progressed learners if they are provided with a favourable learning environment. This will ensure that their academic lives are not affected, and they can view themselves like any other learner in school. The poor implementation of the Learner Progression Policy also contributes to the decline in Grade 12 results and how progressed learners' academic lives are affected (Mogale & Madipane, 2021). The need to describe progressed learners' lived experiences became very clear in this study.

Retaining learners who did not meet promotional requirements does not mean such learners will meet the requirements. In Zimbabwe, progressed learners are termed learners in the lower stream (Mapolisa, 2016). They are grouped according to their learning abilities, and this can kill the confidence of progressed learners. Instead of progressing learners like South Africa, the Zimbabwe Department of Education decided to allocate experienced teachers to learners in the lower stream (Mapolisa, 2016). This is what should be happening in South Africa, with

progressed learners being allocated experienced teachers to support and monitor them, but how is that going to be possible in South Africa experiencing overcrowding in the classroom and a lack of teachers for subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Sciences? Allocating experienced teachers in classrooms that are occupied by progressed learners is an indication that these learners need to be supported through the teaching and learning process.

In Norway, regulations state that all pupils are entitled to automatically progress through the years of compulsory schooling (John, 2015). This has been interpreted to mean that no child at the compulsory level can stay longer than ten years. They allow a learner to be progressed during compulsory levels, which can be more or equal to South African Senior and FET phases. In Bulgaria, according to the amendments made to the National Education Law in 2009, a learner may not repeat, Grades 1 to 4 (Wolhuter & Steyn, 2009). This subsequently sheds light on how progressed learners in these countries in Europe experience their academic lives, especially if they know that they will be progressed through compulsory levels of their education.

Scholars and researchers in South Africa need to show what this policy intends to do within our education system. We need to understand the intentions of this policy and the way it is structured if it benefits learners. Most progressed learners in our schools do not receive the necessary support, as stated by the policy. A pilot study was conducted in 2016 on developing ways to support learners who are identified as at risk in public schools (Louch, 1966). Once plans have been identified, they need to be implemented according to government policy and support the cognitive development of learners.

The role played by school leadership and teachers for the success of progressed learners cannot be over-emphasised (Smith & Loock, 2019). School leadership should play a central role in ensuring that teachers who are tasked with supporting progressed learners have all the resources they will need. Since progressed learners would have been identified as learners at risk (using the Support Needs Assessment process as outlined by DBE (2014), it will allow teachers to have the support developed for the individual learner. District leadership also needs to partner with schools to ensure that they have the necessary resources for progressed learners and at least a central place to have access to study material (within the district or circuit). Once progressed learners have been identified, school leadership should immediately initiate the process of preparing them for support. Different intervention strategies can be formulated for each individual school by the school leadership while keeping in line with SIAS policy as

identified by the DBE (2014). Progressed learners should not feel isolated or being left behind, but they need to be supported once they are identified as struggling.

## **2.5 ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE LITERATURE**

Different scholars, including education commentators, have had a fair share of opinions about the progression policy (Fraser, 2016; Gregory, 2017; Stott et al., 2015). Other scholars pointed out that more needs to be done regarding how policy is implemented (Gray, 2014; Motseke, 2020; Rivers, 2015). Scholars argue that the progression policy has brought uncertainty to the teachers' workload. This is because of teachers' new expectations to give academic support and extra tuition to the progressed learners. Many controversies around progressed learners in South Africa have emerged, the most dominant one relating to the fact that learners who did not meet the requirements to progress to the next grade can go to the next class without meeting the requirements. Looking at the scholarly debate on the Learner Progression Policy, I found that it missed the critical issue of highlighting that the very policy intended to help and benefit learners, in fact, negatively affects the learners. However, although this policy had good intentions to help learners, the way it was structured and implemented negatively affected the learners. In their survey done in South Africa, Alexande et al. (2013) discovered that educators and the public had some reservations about the progression policy.

Shepard (2018) has argued that before learner progression is fully rolled out, a rigorous and extensive test should have been conducted to avoid the unintended consequences that affect learners. It must be used as a tool to support learning in schools. Learner progression should be effective in supporting teaching and learning in schools. If used correctly, it should benefit learners and schools. Learner progression must be an effective intervention explaining how key processes such as assessment should produce intended outcomes (Bennet, 2011). Assessment must be grounded in a theory of teaching and learning, which will support learner progression that is informed by research.

Learner progression in schools has been an ongoing issue in European education since it was included in the European Union (EU) strategic document (Ydhag, 2019). Even though learner progression might be practised, the policy must achieve what it was intended to achieve. Many European countries like South Africa had a problem with early school leavers caused mainly by repeating a class.

European Union needed to know the rates of drop-out and completion after learners have been progressed through the Bologna process (European Commission, 2009). Stiburek et al. (2017) pointed out that the drop-out rate was highly prioritised on the European policy agenda. The study pointed out that 75% of 35 European countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, prioritised stopping a few drop-outs (Stiburek et al., 2017). This is important for learners and schools as it will help reduce the number of drop-outs and help retain learners within the schooling system.

## **2.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Two theories underpinned this research as it deals with the experiences of progressed learners brought about by the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy, the implications of being a progressed learner, and how progressed learners experience school life. These two theories complement each other in terms of providing insight into understanding complex systems such as schools, policy implementation and the impact the policy being implemented has on those who are involved. When used together, these two theories give a balanced perspective about what happens inside complex systems such as schools and policy implementation in those complex systems. In short, The Learning Mastery theory explains how schools use the same approach in terms of assessment and how learners learn despite their differences in learning capabilities, and the Complexity theory explains how it is difficult to implement education policies in complex systems such as schools.

The learning mastery approach theory by Bloom (1968) focuses on how the learner progression policy challenges learner capabilities and what can be done to ensure that struggling learners in schools are progressed with support as the policy demands. The complexity theory by Kauffman (1980) dwells more on how complex it is to enact education policies in schools, with the focus being the learner progression policy. These two theories serve as a concrete representation in explaining the challenges experienced by learners because of the progression policy in secondary schools.

Learning mastery theory suggests that learning must be the time required for different learners to learn the material and achieve the same level of mastery (Lengetti et al., 2020). Progressed learners must be able to achieve the same level of mastery as their peers who have not progressed and who met the requirements to be promoted to the next grade.

Complexity theory should provide learning systems that will develop and examine how the progression policy works and how policy implementation works in schools. This section of this chapter should give depth into the two theories and how their relevance to the study. Learning mastery theory demonstrates how progressed learners can be supported to ensure that they achieve the same results as their peers. Classic models of teaching focused on the difference in learners' abilities and where all learners are given the same amount of time to learn some instruction set (Block & Burns, 1976). These classic learning models of teaching are not ideal for progressed learners as they do not consider that the learner's cognitive development is not the same.

### **2.6.1 Learning Mastery Instructional Approach Theory**

The learning mastery theory is an educational strategy introduced by educator Benjamin Bloom in 1968 that uses multi-tiered lessons, multiple assessments, and instructor feedback to help students master learning material (Ratliff et al., 2022). Bloom maintained that all students are capable of learning if given the time and the right combination of tools to meet their learning needs. The mastery learning theory is an approach to education or training that focuses heavily on ensuring overall competence (Bergmann, 2022). Proficiency is ultimately the priority. As a result, the paradigm embraces a range of mechanisms designed to make sure that every learner can achieve the required level of competence. Along with having clear learning objectives, mastery thresholds are set to ensure competence. In Mastery Learning, a learner's aptitude is based on how long they need to master the content (Bergmann, 2022). The purpose of Mastery Learning is to ensure that learners truly master each course's subject material before moving on to the next course. Armstrong (2015) created the Ten Principles of the learning mastery theory as follows: 1) learners and families are consistently informed of all learning expectations. These include the long-term expectations. 2) The learners' academic performances are assessed against common learning standards and performance expectations. 3) Assessments are competency-based and criterion-referenced, learners' success is defined by the achievement of expected competencies. 4) Formative assessments are used to measure learning progress. Results from these assessments determine how to improve instructions, teaching practices, and academic support. 5) Summative assessments are used to evaluate learning achievement. Results from these assessments record learners' level of mastery at a specific point in time. 6) learners' work habits, character traits, and behaviours, such as attendance and class participation, are monitored and reported separately from academic

progress and achievement. 7) Academic grades translate as a learner's learning progress and are used to improve and facilitate the learning process. 8) When learners fail to meet expected standards, they are given another chance to improve their work. 9) Personalised learning options, differentiated assessments, and alternative learning methods can help realise student learning progress. 10) Learners are empowered to make important decisions about their learning, including contributing to the design of learning experiences and pathways.

The learning mastery theory is important in this study as it recognises that not all learners are the same. Like progressed learners, they need tailor-made support, assessments, and intervention and are monitored not only on how they perform in assessments but in class as well. The learning mastery theory can help schools and teachers to identify learners who might be progressed and ensure that the intervention strategies to prevent that are quickly developed and implemented. The involvement of parents will ensure that struggling learners are given more time and support at home, this will ensure that any weaknesses can be corrected and assessed differently from others. Struggling learners will have a personalised option to make sure that their strengths are enhanced while also correcting their weaknesses in their learning subjects.

Learning mastery theory views the learner's failure (not meeting minimum requirements to be promoted) as more due to instruction and not necessarily a lack of ability on his or her part. This is a shift of responsibilities from other classic learning theories, as we discuss the importance of this theory in progressed learners. The learning mastery theory stems from Bloom's (1984) work, which considered how teachers adopted the aspect of tutoring and individualised instruction to improve learning in general education (Guskey, 2010). With learning being individualised, it means that a teacher will recognise the difference between learners in terms of their learning abilities. Bloom suggested that although learners vary in their learning ability, teachers need to provide the necessary time and appropriate learning conditions (Guskey, 2010). All learners must be able to achieve a high level of mastery by being provided with the necessary support system by schools and teachers. Block and Burns (1976) described learning mastery theory as a philosophically based approach that is designed to offer support to learners. Teachers need to organise concepts and skills that they want learners to learn into instructional units that involve days of instructional time (Guskey, 2007). Learning mastery should make the organisation of learning units for all learners to be easy.

Learning mastery theory proposes that if each learner can receive an optimal quality of instruction and learning time, most learners can achieve good results (Bloom, 1971). This is important for progressed learners as, at times, they are often not given enough time to learn and be on the same path as their peers. The philosophy of learning mastery assets with appropriate learning conditions, all learners can learn well (Block & Burns, 1976). Learning mastery models stress the importance of administering a targeted assessment for all learners to determine if they have the expected knowledge and skills for success in the coming learning sequence (Guskey, 2010). By pre-assessing learners, teachers can easily identify those who are struggling and who might be at risk of being progressed, and appropriate intervention strategies can be developed.

If a nation wants to pursue excellence and improvement of education, mastery at every level must be objective (Block & Burns, 1976). By introducing the Learner Progression Policy in the country, we can argue that the government wanted to improve our education by ensuring that learners will not drop out of school for not meeting the minimum requirements to be promoted to the next grade. Learning mastery was introduced in American schools back in 1920 (Block, 1971). Bloom maintained that the mastery of the material to be learnt, learning mastery theory increases the attitude and interest of learners (Bloom, 1961). With progressed learners showing signs of losing interest in continuing with learning, Bloom argues that we can give them that interest and positive attitude again by introducing them to mastery learning. Bloom (1968) suggested that mastery learning procedures are most likely to enhance learning outcomes. Learning outcomes will result in fewer learners required to be progressed because most will be achieving the minimum requirements to be promoted to the next grade. Learning mastery begins with an assessment of skills for each learner that they will be bringing into class. By doing a pre-assessment, teachers will know what knowledge and skills each learner has and which area they will need to improve on. A specific learning objective should be developed which will organise the material to be learnt into components for learners to learn. Each unit should present an understanding that most learners should achieve.

Learning mastery theory will allow learners to learn at their own pace without being compared to others. In one class, you can have different learners with different learning abilities. Some learners may require more time while others can grasp what is being taught fast. The teacher must ensure that all learners in his/her class bring out their best. Learners who achieve below mastery learning should be provided with remedial assignments, self-study material and one

on-one monitoring (Guskey, 2010). If our schools can adapt the learning mastery theories, most of the problems students face will be addressed. The lack of support and being given time to study at their own pace, having one-on-one monitoring with teachers will help progressed learners a lot. Learners in the learning mastery programme showed increasing gains in achievement over those in traditional programs (Guskey & Gates, 1986). Even though this study does not suggest that learning mastery theory will solve all problems faced by progressed learners, it is worth exploring and being adopted by schools and teachers who want to help learners struggling with their studies.

Instead of using assessment as a tool to evaluate learners' understanding of the content that is being taught, teachers should explore other options. Bloom recommended that teachers should use classroom assessment as a learning tool (Guskey, 2007). Part of the process will be to diagnose individual difficulties and prescribe appropriate remedial procedures. If teachers use learning mastery theory, they will first point out errors in learners' work (feedback) and follow that with an explanation to ensure that the learner understands what is required or expected. This will be important for struggling learners and be in line with DoE policies on identifying learners who might be at risk of repeating the grade. With feedback and corrective information that learners will gain from the assessment, learners will have a detailed prescription of where he/she needs to improve to master the concepts and skills of that unit (Guskey, 2007). These corrections will prevent learning difficulties from accumulating and becoming a learning problem for progressed learners. Teachers will have more time to work with all learners at the same pace, including those who have progressed. Teachers will also have practical means to vary and differentiate their teaching strategies to meet individual learners' needs.

Through formative assessment and regular correction of individual learning errors, all learners could be provided with more instruction that can improve their learning. Jarvela and Jarvenoja (2011) argue that in mastery learning through collaboration, learners will be motivated to collaborate with their fellow group members. Collaborating with other learners will allow progress learners to share information, co-construct knowledge, and engage in coordinated activities. Some of the motivation constructs, such as goal orientation, self-efficacy, group efficacy, and task value, are needed to ensure the academic success of progress learners. Evidence supports the view that mastery learning is a disposition to organise stable achievement in a learning situation (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Mastery learning is distinguished from other learning theories by focusing on the development of competencies,

knowledge, and skills (Lin, 2020). This makes mastery learning theory the most adaptive because learners with mastery goal orientation tend to be more persistent.

Research has demonstrated that mastery learning theory is vital to learner-teacher engagement (Han et al., 2016). Perception of successful past performance leads to increased confidence in learners. However, if they fail to meet the required standards that will allow them to be promoted to the next grade, it will lead to the perception of failure, a decrease in self-confidence and sometimes lead to dropping out of school. With mastery of learning, it becomes clear that different learners have different approaches to learning, use different strategies, and pursue different goals (Palos, 2020). Mastery learning theory will help identify the level of energy that each learner puts in a class and allow teachers and school leadership to have a clear strategy on how learners will be supported.

### **2.6.2. Complexity Theory**

Much of the research on complexity theory originates from the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico, a mecca for those studying complexity theory (deMattos et al., 2017). Complexity theory allows us to better understand systems, such as human beings and organisations, that are only partially understood by traditional scientific methods. Complexity theory and its related concepts emerged in the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century across multiple disciplines. Complexity theory can also be understood generally as the study of complex adaptive systems (Schneider & Somers, 2006). Proponents of complexity theory believe specific traits are shared by most complex systems (deMattos et al., 2017). It attempts to discover how the many disparate elements of a system work with each other to shape the system and its outcomes, as well as how each component changes over time. It is also one way to express the perceived domination of systems over their myriad smaller influences.

Education leadership has, among its principles, responsibilities of initiating and sustaining positive change within schools. Insights offered by complexity theory suggest a radical rethinking of more traditional notions on how best we can use good education leadership to achieve positive changes in schools. Complexity theory implies that in every environment, even in schools, new behaviours emerge that are not predicted from the knowledge of the initial conditions (Mason, 2016). Complexity theory concerns itself with environments, organisations, and systems that are complex, like schools (Waldrop, 1993). With schools being complex,

teachers, learners, and other stakeholders are connected and interact with each other in different ways.

Complexity theory is increasingly used to explain complex education system behaviour (Gear et al., 2018). A selection of complex concepts, such as learner progression policy and complexity theory, is used to guide a research approach and data interpretation. In education research, assumptions about knowledge often go undetected, which results in calls for improved theory applications to support robust findings. Complexity theory helps call attention to explaining and understanding the complex education system behaviour (Martin & Felix-Bortolotti, 2014). In this research, complexity theory was used to study the education system to respond to the learner progression policy and the implications of being a progressed learner. This research will consider complexity theory as a useful and critical investigation to explore the complex problem of learner progression in schools. Complexity theory focuses on understanding the interactions in the system at different levels (McDaniel & Driebe, 2001). Rather than analysing individual elements in isolation, complexity theory help understand the complexity of the Learner Progression Policy, the lived experiences of progressed learners, and the implications of the policy implementation.

Complexity theory is the theory of survival, evolution, development, and adaptation (Mason, 2008). With it being a theory of development and adaptation, it makes it interesting for schools to develop learners, including those who are progressed, for them to adapt to new situations. Given the sufficient degree of complexity, new properties and behaviours should emerge in that environment. Learners, as they navigate the Learner Progression Policy, which brings complexity, a new behaviour of survival is bound to emerge. Complexity theory concerns itself with elements that constitute a complex and sufficiently complex environment in the system. With the environment of education being complex, teachers and learners are bound to try and come up with strategies that will help them navigate the complex system. Complexity theory differs from other theories in that it suggests that it is in the dynamic interactions and adaptive orientation of a system (Mason, 2008). New properties and behaviours emerge, new patterns are developed, and old ones are changed. Complexity theory accepts the existence of certain essential generative elements but suggests that the system is much more than what is predictably determined by generative elements of that system (Waldrop, 1993). Complexity theory suggests that the interactions among constitutive elements that are responsible for the phenomena, patterns, and behaviours are characteristics of a field.

Complexity theory is an interdisciplinary theory that grew out of systems theory. Complexity theory comprises several views and interpretations within education. It is not unitary or monolithic (Sawyer, 2005). Complexity theory can offer much to school leadership and management. It has value in informing and supporting effective change in schools that can help the school be a better place for learners (Morrison, 2010). Complexity theory can be used to simplify seemingly complex systems. Complexity theory has a striking similarity with chaos theory. Still, those who advocate for complexity maintain that chaos does not account for the coherence of self-organising complex systems like schools (Mason, 2008). One of the important concepts of complexity theory is that there is no one controlling any system. Besides, coherent behaviour is generated by the cooperation between those in the system. Complexity theory assumes that there are principles underlying traits that emerge from interactions of different actors within the system (Mason, 2008). Because systems have so many interactions, complexity theory cannot predict the outcomes of any system.

Teaching and learning can be viewed as a complex system within which learning and teaching systems are nested with specific activity settings (Martin & Dismuke, 2017). Teaching and learning are nested in several complex systems within the schools and outside the schools, such as classrooms, districts, and national policies that guide education. The complex networks in these systems affect teaching and learning activity, influence what is taught, and how progressed learners will be supported (within the districts where schools are located or nationally). Teaching and learning are also influenced by the complex systems embedded within teaching and learning systems, such as the abilities, knowledge, identities, and attitudes of both teachers and learners (Martin & Dismuke, 2017). These systems can affect how learners engage in learning. Learning outcomes in schools are in the complexities of dynamic interactions of teacher, learner, and social setting as the complex system.

The complex theory facilitates a transdisciplinary approach to research, allowing for different bodies of knowledge to be blended to provide an understanding of the complex problems being researched (Martin & Felix-Bortolotti, 2014). There is a wide variation in complexity theory, and considerable conceptual stretch remains. Complexity theory can be used to extend a case study and examine system elements that traditional methods have not captured. Qualitative research of complex systems such as education has the potential to capture complex dynamics that would have remained unexplored (Clark, 2013). The progression of learners in schools is complex, which is why the most commonly used method of studying complexity is case studies.

A qualitative complexity approach is useful in understanding complex phenomena that will emerge, such as quality improvement of schools (Ellis & Herbert, 2010). The choice of theoretical framework shapes the research design and the level of knowledge that can be described and understood. A complexity approach as a theoretical framework calls attention to the influence of the theoretical perspective to present alternative ways of knowing.

Complexity theory provides ways to conceptualise the research problem as a complex system. It will focus on the systems patterns and interactions between different system elements at different levels (Gear et al., 2018). South African schools are made up of diverse learners capable of learning, adapting, and responding to changes generated by thorough interactions with teachers and other students. However, schools follow a nonlinear nature of interactions between learners and teachers and create a fundamental uncertainty about how things will unfold. Multiple outcomes are possible depending on how learners and teachers interact and respond to change, as school is a complex system (Kaissi, 2012). Applying complexity theory principles, this research will conceptualise a sustainable education response to progressed learners. Although we may never accurately predict what outcomes will emerge from this study, using complexity theory, we can try to understand the lived experiences of progressed learners and what implications the policy implementation has on progressed learners. Qualitative research has proved useful in identifying the complexity that is involved in progressed learners. As research recognises the complexity of implementing sustainable, effective support to progressed learners, different theoretical frameworks must be used to capture different complexities.

The use of complexity theory for exploring the lived experiences of progressed learners represents greater dependability between the research problem and methodology. Arguably, not much is known about applying complexity theory as a theoretical framework in education, especially in the South African context. Complexity theory challenges the researcher to identify and query general assumptions (Eppel, 2017). Using complexity theory requires us to be aware of and articulate how the research maintained and transformed knowledge (Cilliers, 2001). This research illustrated how complexity-led research shapes our perspective and conceptualisation of the research problem. The use of complexity theory should contribute to an innovative perspective to research that seeks to improve learners' lived experiences.

Understanding educational policy processes is essential to achieving social changes in increasingly complex schools (Eppel, 2009). The complexity of the education policy process

links together the social, economic, and political worlds that should provide a consistent reality for schools. Complexity theory is among the leading provoking theories in education, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. The complexity theory came into the teaching and learning process due to a shift from the pedagogy in which information was transmitted (Deogratias, 2018). Now, information transmitted in schools moves from point A to point B, where points A and B are interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. That is why information learnt from a previous grade will lay a foundation for what is expected in the following grade in schools. Complexity theory emphasises that knowledge is dynamic and allows it to be shared by participating in a collective classroom (Newell, 2008). Learners will need complexity theory to share and participate in a collective classroom that will complement their learning and transition of knowledge.

Complexity theory as a model of enquiry in schools is important for organising learners to allow individuals to learn complex concepts from one another in a collective understanding. As a theory of teaching and learning, complexity theory should strengthen and enhance learners' curricula and pedagogies practised in class (Deogratias, 2018). Using complexity theory, especially in large classroom contexts like those found in our lower quantile schools in South Africa, we can change from a teacher being the only source of knowledge to learner centred learning. Complexity theory enables researchers when researching to be effective and trustworthy when collecting data by involving a diversity of people (Davis & Renert, 2013). Participants in this study have one common thing: they all progressed from their previous grades. Still, they bring in diversity as they come from different backgrounds and have experienced progression differently.

## **2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided debates on the phenomenon of progression policy in South Africa and the lived experiences of progressed learners. Following this was the discussion on how progressed learners experience schools and how the Learner Progression Policy affects their academic lives. This was supported by the literature on how progressed learners in other countries are doing and what needs to be done to ensure that progressed learners' experiences are captured and documented to help improve policy implementation. The next stage focused on a theoretical framework, which two different models underpin. A summation of emerging

issues was presented to demonstrate why this study can still be taken to different levels, given the literature on the Learner Progression Policy and the lived experiences of progressed learners. The next chapter focused on the research design and methodology used to conduct this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Two presented the literature review and the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. This chapter described the research design and methodology used in conducting this research. This was the outline of the plan and strategies followed to obtain the relevant answers to the research questions presented in Chapter One. This chapter began with a discussion of the research paradigm in which this study was located. This was followed by a discussion on qualitative research and the procedure followed in the recruitment of participants, the data generation method, and the data analysis method. In this chapter, I presented the study design and methodological choices and explained them in detail through the literature. All design and methodological choices were justified, which gave the reader and other researchers who might want to extend this research an understanding of why they were suitable for the study.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Interpretivist paradigm was used in this research as an effort to ensure that views and responses from participants are prioritised. The interpretivist paradigm is best suited for this study because of the widely held view that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual (participants) rather than being an external entity (Hansen, 2004). Using this paradigm enabled me to elicit an understanding of the experiences of progressed learners and the impact of policy implementation for progressed learners. I did not assume that there was a single view of reality, the belief was that the different methods reveal different perspectives, especially when views are shared among the participants. The paradigm in educational research can be used to describe a researcher's worldview (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The interpretivist paradigm will help me understand what acceptable research can be and how my research should be conducted. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) made a similar argument. I did not assume that there was a single view of reality. Instead, the belief is that different methods reveal different perspectives, especially when views are shared among everyone taking part. I grew closer to the participants' perspectives through detailed interviewing and observation.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) argue that the research paradigm tells us how meaning will be constructed from generated data. A paradigm should comprise four elements, namely axiology, methodology, ontology, and epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Axiology in research deals with ethics, aesthetics, and religion (Killam, 2013). It refers to what the researcher believes is valuable and ethical. The purpose of the enquiry needs to balance what the researcher values as well as other ethical considerations when conducting research. Axiology plays an important role in the selection and formation of research questions and driving the interest in certain issues over others (Biddle & Schafft, 2015). Axiology is a belief in what should be. Axiology helped me to ensure that research was conducted with consideration to ethics and beliefs, which is important to the interpretivist paradigm. Ontology refers to the researcher's belief about nature's reality (Killam, 2013). Ontology is concerned with the nature of existence (Crotty, 1998) or the social entities (Bryman & Cramer, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (2013) describe ontology as dealing with the questions of what that is there can be known and what is the nature of reality. Ontology refers to the study of our existence and the nature of reality or being.

Researchers' beliefs should not interfere with what is being researched and the realities of participants of this inquiry. Ontology helped me to recognise how progressed learners are affected by the policy implementation of the LPP. Epistemology examines the relationship between knowledge and the researcher during discovery (Killam, 2013). Epistemology refers to the relationship between the knower and what is known, and how we know what it is. It deals with sufficient and valid kinds of knowledge (Gray, 2014). It is the process by which the researcher comes to know the reality and truth. It examines the relationship between the inquirer and the inquired (Guba, 1990). The epistemology helped me to understand the lived experiences of progressed learners and how the policy implementation impacts progressed learners. Methodology, on the other hand, is defined by Killam (2013), as a systematic way of discovering knowledge. It is more practice-based and specific. Kawulich and Huett (2015) described methodology as how we should study the world. The methodological aspect of research must agree with the ontological and epistemological stances of the research. The methodology helped me to have a clear picture of how I should conduct my research.

Understanding these paradigm elements is crucial because they comprise the assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values of each paradigm. As a researcher, it is crucial to locate your research in a research paradigm. As a researcher, my research should uphold and be guided by the assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values of the chosen research paradigm. Creswell (2009)

outlines constructivism and interpretivism as paradigms where human beings construct meanings as they engage in the world they are interpreting. This assumes the meaning attributed to multiple participants, which implies that different participants in a study come up with their understanding in relation to the topic under study. Considering the paradigms outlined above, the researcher aligned his study with the interpretivist paradigm since it is appropriate for this study as it is qualitative research. This study was located within the interpretivism paradigm. This is after careful analysis of the positivist, post-positivist, critical and interpretivism paradigms.

Through the interpretivism paradigm in research, I sought to understand the human experience and what informs human behaviour in a chosen context (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). As the researcher, one needs to acknowledge that the participant's experiences are crafted from the participant's own lived experiences within the given context. In this study, I opted for an interpretative paradigm as this research paradigm enabled me to generate qualitative data and articulate the realities from the perspectives of the participants, as the study was about their lived experiences.

### **3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

The study employed a qualitative research design. The study was a qualitative case study of two secondary schools in the Umlazi District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A qualitative approach allowed me to put emphasis on understanding each participant's experiences rather than generalising their case. This study focused on understanding and exploring the practices of the Learner Progression Policy (LPP). Having adopted the qualitative design for my study, I was able to gather an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the progressed learners and generate rich new ideas. Silverman (2011) shared how qualitative research can be used to gather in-depth insight into a problem being researched. Qualitative research is appropriate when factual data are required to answer the research question (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative research can be used to answer questions based on experiences, meaning, and perspectives from the participant's standpoint. Participants were drawn from local schools that have progressed learners.

Using qualitative research, the main focus of this research was to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of the participants (Shilp et al., 2014). From the above view, this study focused on the lived

experiences of the progressed learners in two secondary schools in Umlazi District in KwaZulu-Natal province.

### **3.3.1 Case study methodology**

A case study methodology was adopted for this study. A case study is a research instrument that is used for the study of various social problems (Thyer, 2009) It is used to investigate phenomena within its environmental context. The narrative case study provides entrée to information that might otherwise be inaccessible. It makes it possible to research phenomena that might not be understood as readily through available studies. A case study is a research approach that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its environment and context using a variety of data resources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Using a case study ensures that a variety of lenses will be used for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. The approaches to case study seek to ensure that the topic being investigated is well explored, and the essence of the phenomenon is revealed. A case study methodology should be considered when the focus of the is to answer “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2003). Case study as a research method allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006). It can be considered as a robust research method, particularly when holistic, in-depth enquiry is made (Zainal, 2007).

The role of the case study as a methodology in qualitative research becomes more prominent when issues about education, sociology, and community-based problems are studied (Johnson, 2006). One of the reasons researchers recognised case studies as a research methodology is that researchers were becoming more concerned about the limitations of quantitative methods in providing holistic and in-depth explanations of social problems (Zainal, 2007). Through case study as a research methodology, a researcher will be able to go beyond the statistical results and understand the behavioural conditions through the participant's perspective. A case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the participants of the study.

I used the case study as the methodology to research an in-depth understanding of the experiences of progressed learners and the implications for policy implementation. The case was the progressed learners in two secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, Umlazi District. The aim was to investigate the experiences of progressed learners in two secondary schools and the implications of the policy implementation. The case study aimed to explore the

lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications of the policy. I used a case study methodology because my focus was to understand the lived experiences of progressed learners and to ensure that the findings from the generated data would not be manipulated, and I wanted to cover the conditions of progressed learners based on their lived experiences.

Stake (1995) suggested three different types of case studies based on case selection: *the intrinsic case study*, where the case is always given rather than chosen; *the instrumental case study*, where the case is determined based on the ability to contribute to a general understanding of a phenomenon; *the collective case study*, an extension of the instrumental case study, where more than one representative case is selected. This study was an instrumental case study, as the enquiry sought to understand the phenomenon of lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications of the policy implementation in two secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal province in Umlazi District. Multiple case studies can allow the researcher to find balance in understanding each particular case under exploration (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). The strength of the case study is that it allowed me to zoom in on the lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications of the policy implementation. This enquiry looked into the lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications to them due to the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy.

In this case, learners were interviewed one-on-one using a semi-structured interview. The Zoom platform and face-to-face interviews were used depending on the availability of the participants, and those interviews were audio recorded. Where possible, the interviews were held outdoors in a more friendly and unthreatening space. Having interviews outdoors in an open field allowed the participant to be free and speak about their experiences regarding the LPP. Outdoor interviews were to assure learners that they were speaking about their lived experiences, not the school or teachers, the research was about their lived experiences with the Learner Progression Policy. Each interview was planned with the learner beforehand to ensure that the learner was not disturbed in his or her studies, and a quiet place outside the school was selected for the interview with each learner. Participants had to be in Grade 11 or Grade 12 and progressed to their current grade. Setting up the interviews was a little bit challenging because I had to make sure that learners were not disturbed in their studies and that I chose the appropriate time to ensure that we had enough time for the interview. The next step was setting a date and time for interviews with participants and also informing the principal that I would be in school on this date to set up an interview and had to make sure that interviews were

outside of school hours. During interviews, a place outside the school was selected to ensure that the learner was unintimidated by the environment. For those whom I could not have face-to-face interviews with, a Zoom meeting was set up, and the interview was conducted on Zoom.

### **3.3 SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS/SAMPLING**

#### **3.3.1 Location of the study**

The study was conducted in two secondary schools, which were in Mariannhill township in Umlazi District. The township where the study was being conducted had several no-fee schools. The schools in the township, including participating schools, had a high-class size. The enrolment in the schools was high compared to neighbourhood schools. Most learners from the selected schools were coming in from the neighbourhood houses which were mostly government-built (sponsored) houses.

#### **3.4.2 Selection of participants/sampling**

I used purposive sampling as this was qualitative research. I used purposive sampling because the selected school and participants (progressed learners) were chosen for a specific purpose regarding their experiences with the Learner Progression Policy (LPP). Besides, this was to ensure that the selected participants would help generate an in-depth description of the phenomenon. The sampling consisted of participants who had been progressed from the previous grade and had been in the same school for not less than two years. Not all progressed learners were taken as participants since the aim was to have those who were in Grade 11 or 12 and were above 17 years of age. The participants had previously been progressed in their previous grade and had been in the same school for not less than two year and they understood the school very well.

According to Blaikie and Priest (2019), the process of sampling is informed by determining the sample size of participants and using the relevant sampling strategy. Sampling is about deciding the place and the participants from which the data will be generated (Feng et al., 2006). The quality of findings largely depends on how the researcher selects the sample (Shilpa et al., 2014). I selected progressed learners based on the assumption that they are the most relevant people who would provide rich data about their lived experiences and the implication of the implementation of learner progression policy in their schools. There were three participants, in each school, all had been progressed before and were in either in Grade 11 or 12. Letters

requesting participants to be part of the research were sent both to participants and parents/guardians, information was provided on what this study entailed and that they could withdraw from this research anytime they felt like they did not want to continue.

Rule and John (2011) argue that purposive sampling requires discretion from the researcher to select participants who will advance the purpose of the research. The selected participants must be able to inform perspectives related to the phenomenon of the enquiry (Sargeant, 2012). Participants came from the two secondary schools in Umlazi district in KwaZulu-Natal province. The limitation of this sampling is that it provides less breadth to the study. This meant that I could not cover a broad scope of participants. Both schools as research sites were not fee-paying schools and were surrounded by government-built dwellings and informal settlements.

The schools, as research sites, were chosen because they were viewed as encapsulating several issues, including that they were all no-fee schools, had a high enrolment of learners, the majority of learners were from poor families, and lacked resources such as libraries and computer labs, this made them relative to the phenomenon of lived experiences of progressed learners. The schools were appropriate research sites because they have progressed learners and used the Learner Progression Policy.

All participants of this study were recruited face-to-face in their schools. I had to go to each school and check if they had any progressed learners, and once they confirmed, I would then explain to the principal as a gatekeeper that I was researching progressed learners and that I wanted to interview them. I requested that all progressed learners in Grades 11 and 12 be called into one classroom, and I explained to them what the research was all about and what I needed from them. I also explained that they would not gain any reward for being participants and that they were not forced to participate. They could withdraw at any point of the study without anything happening to them. I gave them consent letters translated into IsiZulu and explained what would happen going forward to those who agreed to be my participants.

Each participant had a different experience from one another, which included their home background and their experiences as progressed learners, and this was ideal in helping the researcher answer the research question. Rule and John (2011) argue that it means producing high-quality and respectable research. The researcher must ensure that participants in qualitative studies have experience with the phenomenon under study.

The names of the schools and the participants were anonymised for ethical reasons. I had to ensure that after the information had been generated, my source thereof could not be made known. The schools were named School A and School B, and participants were all given pseudonyms to protect their identity and their schools. Participants from School A were called Participant Elethu, Sanelisiwe, and Sibonelo, and participants from School B were named Participant Fezeka, Zizile and Junior. This was to ensure that the names of the schools and participants were hidden. According to Kumar, et al (2018), sharing personal information about a participant is unethical.

### **3.5 DATA GENERATION METHODS**

Before I could generate data, I had to seek gatekeepers' permissions (provincial office and the school principals) through writing. Permission to conduct research was sought from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and was granted by the ethics committee. A letter of request was sent to the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education (DBE) to gain permission to conduct this study in their school in Umlazi districts. Semi-structured interviews were used to achieve the objective of this enquiry. According to Lederman (2013), a semi structured interview is a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected, representing a specific population on a given topic.

#### **3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

I prepared interview questions in advance to ensure that the interview process was more systematic, focused, time-saving and highly comprehensive. I ensured that I had familiarised myself with all key aspects of the phenomenon so that I would be able to construct relevant questions for my participants. I used semi-structured interviews, where open-ended questions were asked to generate data and to encourage the participation of interviewees using probes and sub-questions for clarification. Rule and John (2011) argue that semi-structured interviews allow more flexibility during data generation. I used open-ended questions which allowed for probing and formulation of sub-questions that arose naturally. The semi-structured interview method is successful in enabling reciprocity between the interviewer and participant (Kallio et al, 2016). It enables the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on the participant's responses (Polit & Beck, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and allows space for participants' individual verbal expressions. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to converse and create rapport with the participants.

With most of the interviews being face-to-face and two online via Zoom, it was important for me to ensure that the interviews took place in a natural environment, not in school and had to be outside of school hours to ensure all the participants were not disturbed. There were three participants from each school. I had anticipated that whilst conducting the interviews, it would be necessary to use English and isiZulu to make the conversation flow and for participants to feel at ease. With globalisation, interviews using one language are on the increase (Baumgartne et al., 2017). With the number of qualitative studies using more than one language within single research for data generation purposes, research conducted in this type of methodology is extremely limited. These scarce methodological studies seem to deal exclusively with the issue of translations, particularly with the problematic use of interpreters and translators in the course of a qualitative enquiry. As expressed by Huntley *et al.* (2019), this methodological research is principally concerned with qualitative research studies where data are collected in more than one language and the research process, at whatever stage(s), involves acts of translation between languages.

The interviews were conducted at the participant's convenience time after setting up the appointments for face-to-face interviews. An information sheet and a summary of what was expected of them were also provided. The information sheet to participants provided important details about the LPP and how the government expects it to be implemented in schools. Each interview was allocated 60 minutes, which meant more time for interviewees and the interviewer to interact. However, most of the interviews were between 20 to 30 minutes as some participants were a little bit nervous. The researcher had to take the neutral role as interviewer and not allow the participants to influence the course of the interview, and this was to ensure that an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of participants was obtained. The quality of interviews always depends on the ability and competence of the researcher (Neuman, 2006).

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

Qualitative data analysis is a process of the description, classification and interconnection of phenomena with the research concepts (Graue, 2015). The phenomena under study need to be described precisely. Qualitative data analysis is a process involving organising, appointing for and explaining the data (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher needs to be able to interpret and

explain the data. When analysing qualitative data, the researcher deals with the meanings and the views of participants.

In planning data analysis, I considered the following: firstly, after the generation of data, I considered how it needed to be processed and analysed; secondly, I examined how the results should be validated and verified. A great deal of data was captured, however, I focused on information relevant to this research. I sorted them out personally in order to have those that were relevant to this research and identify emerging themes.

Semi-structured interviews were recorded using an audio-recording voice recorder. The audio recorded interviews were transferred to a laptop to prepare for transcribing the interview immediately after the interview was over. The interviews were first transcribed verbatim, written word-for-word of the interviews. For analysis, I started by reading how to analyse data to ensure a quick turnaround time. I then reduced transcribed interviews to manageable data. The emerging data were arranged into three major themes. One of the major themes was that progressed learners receive support as outlined by the LPP, and teachers were interested in giving extra classes to progressed learners.

It was important to find patterns, connections, and relationships in the data. Indexing, which comprises sifting through data, highlighting and sorting out quotes, and comparing cases, was deployed in this study. I first needed to transcribe all the recordings verbatim to ensure that I had captured everything that was recorded and that those transcripts could be available when needed. During transcribing, gaps and silences were noted, which prompted the researcher to send follow-up questions to some participants. The data were reported verbatim. Marcucci et al. (2011) promote this approach because direct conversations can be detailed. I used thematic analysis to analyse data from the semi-structured interviews I had with the participants. Thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases, and they focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest et al., 2011). Thematic analysis and triangulation are important in ensuring the quality of a study using data generation and data analysis as a systematic chain of evidence in an interpretive paradigm (Merriam, 1998).

Content analysis was also used to bring meaning to data. Content analysis can take any qualitative data, reduce it and make sense of the large volume of data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative analysis is an ongoing process where there are no strict boundaries between generated data and making sense of that data (Miles et al., 2014). The transcripts were broken

into smaller units of analysis that were guided by the emergent themes and then reduced through the identification of similarities, contradictions, and inconsistencies.

This is what Guest et al. (2011) described as grounded theory, where a set of inductive and iterative techniques is designed to identify categories and concepts within the transcripts that are then linked to formal theoretical models. Miles et al. (2014) attest that qualitative data analysis is a process of simplifying abstract data and transforming it into stronger data, which involves identifying themes and patterns.

The data were presented economically in the form of findings which emerged from the data, highlighting the most significant points that emerged. Explanations and conclusions were made based on the evidence from the findings.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Conducting research ethically is crucial, as it ensures the well-being and rights of research participants, maintains the integrity of the research process, and contributes to the overall credibility and validity of the research findings. I received the ethical clearances from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. Informed consent letters were sent to all principals where I wanted to conduct my research. The participants and the parents/guardians also received consent letters asking learners to be participants and parents to agree to their child being a participant in my research. In developing the purpose statement, I considered that the participants must receive an honest explanation of this research work. Deception comes into play when participants are misled about the purpose of the research, whilst as a researcher, I might have a different purpose. No information from participants was disclosed in any manner that could enable participants to be traced. The principle of nonmaleficence gives an obligation to researchers that they should inflict no harm on participant.

Beneficence was achieved as the findings of the study expanded the limited knowledge of the lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications of the policy implementation. The government or other researchers may use the findings of this study to relook at the Learner Progression Policy in schools and how it is affecting progressed learners. This research needed to be ground-breaking in terms of dealing with progress learners in schools. The principle of beneficence should be a moral obligation to researchers.

When conducting research, it is important to consider issues of ethics. Apart from a moral perspective, when research is conducted ethically, the quality of the research is enhanced. Ethical practice is vital as it ensures respect for participants' privacy (Durodola, 2009). Ethical considerations in research are a set of principles that guide your research designs and practices (Bhandari et al., 2022). It provides research that has to be truthful, that reflects participants' responses, and that is not personalised. Ethical consideration includes informing participants about autonomy. Autonomy requires that the researcher provide participants with all the relevant information and allow them the right to whether to participate or not and that they can withdraw from the study at any point they choose (Rule & John, 2011). Other ethical aspects include issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The process of obtaining consent means that consent should be given voluntarily, and participants should understand what is being asked of them.

### **3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

It is argued that although assessing the accuracy of qualitative studies is not easy, however, several possible strategies can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Amankwaa, 2016). Trustworthiness is the corresponding term used in qualitative research as a measure of the quality of research (Amankwaa, 2016). Qualitative research deals with the subjective realities of people and their interpretation of lived events. The researcher must follow appropriate methods and processes to ensure the trustworthiness of the enquiry. There are four criteria to ensure trustworthiness, alternatives to what positivists call reliability and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria were discussed in detail below.

#### **3.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research establishes whether research findings represent plausible information drawn from participants' original data and are interpreted correctly based on participants' original views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility endeavours to deal with the question of how accurate the findings are in reflecting participants' views through generated data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some strategies employed in this enquiry to ensure credibility were prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Triangulation aims to enhance the process by using multiple approaches in qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser,

2018). Source triangulation was applied by using various participants and asking participants the same question in different ways to ensure a clear description of the phenomenon was obtained. Methodological triangulation means gathering data using varying data generation methods, such as semi-structured interviews and field notes. Deploying triangulation helped me capture participants' views and perceptions and understand their lived experiences and how the implementation of the policy impacts them. An audio recorder was used, and interviews were then transcribed verbatim to get more accurate transcripts. Shenton (2004) argues that tape recording interviews is an essential provision for promoting credibility as it helps convey the actual situation being investigated. Developing the codes, concepts, and core categories in emerging themes helped to understand the characteristics of the generated data. Participants were reminded continuously and ensured anonymity and confidentiality to guarantee that they responded honestly and gave their in-depth views on the matter.

### **3.8.2 Transferability**

The transferability concerns the applicability of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other scholars, such as Shenton (2004), argue that transferability is impossible as contexts define findings. As the researcher, I gave a detailed description of the research process and participants, which will allow other researchers to know if the findings of this research can be transferred to a similar context. Korstjens and Moser (2018) claim that it enables the reader to assess whether the research findings are transferable to their setting. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that it is up to the reader rather than the researcher to determine if the findings can be applied to other settings with similar contexts. The intention is not to generalise the research findings of the study but to provide a thorough description of the context of those interested in understanding the lived experiences of progressed learners and the implications of policy implementation to progressed learners. The researcher needs to provide a rich account of data such as the context where the research was carried out, its setting, sample size, demographic, socio-economic and inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants. If the researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison, the researcher will then address the problem of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.8.3 Dependability**

Golafshani (2003) describes dependability as the extent to which the result of the enquiry is consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study. If the

study results can be reproduced in a similar methodology and context, then the research instrument can be considered reliable. Korstjens and Moser (2018) describe dependability as the stability of findings over time. In the research design and methodology chapter, the researcher provided sufficient and extensive information on the research design, implementation, and data generation method. Dependability involves participants' evaluation of findings, interpretation, and recommendations. This should be supported by the data generated from the participants of the study. The interpretation of the study was grounded on the collected data and not the preferences and viewpoints of the researcher. In this study, I employed triangulation of sources to ensure the dependability of the study. The plan was to have a follow-up call with participants to confirm whether the transcripts were representative of what they were conveying. Participant checking was conducted after interviews as the researcher called the participants at their convenience time to clarify some issues and probe further into new issues that emerged during the analysis of data. The researcher may be able to prove the research instrument's repeatability and consistency over time; therefore, proving dependability, an instrument used may not be valid over time.

#### **3.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability means addressing concerns about the researcher's influences and biases on the study (Rule & John, 2011). Korstjens and Moser (2018) describe confirmability as the degree to which other researchers' findings can be confirmed. Confirmability in the research should be concerned with establishing that data and interpretation of the findings are not fragments of the researcher. Still, they are derived from the generated data. The performance of data should not be based on the researcher's particular preference but needs to be grounded in the generated data from participants. To ensure confirmability, Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggest that the researcher needs to describe the research steps taken from the start to the development and reporting of findings. The records of this research path were kept throughout the study. During data generation and data analysis, I maintained a neutral position to ensure that my personal views did not influence the analysis and interpretation of data. Although I do not support the progression of learners in its current form and how it is implemented, I allowed the participants to speak about their lived experiences without influencing them. I ~~tried~~ not to impose his understanding by asking the participants if the interpretation was accurate. This allowed the findings to be informed by the participant's point of view, not my personal view.

### **3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the research design and methodology followed in conducting this inquiry. The research paradigm, research approach, and methodology were discussed, followed by the data generation method and data analysis approach. Discussion on the selection of the research site and the recruitment (selection) of participants were discussed. Trustworthiness and its four criteria were then presented in detail. An outline of the limitations of the study followed ethical considerations. The next chapter provides a detailed presentation and discussion of the data generated.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Having provided an account of both the research design and research methodology used, this chapter will present and discuss the findings that emerged from the data analysis. Before the presentation of themes, the profiling of participants will be presented to outline the grades and schools of the participants. The findings of the study are presented in themes abstracted from analysis and the presentation beyond the level of description only (Wu et al., 2016). Five themes that emerged from the findings, guided by the research questions, will be used to present and discuss findings:

- What are the experiences of progressed learners in selected secondary schools?
- What meanings do progressed learners in secondary schools attach to being a progressed learner?
- How does being a progressed learner in secondary school affect learners' academic performance?
- What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of progressed learners about the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy?

#### **4.2 PROFILING OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE RESEARCH SITES**

Participants and research sites were profiled to give the reader a picture and a brief background of each participant and the research, which includes relevant information during data generation. This section describes both the participants and research site characteristics during the time of data generation.

##### **4.2.1 Profiles of the schools and the participants**

Both schools chosen as the research sites in this study are secondary schools. They are both in Umlazi District. The geographical area where the schools are located is characterised by a high level of unemployment and poverty. The participants shared this as most of them indicated that their parents were not working, most of them were living in government-issued (sponsored) houses, and some of them were from the neighbourhood's informal settlement. Both schools

are near each other, within 10 minutes' drive or 20 minutes' walk from each other. They are both accessible by road and public transport.

The following table summarises the profile of the two schools used as the research site in the study. The table summarises the quintile grouping of the schools, the socio-economic standing of many learners in the schools, the language of instruction of the school, the number of enrolled learners in the schools during the period of this research, and the number of teachers and School Management Team (SMTs)

<b>School</b>	<b>Quintile Grouping of the school</b>	<b>Socio-Economic Status the of Majority of the Learners.</b>	<b>Language of Instruction</b>	<b>No. of Learners</b>	<b>No. of SMTs</b>	<b>No. of Educators</b>
School A	1	Below average	English	1300	5	40
School B	1	Below average	English	1450	5	35

**Table 1. Summary of participating schools and participants**

### **The profile of School A**

The first school is named School A for anonymity. The school is a public school like other schools in the area. It is ranked as a Quintile 1 school because the majority of parents are unemployed, and the school is surrounded by informal settlements and government-built houses. School A has an enrolment of 1300 learners and has 25 classrooms. It was built in early 2002 when the settlement was developed by the government and was named after one of the struggle heroes from the community. The access to school is by paved road, which makes it easy to access even in bad weather. There is a river near the school, which sometimes prevents learners from accessing the school when it is flooded. It has one principal, one deputy principal, and three Departmental Heads (DHs).

Since the focus of the study is on the experiences of progressed learners, it is important to mention that the school has progressed learners from Grade 8 who are progressed from primary schools, and almost all the grades have progressed learners.

## **The profile of School B**

The second school is named School B for anonymity. The school is a public school like the other schools. It is ranked as Quintile 1 because of unemployed people around the schools, and the school is also surrounded by informal settlements and government-built low-cost houses. The school is in Umlazi District but within 10 minutes of driving distance from School A. School B has a learner enrolment of 1450, and these learners are accommodated in 24 classrooms. Presently, the number of learners dropped due to parents complaining about overcrowding and a shortage of teachers. The school has a feeding scheme that provides meals to all the learners during lunch breaks. Like School A, School B has one Principal, one deputy principal, and three Departmental Heads (DHs). Many parents with learners in the schools depend on government social grants, and some are selling vegetables in Pinetown.

School B also had several progressed learners in every class since they share the same primary schools as feeder schools. Progressed learners are a known issue from both schools, and both principals are in frequent contact trying to work with feeder primary schools to address the issue as they complained that it affected their Grade 12 pass rate due to the high number of progressed learners.

## **Profile of the participants**

I generated data from 6 participants who were in either in Grade 11 or 12 and were previously progressed, or they were progressed to the current grade. They were all from two Secondary Schools in Umlazi district in KwaZulu-Natal. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

### **Elethu**

Elethu is in Grade 12, and she has progressed from Grade 11 to Grade 12. At home, she lives with her parents and other siblings still in primary and high school. She was doing well from primary school until high school when she first progressed in Grade 8, and she has hopes that she will make it to Grade 12 and being progressed should not define who she is.

### **Sanelisiwe**

Sanelisiwe is an 18-year-old progressed Grade 12 learner. She lives with both her parents. She looks forward to doing well in her Grade 12 and hopes to go to university. She stays closer to her school and attends school regularly, including extra classes from other schools.

### **Sibonelo**

Sibonelo is an 18-year-old progressed Grade 11 male learner who lives in one of the informal dwellings that surround the school. She mentions that studying at home is a bit difficult because of limited space.

### **Fezeka**

Fezeka is a 20-year-old progressed Grade 12 learner. She is from eNkoseleni place across the uMlazi river and is one of the few learners who cross the river daily to access school. She has a sister in university and she asks for her assistance whenever she experiences difficulties with her schoolwork.

### **Zizile**

Zizile is a 21-year-old progressed Grade 11 female learner who lives with both her parents. She progressed to Grade 11 after failing Grade 10. She mentions that she is a kind person who likes overcoming challenges.

### **Junior**

Junior is a 19-year-old progressed male learner. He shares that he wants to go to university when he completes his schooling. He wants to help at home and improve the situation and give his mother a better life.

## **4.3 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

To analyse data that emerged from the interviews, I used thematic analysis to analyse data. This process helped me to identify patterns and themes used to present the research findings in this chapter. The following themes that emerged in the data analysis and were used to present the findings: Meanings that progressed learners attached to being progressed, Difficulties encountered by progressed learners, Strategies to overcome the challenges encountered by progressed learners, Support for some of the Progressed Learners and a lack of parental involvement, and a Lack of parental involvement in supporting progressed learners.

### **4.3.1 Meanings that progressed learners attached to being progressed**

This section presents the first dimension of the participant's responses to the question about what it means to be progressed. The focus of the study was to understand the progressed

learners' experiences about being progressed and what it means to them, the implications of policy implementation for progressed learners. All participants showed a lack of understanding when asked what it meant for them to be progressed. From the participants' views, it can be observed that the meanings they attached to being progressed are similar. For the participants, being progressed meant that one did not meet the minimum requirements to be moved to the next grade, but because teachers saw the potential, they were then allowed to move to the next grade. Participants found it difficult to explain what it means to be progressed and the implications the implementation of the policy has for them.

Even though the participant's voice is incomplete on what being progressed means, Elethu explained that being progressed meant that she did not meet the requirements to move to the next grade, but because of her potential, she was given a chance to move to the next grade.

Elethu said:

*I was not able to meet the required requirements to be promoted, but my teachers knew that I have the potential to pass my grade and the next grade hence I deserved to be here.*

Sanelisiwe shared a similar view but added that progression also meant that teachers adjusted the marks to help them pass while they had failed. Sanelisiwe stated:

*Being a progressed learner means that you have been transferred to another grade after adjusting your marks from the previous grade, so you can be carried to the next grade. Basically, it means that the teachers helped you pass while you did not.*

The views of Sibonelo were echoed by Elethu and Sanelisiwe but more negative in that Elethu and Sanelisiwe indicated that teachers helped because they saw the potential. Contrary to Elethu and Sanelisiwe's assertions, Sibonelo said:

*To me, to be a progressed learner means I am not capable of passing or meeting the minimum requirements to be promoted.*

For Sibonelo, being progressed is not about the potential to do well in the next grade, but rather it is about one's incapability to meet the required standards. For Fezeka, being progressed meant she did not put more effort into her work, and more effort was required to make the grade. Fezeka said:

*What I can say is that for me to be a progressed learner, it's not easy since there are challenges.*

She added that:

*It means that I need to put a lot of focus on my studies because it means I need to put more energy and I have been given a second chance to do more and well.*

Based on the participant's responses, most participants seemed to view being progressed as those learners who were 'pushed'. They demonstrated little knowledge about the factors that contribute to a learners' being progressed, such as age and repetition of a phase. Learners who fail a grade and repeat the same grade should be progressed to the next grade even if he/she failed (DBE, 2015). If the learner had failed once in a phase, that learner should not be retained even if he/she failed in the upcoming grade of the same phase. Participants of this study had issues in understanding what it means to be progressed, they did not understand what the policy says about who should be progressed and under which circumstances. Sanelisiwe added the following:

*To my knowledge, I was not able to meet the required requirements to be promoted, but my teachers knew that I had the potential to pass my grade and the next grade hence I deserved to be here.*

Sanelisiwe demonstrated a bit of understanding of what it means to be progressed. The responses given by the participants indicated that more can still be done to help progressed learners understand the implications of the policy and what it means to them and their future to being progressed. Zizile said the following about what it means to be progressed:

*Being a progressed learner means that you have been transferred to another grade after having some adjustments done to your marks from the previous grade, so you can be carried to the next grade.*

The NPPPR (2011) provides the guidelines for passing learners from grade to grade or phase to phase. These guidelines outline how the learner should be progressed. The guidelines are discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. If a learner is older than the grade by two or more years, that learner should be progressed to the next grade (NPPPR, 2011). Furthermore, if a learner had failed the grade once, he/she could not fail the grade for the second time but rather be promoted to the next based because of the number of years in the grade or in the phase.

These guidelines provide a glimpse into what the policy says about who should be progressed and how a learner should be progressed. Sibonelo added the following:

*I have been given a second chance to do more and well.*

As mentioned above, the policy indicates that the learner can only be progressed once the learner has failed the class more than once or the learner has already failed the class in the same phase. McMahon (2018). indicated that progressed learners viewed being progressed as social promotion, being moved to the next grade with their peers. Mawhinney et al. (2016) stated that in the United States of America, some states use social promotion to maintain social ties amongst age-level peers. The conceptual framework, as discussed in Chapter Two, speaks about the complexity of the education system, the complexity of navigating new grades can be a daunting task for progressed learners. Complexity theory implies that in every environment, even in schools, new behaviours emerge that are not predicted from the knowledge of the initial conditions (Mason, 2016). The conditions of the new grade for progressed learners cannot be predicted in the new grade, which results in complexity for progressed learners. The learner's age should be taken into cognisance when the progression of learners is done.

The Policy on Learner Progression, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 of this study, is defined as the movement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R (DBE, 2011). These learners are exempted from not having complied with all promotion requirements. This practice is called progression because non-academic factors and considerations, including societal pressures and expectations, influence promotion decisions. Further from the policy, the literature discussed in section two of this dissertation in Chapter Two defines learner progress as a means of advancement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R, despite the learner not meeting all promotional requirements. From the policy perspective and the literature, it can be argued that the learners' meanings are different from what learner progression is understood in policy and literature. These meanings differ in that the learners think that being progressed is teachers doing them a favour or that they have been given a second chance. The policy clearly states that progressed learners are those learners who fail promotional requirements and are now being moved to the next grade without being promoted. Progressed learners are learners who were moved from one grade to another because of the progression policy, not because they satisfied the requirements of passing the previous grade (Government Gazette 36041, 2012). The basic principle relating to this policy statement is that

a learner must not spend more than four (4) years in a phase. It is not about giving learners a second chance, but that learners must progress with learners in their same age group. The learner is advanced to the next grade even if he or she fails to meet the promotion requirements.

The participants' responses align with Bloom's concept of "learning at your own pace" and the idea that learners can progress when they demonstrate mastery of the material. In this case, being progressed is seen as an opportunity for learners to catch up and master the content they struggled with previously. However, the participants' varying perspectives on being progressed also reflect the importance of individualised support, which is a key aspect of mastery learning.

Some participants saw it as an acknowledgement of their potential, while others viewed it as an indicator of their inability to meet standards. The participants' limited understanding of the policy's criteria for progression suggests a potential gap in communication and guidance, which could be addressed in the context of mastery learning by providing clear criteria for progression and a support system to help learners meet those criteria.

#### **4.3.2 Difficulties Encountered by Progressed Learners**

This section presents the second dimension of the participant's responses to the question about their experiences as progressed learners. Progressed learners highlighted different difficulties that they face in the new grade. All the participants shared a similar view that they were experiencing difficulties in the new grade that they were progressed to. These difficulties include coping with work of the new grade, understanding the content taught in the new grade, feeling isolated and not belonging in the new grade, difficulty in adapting to the new grade and the fear of being discriminated by other learners once they know they have been progressed. Of course, these difficulties are unlimited to those mentioned here, other progressed learners from other schools and in other places might have different challenges depending on their context. Coping with a new grade for progressed learners is difficult, especially keeping in mind that if they did not understand what was taught in the previous grade, managing a new grade will be a huge task because it is a continuation of what was done in the previous grade. The curriculum in schools is designed to be a build-up of what was done in the previous grade, you need to understand it and have a grasp to do well in the following grade, with Grade 12 covering what was already done in Grades 10 and 11. Understanding the content taught in a new grade will require one to understand what was done and taught in the previous grade. For progressed learners, this is difficult since they are progressed because they did not do well in

the previous grade, and they are expected to do well in the grade. Having been progressed to a new grade can lead progressed learners to feel isolated in the new grade, as those who are promoted will be able to settle and fit in the new grade very quickly. Progressed learners feel that they do not belong to the new grade because they did not meet the requirements to be promoted but were progressed.

The difficulties in the new grade tie back towards the complexity theory, which suggests that in a new environment, difficulties are bound to be there, as it is difficult to navigate complex systems like schools. Progressed learners indicated that being a progressed learner is not easy. Coping with the work of the new grade and being in a new grade while you know you were not promoted to that grade were some of the concerns that they highlighted that made it difficult for them. Ngema and Maphalala (2021) in their study highlighted that some difficulties experienced by progressed learners are the results of teachers who are influenced by their subjective perceptions, attitudes, and opinions, not by what the policy says. Elethu, when asked about life in a new grade as a progressed learner, said the following:

*It was not easy at all, especially for my parents”.*

The difficulty was even felt by her parents which made it more difficult for her because she needed her parents to be there for her and support her. Sanelisiwe said that she felt like she did not belong to the grade:

*At first it was hard; I felt like I did not belong.*

This was due to the demands of the new grade and the expectations associated with being progressed. This becomes a chain reaction, with progressed learners receiving differentiated treatment from teachers and consequently becoming detached from the learning experience.

Sibonelo said the following:

*I could say it is hard, challenging, and hectic”.*

This was because no support was offered by the teachers. Mogale and Modipane (2021) found in their research that schools were complaining that parents were not actively involved in the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy. This made it difficult for schools and parents to enter into a partnership to support progressed learners. Mngadi and Maphalala (2021) found that progression results in positioning and labelling in the classroom, which leads to low motivation, poor performance, and dropping out. These labelling and positioning contribute to

progressed learners' difficulties in a new grade and push them into a circle of repeating the grade.

Munje and Maarman (2016) highlight that this policy relies on learner support, which should be provided by teachers in these grades. The support provided to progressed learners can help progressed learners cope better in the new grade and ensure that they are in a position to pass the grade they were progressed to. Participants in this study indicated that the support was not there or very minimal if it was ever given. The lack of support contributed to the difficulties experienced by progressed learners. Sibonelo said the following:

*Life in a new grade as a progressed learner is very difficult.*

This reinforces the findings by Munje and Maarman (2016) and Nkosi and Adebayo (2021) that being progressed without support can be very difficult. Junior said that without support, being progressed is not a pleasant move. Muthusamy's (2015) findings revealed that teachers also had problems supporting progressed learners because of different reasons, such as overcrowding, which limits them in monitoring progressed learners. This is the reason Fezeka emphasised the following:

*I feel like life as a progressed learner is very difficult.*

Mpofu and Maphalala (2018) indicated in their study that classroom climate is essential in ensuring that support is given to progressed learners. The climate in the classroom may be a result of bullying amongst learners, as Zizile added the following:

*There are challenges and the fear that people might discriminate against you.*

The fear of being discriminated against was a result of classroom bullies, which was one of the fears that participants highlighted about things that made it difficult for them in the new grade.

The lack of support provided to progressed learners creates a situation where progressed learners, due to the demand of the new class, fail to catch up and cope with the work of the new grade, resulting in them falling behind their peers, defeating what the policy is trying to address that learners should be in a same class as their peers. The consequences of progression in South Africa are that learners never catch up but instead fall further behind and end up dropping-out of school (Westaway & Graven, 2019). These challenges also result in progressed learners failing in the grade they were progressed to. Fezeka added the following about the difficulties:

*Some challenges that hindered me from passing.*

The challenges he faced resulted in him failing the grade he was progressed to. This was the result of not receiving enough support from teachers and not catching up to the demands of the new grade. Elethu added the following:

*It was painful; I cannot lie because I feel like I was different from other learners.*

These difficulties made progressed learners even start questioning their capabilities and lowered their self-esteem in the new grade. Bloom maintained that all students are capable of learning if given time and tools to meet their learning needs. The mastery of learning theory approach can help progressed learners to ensure they cope with the demands of the new grade.

Sibonelo added the following:

*It becomes hard.*

The hardness comes from the fact that progressed learners were not receiving adequate support as the policy states. Sanelisiwe added the following:

*It was a bit challenging.*

This was a result of receiving appropriate and adequate support from teachers and at home. Junior said the following:

*I felt bad for a while, but I felt good because some of my friends were promoted so there was that excitement because I had to move along with my friends.*

This was in line at least with the aims of the policy to encourage socialisation by age. Even though being a progressed learner was difficult, for Junior, it was easy to adapt to the new grade because her friends were there in the same class as her. Once it becomes difficult for progressed learners in the new grade, some progressed learners battle with their schoolwork and become involved in unbecoming behaviour. Moagi (2020) observed in her study that progressed learners gave up simply because they were no longer motivated enough to study, and they believed that school was difficult. Sibonelo said the following about studying in a new grade:

*For me, my challenge was to understand something that is taught to me at a later stage, it takes me much longer to understand what is being taught to me.*

These difficulties can lead a learner to give up and enter a cycle of being progressed up to Grade 12. Learners' attitudes become negative, especially if they find it difficult to understand

what is being taught and they tend to lose focus very easily. Zizile said the following about the difficulties in the new grade:

*If I failed to make it in the previous grade, how will I be able to make it in this one?*

The questions asked by Zizile are some of the questions that, if left unanswered, can lead to progressed learners not seeing the importance of working hard and improving on their grades. Learners' attitudes play an important role in their learning; some do not take responsibility for their learning and are often absent, while others bunk classes. To avoid the development of negative attitudes from the progressed learners, learners' efforts should be recognised at all times (Maogi, 2020). When learners are progressed, they must be assured of support in the next year through the programmes designed by the teacher to assist them individually.

Understanding the content of the new grade was also another difficulty faced by progressed learners. Being progressed from the previous grade means that the learners did not master what is expected of that grade. They will find that the work in the new grade is the continuation of work from the previous grade. This creates difficulties for progressed learners because in the new grade, they are expected to understand and master content that they could not master in the previous grade. Elethu said the following about the difficulty of dealing with work of the new grade:

*As a progressed learner, I need more extra classes since we all know that I did not do well in Grade 11 and some topics are from Grade 11 and here in Grade 12, teachers just skip what we did in the previous grade.*

These difficulties contribute to what I have mentioned above about creating a situation where progressed learners find themselves in a cycle of repeating every grade because they first need to adapt and understand the content of the new grade. Learning mystery theory says that a learner needs time and the correct tools in their education. The question now is when they will get time to understand the new grade content when they only have a year in that grade to master and understand in order to pass. With time and the correct tools, progressed learners can understand, and master new material being taught in the new grade, and this can save them from being trapped in a cycle of repeating every grade. The challenges faced by progressed learners in adapting to a new grade can be related to various levels of Bloom's taxonomy, from acquiring foundational knowledge to evaluating support systems and synthesising strategies for

success. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning.

#### **4.3.3 Strategies to overcome the challenges encountered by progressed learners**

This is the third dimension of the participants' strategies they had to develop to overcome challenges encountered as progressed learners. The participants were asked if they had encountered any challenges as progressed learners and if they had any strategies to overcome those challenges. Their responses differed as some indicated that they had decided to attend extra classes from neighbourhood schools, and some had to use different platforms, such as radio stations, to get extra classes. Despite the challenges, all the participants were willing to work hard in the new grade to change their fortunes. Participants were asked what they were doing to cope with the demands and challenges of the new grade. A common theme across all the participants was that they all wanted to work hard in the new grade. The first thing they wanted to do was to gain confidence in the new grade and feel that they now belonged to that grade. The second thing was to prove others wrong that despite having progressed, they could still do well in the new grade and pass, especially those who had progressed to Grade 12. They all wanted to do well in Grade 12 to stand a better chance of changing their lives. These strategies included attending extra classes at other schools nearby and being in an environment where it did not count whether they were progressed learners or not. These strategies were over and above what the department recommended for progressed learners, screening, identification, assessment and recommended support.

Fezeka said the following about support:

*I have started to gain confidence and have developed a love to study and do my schoolwork.*

This was after her teachers started supporting her with extra classes and ensuring that she was not struggling in the new grade. Elethu said the following:

*I tried all means to prove them wrong.*

The support provided by teachers to progressed learners is important in boosting their confidence. Moagi (2020) argues that teachers and progressed learners need support from parents, the DBE, and other stakeholders. The support given to progressed learners both at home and at school is important. According to Screening, Identification, Assessment, and

Support (SIAS, 2014), teachers, parents, and learners should be centrally involved in the learning, teaching, and assessment processes. Fezeka added the following:

*I told myself that I wouldn't be defeated by this and if I were not given a chance to get to Grade 12, I wouldn't have got this self-motivation of telling myself that I am studying to be knowledgeable and to pass and build my future.*

What Fezeka said summed up everything that the other participants said about the need to work hard and do well in the grade they were progressed to.

Westaway (2019) argues that the problem is that there are no mechanisms in place to hold schools accountable if they do not implement these interventions. The progression policy states that School Based Support Teams (SBST) need to monitor and report on the progress of learners at risk, referred to as progressed learners (DBE, 2015). Roux (2021) and Klopper (2021) found that these interventions were not happening in some under-resourced schools in provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape. This then leaves a question of what is happening in the majority of under-resourced schools in KwaZulu-Natal province in, Umlazi District. In implementing progression in schools, learners are not identified as progressed by teachers and, therefore, are just a part of the larger school community within the grade/age cohort (Knight, 2014). Once a learner has progressed, he or she tends to blend in. The consequence of this is that the progressed learner is not targeted for interventions to try and address the problem areas that have led to prior grade repetition and subsequent progression.

Muedi et al. (2021) indicated that in schools, there were no specific support strategies to assist progressed learners to catch up with their counterparts. Without specific support and strategies, progressed learners had to develop ways to cope with the demands and challenges of the new grade. These challenges required progressed learners to change their thinking and find ways to make it work in the new grade for them to stand a better chance of succeeding. The strategies to overcome the challenges faced by progressed learners involve a combination of cognitive and practical approaches, from building self-confidence to seeking additional support and adapting to their circumstances. These strategies are essential for progressed learners to succeed in their new grades and can be related to different levels of Bloom's taxonomy, reflecting the complexity of their learning experience.

#### 4.3.4 Support for some of the Progressed Learners and a lack of parental involvement

This section covers participants' responses to the question about the support they receive as progressed learners and if they receive any support from home. Participants in this study believed that getting enough support could help them improve their grades and they could be given more time to learn. Progressed learners need more attention from teachers who are sometimes drained by multiple negative circumstances and challenges found in poor schools in South Africa. According to Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS, 2014), teachers, parents and learners should be centrally involved in the learning, teaching and assessment process. However, it was clear from the conversations with the participants that not all the participants received support from school or home. The lack of support for progressed learners made it difficult for some to cope with the demands of the new grade. Those who received support gave them a better chance to do well in the new grade. Some participants had to develop their strategies due to a lack of support, and others opted to attend extra classes from other schools. Some participants had support from their class teachers and at home. Others reported that they also received support from their siblings who were already in university, and that made it very easy for them to be in a new grade.

Elethu said the following when asked about the support in the new grade:

*As a progressed learner, I need more extra classes since we all know that I did not do well in Grade 11 and some topics are from Grade 11 and now I am in Grade 12.*

Sibonelo highlighted that due to the lack of support from her school, she had to attend extra classes in neighbouring schools:

*I have a strategy now for dealing with this by going to the neighbouring schools to attend extra classes there.*

For her, this was the strategy as in that school, no one knew she was a progressed learner, and it would be easy for her to blend in. Notably, some stakeholders were not playing their part in supporting progressed learners. Apart from support, many interventions are needed for progressed learners to succeed.

It is reported that various interventions were introduced to support progressed learners. These interventions included Saturday classes, boot camps, DBE second chance programmes, and

team teaching (Nkosi, 2019). Sanelisiwe said that she had support from her family after finding out that she had progressed:

*I had their full support.*

This was after her sister who is at the university had to explain to her parents what it meant to be progressed and what was needed going forward. Struggling learners like progressed learners gain maximum benefit from academic interventions if the interventions are tailored to their needs. Fezeka said the following about support from teachers:

*They support us a lot, if you were progressed, they motivate you in a way that you see that when you are given a second chance, you are granted an opportunity to rectify your mistakes.*

Elethu indicated that she received support at home:

*Yes, I get support from my parent, especially my mother, siblings, and friends. Since they know that in Grade 12 we are very busy most of the time, my family gives me more time and encourages me to study hard.*

The support from home is important as well, same as the one from school, as it ensures that progressed learners can focus on their schoolwork.

It was clear from the participants that they receive some form of support from either home or school, but they did get some support. The support included helping with assignments, explaining notes and key concepts, study tips and test preparations. This is what Sanelisiwe said about the kind of support she was getting:

*Let us say, we had an activity, if ever I did not perform well, they would call me and explain very well what I was supposed to do and how, and in extra classes in the afternoon, they make sure I am always present and if am not, I have to explain why was I not in class. We also have classes on weekends, and we do not close during holidays.*

In her school, they had access to teachers for consultation and afternoon classes were arranged for them as required by the policy and intervention strategies. Sibonelo indicated that she goes to teachers for even issues from home for support:

*If you see that you need help, you are the one that needs to go to them, and I can also communicate with them about other troubles and challenges that I come across maybe at home or anywhere else.*

Although the support varied for each school used as the research site, it was good to note that there was some form of support for progressed learners as the policy stipulates. Some progressed learners received support specifically on the subjects that they did not do well in, as Zizile said:

*I did receive some support from the school, especially the teachers, with the subjects that I did not do well, they helped me a lot when I asked questions, and they paid special attention to me so that I could understand a certain topic.*

Having target-specific intervention will help progressed learners and teachers to make sure that their limited resources go where they are needed. The lack of resources like reading books for South African learners, including progressed learners, contributes to the challenges in schools with how learners interact with their subjects (Moagi, 2020). The availability of resources at home like books, electronic resources such as computers with internet and general support at home is crucial for progressed learners (Moyo & Maseko, 2016).

Progressed learners' non-exposure to educational resources from home can affect their performance at school compared to those who have resources and support. Junior said the following about the kind of school support:

*I can say it's not enough.*

When probed further, he added the following:

*Most of the time, I am in a rush to complete and when I want to ask something, then the teacher is busy with something else, when I finally get the chance to ask, it is like you are interrupting the teacher or want attention and wasting his/her time. I do not think the support is sufficient.*

Teachers are often pointed out as the ones who are not giving much support to progressed learners and tend to focus on finishing the syllabus. Teachers tend to focus more on finishing the syllabus, especially in Grade 12, where the focus is on the final results (Smith & Loock, 2019; Van der Berg, 2015). This leads to progressed learners receiving less support from teachers as they are often viewed as a burden. Support from home and school is crucial for

progressed learners, and the policy states very clearly that they should receive support as mentioned in this study. As highlighted in this chapter, the policy stipulates that progressed learners must be given extra classes to catch up on the demands of the new grades. This can be done in schools by the lead educators and teachers from neighbouring schools. The theme highlights the essential role of support for progressed learners from both schools and family environments in their academic journey. Participants' voices underscore the need for tailored interventions and resource availability to help progressed learners overcome challenges. This theme highlights the importance of aligning educational policies with practical support measures to ensure that progressed learners receive the assistance they require to succeed in their academic endeavours.

#### **4.3.5 Lack of parental involvement in supporting progressed learners**

This section covers the last theme, which emerged on the extent of parental involvement in supporting them on their educational journey as progressed learners. It emerged that there was a lack of parental involvement in supporting progressed learners. The lack of parental involvement emerged when participants were asked if they had received any support at home since they were progressed. The lack of parental involvement in the progression of learners emerged as one of the consistent themes across all the participants. Looking into responses from participants, most of them were progressed without the involvement of parents/guardians, which is against what the policy says. The lack of parental involvement can contribute to the lack of support from home for progressed learners, as parents will not be aware of what is needed. Fezeka, when asked if her parents were involved in the decision to progress her as the policy says, said the following:

*There was no communication; I just saw it on my report.*

There was no communication even with her that she would be progressed. When probed further if there was any sort of communication with her parents, she added the following:

*No, they were not called.*

Parents/guardians of identified learners are said to be the final decision-makers of whether a learner can be progressed or not (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). Sanelisiwe said the following when asked if her parents were involved in the decision to progress her:

*No, they did not explain to my parents, they saw my report since they are old, and they believe that if you are progressed, it is the same as failing.*

This shows clearly why parents need to be involved in the decision to progress a learner because the school will have a chance to explain to parents' what progression means.

Mogale and Modipane (2021) argue that the progression policy was not implemented according to its provisions. The effective implementation of the learner progression policy is a major issue in the school lives of both learners and teachers (Nyathi, 2022). This may have long and short-term consequences. The finding of this research reinforces what has been said by the researchers on the learner progression policy and how it is not implemented accordingly. Zizile said the following about the involvement of parents:

*There was no letter which was given to me for my parents and they did not receive any type of communication.*

The issue of policy implementation is very crucial in ensuring that the policy addresses what it was intended to address. There is a need to track down the implementation of this policy, which can describe and explain how the policy is implemented in schools. In their research, Nkosi and Adebayo (2021) noted the gaps in terms of the implementation of the education policies and educational outcomes and how these could be a reflection of the key objectives of the learner progression policy. Parents/Guardians of progressed learners automatically form part of the support group for progressed learners (DBE, 2015). If schools do not involve parents or guardians of progressed learners, this means that an important component of support groups for progressed learners is uninvolved, meaning the support given to them is already compromised. The ineffective implementation of the progression policy is probably because stakeholders are not being consulted. The policy states very clearly that parents have the final say on whether a learner will be progressed or not. Different studies reveal that there is a gap between the formulation and the implementation of policies, which leads to the ineffective implementation thereof (Mogale & Modipane, 2021). The policy suggests that various consultation measures need to be carried out with teachers, parents, and learners during the implementation process (DBE, 2015a). Parents or guardians of learners identified for progression have the final say in whether the learner should be progressed or not.

Only one participant's parents were informed about the decision that she will be progressed. There is a need to review if the parents of progressed learners are consulted and if parents offer

support to their children. We need to trace the implementation of the progression policy in order to determine how secondary schools monitor and offer curriculum support to the progressed learners.

The research findings highlight the experiences and challenges faced by progressed learners in South Africa. These findings also suggest that there may be discrepancies between policy recommendations and their actual implementation, particularly regarding parental involvement in progression decisions. The study implies that there is room for improvement in supporting and understanding the needs of progressed learners within the South African education system. Further research may be needed to explore these issues in more depth and to develop strategies for more effective policy implementation and support for progressed learners.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Findings presented in this chapter indicated that progressed learners face a multitude of challenges in school and that they have different meanings of what it means to be progressed. These challenges include struggling with the content of the new grade, feeling of being out of place, and the pressure to perform academically. Teacher support emerged as a critical factor influencing the experiences of progressed learners. While the support was not consistently provided to all learners, those who actively sought assistance from teachers found it beneficial. Family involvement and support seemed to depend on individual circumstances and resources. There is a need for improved communication and transparency to ensure that learners and their families fully understand the policy's requirements and implications. The findings from the participants who participated in the study were more or less the same, which made this study more interesting. The following chapter, Chapter Five, provides a summary, recommendation, limitations of the study, and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter presented and discussed findings that emerged from the data generated in the semi-structured interviews. I began by drawing patterns that developed from data analysis that was discussed in Chapter Three. In this chapter, I presented conclusions that were drawn from the findings and discussions that were presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Four, data discussions were organised under themes and direct quotes were used to substantiate the findings and claims. I also highlighted the extent to which the research questions have been addressed. Before I presented the conclusions in this final chapter, I commenced by providing a study summary, highlighting important points from previous chapters to remind the reader about what the essence of each chapter was. After that, I restated the research questions that underpinned the study to frame the discussions of the conclusions. After that, I concluded from the findings. Then, I presented the findings and recommendations categorised in two parts: Recommendations for Practice and Recommendations for further research. I then provided the limitations of the study and the final word of the study.

#### **5.2 STUDY SUMMARY**

I set the scene for this study in Chapter One, where I introduced the topic of the study. I provided the background and rationale for conducting this study. The background of the study highlighted that progression refers to the movement of a learner from one grade to the next, excluding Grade R, despite the learner not meeting the promotional requirements for that grade. Progression policy can be used to prevent a learner from being in the same phase for more than four years. The study aimed to investigate the experiences of progressed learners and the implications of policy implementation in two schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, Umlazi District. Key concepts of the study were defined, namely, progression, learner capability, and education policy. I concluded the chapter by outlining the layout of the study, which indicated what each chapter entailed.

Chapter Two presented a discussion of the relevant literature relating to learner progression policy. The policy was introduced in 2013 as a way to address the high rates of grade repetition and dropout in the country's secondary schools. I interrogated the literature, linking it to policy

and policy implementation in schools, implementation of the learner progression policy, and issues emerging from the literature. In this study, I defined learner progression as the movement of a learner from one grade to another without that learner meeting all the promotional requirements of that grade. Bayeni and Bhengu (2018) define policy using three dimensions: policy as an authority prescript, policy as a prescriptive process and policy as an interactive practice. Through this review, I gained theoretical insight into how the policy has been criticised for being implemented without adequate preparation or resources and for placing undue pressure on progressed learners to meet unrealistic targets. The experiences of progressed learners in other countries, such as the United States, Madagascar, Kenya, and Australia, provide insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of the policy.

I also looked at the theoretical framework which underpinned this study, and I drew on the learning mastery approach theory by Bloom (1968), which focused on how the learner progression policy challenges learner capabilities and what can be done to ensure that struggling learners in schools are progressed with support as the policy demands. The complexity theory by Kauffman (1980) focused more on how complex it is to enact education policies in schools, with the focus being the learner progression policy. The theoretical frameworks of the study showed that the policy needed to be looked at through different lenses to understand the phenomenon. The two theories used for this study had to find the balance between the implications for policy implementation and the lived experiences of progressed learners.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the research design as well as the research methodology that I employed. Using the interpretivist paradigm enabled me to elicit an understanding of the experiences of progressed learners and the impact of policy implementation for progressed learners. A paradigm should comprise four elements, namely, axiology, methodology, ontology, and epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study was a qualitative case study of two secondary schools in Umlazi District in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. I used semi-structured interviews as my primary data generation method. I was able to understand the experiences of progressed learners and the implications the policy has on progressed learners through the data generated during interviews. The study employed various strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the data, such as member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexivity. The narrative case study provides entrée to information that might otherwise be

inaccessible. It makes it possible to research phenomena that might not be understood as readily through available studies.

The township where the study was being conducted had several no-fee schools. I used purposive sampling, as this was qualitative research, to ensure that the selected participants would help generate an in-depth description of the phenomenon. Informed consent letters were sent to all principals where I wanted to conduct my research, participants and the parents/guardians also received full consent letters asking learners to be participants and parents to agree to their child being a participant in my research. In developing the purpose statement, I considered that the participants must receive an honest explanation of this research work.

In Chapter Four, I presented and discussed findings that emerged from data analysis. Participants and research were profiled in detail, giving readers a detailed picture of the research site and the background of the participants. This can be found in Section 4.2 of Chapter Four. Findings were presented using five themes that emerged from the data., namely: Meanings that progressed learners attached to being progressed, Difficulties encountered by progressed learners, Strategies to overcome the challenges encountered by progressed learners, Support for some of the Progressed Learners and a lack of parental involvement, and a Lack of parental involvement in supporting progressed learners.

A summary of the findings is discussed here, the detailed findings can be found in Section 4.3 of Chapter Four of this study. Progressed learners showed that they did not understand what it means to be progressed and the implications that come with the implementation of the learner progression policy. Progressed learners highlighted different difficulties that they face in the new grade. These difficulties include coping with work of the new grade, understanding the content taught in the new grade, feeling isolated and not belonging in the new grade, difficulty in adapting to the new grade and the fear of being discriminated by other learners once they know they have been progressed. The participants were asked if they had encountered any challenges as progressed learners and if they had any strategies to overcome those challenges. Some of the strategies used by participants included attending extra classes from neighbourhood schools, while some had to use different platforms, such as radio stations, to get extra classes.

Participants in this study believed that getting enough support could help them improve their grades, and they can be given more time to learn. Not all the participants received support from

the school or at home. The lack of support for progressed learners made it difficult for some to cope with the demands of the new grade. Those who received support had a better chance of doing well in the new grade. The lack of parental involvement in the progression of learners emerged as one of the consistent themes across all the participants.

In Chapter Five, I concluded this study by providing a summary of the study, summary of the findings, conclusions, learnings from the findings, recommendations, limitations of the study and final word.

### **5.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This section summarises the findings of this study, as discussed in detail in Chapter Four. The key research questions are used to summarise the findings. It will provide a clear picture of how the research tried to answer the key questions asked in the study. In doing this summary, I used the research questions, and under these questions, I presented how the questions were addressed.

#### **5.3.1 What meanings do progressed learners in secondary schools attach to being progressed?**

The study found that the meanings that progressed learners in secondary schools attach to being progressed may differ from what the policy and literature understand about learner progression. The study found that some learners think that being progressed is because teachers are doing them a favour or that they are being given a second chance. The different views are given by the participants when asked what it means to them to be progressed and their understanding of being a progressed learner. They indicated that for them to be a progressed learner, it means that they failed to meet the requirements to be promoted to the next grade or that their age was no longer allowing them to be in that grade/phase. What also emerged was that participants were not well informed why they were progressing, and their parents were uninvolved. Participants indicated that they viewed being progressed as a second chance. They felt that it required them to put in extra effort to ensure that they did well in the grade they were progressed to. They felt that with adequate support, they had a better chance of excelling academically and to stand a better chance of obtaining their senior certificate after the matric examinations. This is positive considering that some, when they were told that they had progressed in Grade 11, felt like they were failures and that they did not deserve to be in Grade 12. These issues were discussed in detail in Section 4.3.1 of Chapter Four.

The meanings we create about something will always depend on the information we have about that particular subject. They narrowly view being progressed as a second chance, which is not a problem because the information they received made them conclude that being progressed means being given a chance to improve in the next grade.

### **5.3.2 What are the experiences of progressed learners in selected secondary schools?**

The study found that progressed learners experience school life differently. Some indicated that finding out on the last day that they had been progressed made it difficult for them that they deserved to be in Grade 12, and it took them time to adjust to their new grade. Those who received support from school and at home indicated that it was easy for them to improve their marks in their new grade quickly, and they were given more time at home to focus on their studies compared to those who did not get any support from home. Some teachers tried to accommodate progressed learners by having extra classes during the afternoon on weekdays and on weekends to make sure that they were at the same level as those who were promoted. Some participants indicated that they felt the pressure and anxiety of being in Grade 12, knowing fully well that they were progressed. The responses from the participants also indicate that without support, they are going through a lot without anyone paying attention to their plight. Progressed learners felt that schools had a lot more to do in terms of support offered by the school.

Without support from the school, the experience of being a progressed learner becomes hard, and adapting to the new grade without support becomes even more difficult for them. The hardship they experience in a new grade needs to be acknowledged. Teachers need to create safety nets where progressed learners can bounce from if they find it difficult to be in a new grade. Being a progressed learner in a new grade comes with its pressure, and the participants highlighted that being in a new grade as a progressed learner is hard on its own. With the right support from school and home, it becomes better, and they can cope with the demands of the new grade. What is important to progressed learners to help improve their experiences is their effort and support from school and at home. They felt that they needed to push themselves in a new grade and believed that it was through their effort that they could improve their marks and pass. They viewed being progressed as getting a second chance to improve on their marks. These issues were discussed in detail in Section 4.3.2 of Chapter Four. This has huge

implications in terms of learner confidence and progressed learners losing hope in thinking that they are different.

### **5.3.3 How does being a progressed learner in secondary school affect learners' academic performance?**

The study found that progressed learners may experience challenges such as a lack of support from home, teachers and the school, and pressure to do well in the new grade. These challenges can affect their academic performance and ability to succeed in the new grade.

The lack of support made it difficult for participants to cope with the workload of the new grade and made their lives difficult as they were seen as failures. Participants highlighted that teacher in their school treated everyone the same way, whether they progressed or not. This highlighted the differences in how the policy is implemented in different schools. The findings indicated that schools were only doing what was best for the school, not what was best for the learners. SMTs need to come into the party on how the policy is implemented and if the policy is implemented as intended by the government. The two schools where this study took place are just a few kilometres away from each other, they have the same primary schools as feeder schools, yet they were implementing the policy differently from one another regarding supporting progressed learners. The need for teachers to implement educational policies as intended cannot be demonstrated enough in this study. If progressed, learners feel like they are out of touch with the demands of the new grade. It is the duty of the teacher (especially those who are tasked by the department to support progressed learners) to ensure that they create an environment where learner progression policy is implemented in the best interests of progressed learners.

### **5.3.4 What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of progressed learners about the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy?**

The findings suggest that we can draw several lessons from the experiences of progressed learners about the implementation of the progression policy. The study found that: 1. The policy had well-intended practices, but application and monitoring challenges had adverse effects on progressed learners. 2. Parental involvement to support progressed learners was lacking and was one of the reasons that the policy was failing to address what it was intended to address. The lack of parent involvement in the progression and support of progressed learners contributes to the difficulties experienced by progressed learners. Progressed learners indicated

that their school lives had not been affected that much since the support from teachers and some at home made it easy for them to adapt to new life.

No participant ever thought about quitting school, which is a huge positive for the LPP as it also seeks to limit learner dropout. Some of the participants indicated that teachers in their school only cared about their subjects, which is why they were giving support to progressed learners. They were only interested in the total percentage of their subjects at the end of the year, and that is why they were offering extra classes. This was discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Section 4.3.5.

## **5.5 LEARNING FROM THE FINDINGS: CONCLUSIONS**

Conclusions were drawn in the context of the study's aims, objectives, and critical questions:

**5.5.1** During this research, I learnt that progressed learners attached different meanings to what it means to them to be progressed. This was due to a lack of information and teachers not informing them about what progression means and its implications on policy.

The study concluded that the meanings that progressed learners attach to being progressed differ from what is understood in policy and literature. Progressed learners often view being progressed as teachers doing them a favour or giving them a second chance rather than as a policy requirement to ensure that learners progress with their age group.

**5.5.2** In this study, I learnt that progressing learners can be negative and positive depending on the level of support provided to progressed learners. If progressed learners receive adequate support, they have motivation to do well in the grade they were progressed to. The support given to progressed learners is crucial in ensuring that they do not find themselves in a vicious circle of being trapped in progression until they fail to get their senior certificate in Grade 12.

The study concluded that being progressed can have both positive and negative effects on learners' academic lives. On the positive side, being progressed can provide learners with an opportunity to catch up and master the content they missed in the previous grade and can also help reduce the stigma associated with repeating a grade. On the negative side, being progressed can lead to learners feeling unprepared for the new grade and can also result in learners struggling to keep up with the increased academic demands of the new grade.

The study concluded that the implementation of the Learner Progression Policy could have negative implications for progressed learners, including feelings of stigma and unpreparedness

for the new grade. The study also concluded that the policy implementation can vary across schools, with some schools using age to progress learners to the next phase.

Firstly, the study suggested that there may be discrepancies between policy recommendations and their actual implementation, particularly regarding parental involvement in progression decisions. Secondly, the study found that progressed learners face a multitude of challenges in school, including struggling with the content of the new grade, feeling out of place, and the pressure to perform academically. Thirdly, the study revealed that teacher support emerged as a critical factor influencing the experiences of progressed learners and that those who actively sought assistance from teachers found it beneficial. Finally, the study highlighted the need for improved communication and transparency to ensure learners and their families fully understand the policy's requirements and implications.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following section presented the recommendations of this study, presenting three sectors, recommendations for practice, recommendations for further research and recommendations to the Department of Basic Education.

### **5.6.1 Recommendations for Practice:**

- Ensure teachers receive the necessary support to help progressed learners catch up.
- Compensate teachers leading programmes for progressed learners and establish a tracking system.
- Involve district and circuit officials in monitoring policy implementation.
- Implement the Learner Progression Policy considering the lived experiences of progressed learners.
- Conduct further studies to enhance knowledge and improve policy effectiveness.
- Include diverse stakeholders (teachers, district officials, School Management Teams, unions) in policy implementation and policy formulation.
- Promote collaborative efforts between the Department of Basic Education (DBE), schools, and officials.

- Conduct studies in other provinces to assess the impact of the Learner Progression Policy.

### **5.6.2 Recommendations for Further Research:**

- Conduct in-depth research on lived experiences and challenges faced by progressed learners.
- Develop strategies for more effective policy implementation and support for progressed learners.
- Explore the role of family involvement and support in the experiences of progressed learners.
- Investigate discrepancies between policy recommendations and actual implementation.
- Address commonalities and disparities in support for progressed learners.
- Encourage a student-centric approach to address contextual shortcomings.
- Ensure policies complement efforts to provide equal educational opportunities.

### **5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This is a small-scale study, and although the findings are valuable, they cannot be generalised to a wider audience. I have provided a thick description of the findings to make readers understand the context under which this study was conducted. Given these descriptions, similar situations may be interpreted from this study, and there is a clear understanding of the similarities between the contexts. Even though I was hoping for five schools and more participants, only two schools were possible and far fewer participants than I anticipated, but the findings can be a guiding start to a study with more schools and participants from different school contexts.

### **5.8 FINAL WORD**

The study sought to explore progressed learners' experiences in secondary schools and understand the implications of implementing the learner progression policy in schools. It emerged that the PLs' lived experiences are better if they receive support from schools and at home. They see the LPP as giving them a chance to do better in the new grade. Even though

the schools that were research sites were just five minutes away from each other, it emerged that they practised the LPP differently, which led to participants having a different understanding of what the LPP is and how they experienced school as progressed learners. The schools engaged in the LPP because the DBE introduced it as a means to ensure learner retention in the schools. They had to comply with the DBE by implementing the policy even though they were not implementing it as intended by the DBE.

In this chapter, a summary of the findings was presented, and conclusions were drawn based on them. Recommendations were offered to the DBE and researchers, and a proposal was made on developing a model that can assist in implementing the LPP. The intention of this was to help those who practice the LPP in their schools and those who have progressed learners in schools to understand the progressed learners' lived experiences and come up with a better way of implementing the policy. More research on the phenomenon is required so that we can better understand the policy and how it affects progressed learners in schools.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A : Permission letter to KZN Department of Education

*Letter to DoE requesting permission to conduct research in KZN schools*

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
08/03/2022

Attention: Head of Department  
Department of Education  
Province of KwaZulu-Natal  
Head Office  
**247 Burger Street**  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200  
Dear Sir

#### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

My name is Mthunzi Maphumulo, a student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). As part of my master's degree fulfilment, as a student, I am required to conduct research. I would kindly seek permission for students to conduct research in identified schools under your jurisdiction. The project title is: **Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation**. The project aims to interrogate the lived experiences of progressed learners in secondary schools (FET phase). The important question that this research will aim to answer is, How the progression policy affect progressed learners and how does the policy implementation impact their academic lives? The study will use semi structured interviews with progressed learners. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 40-60 minutes at times convenient to them which will not disturb teaching and learning. Each interview will be voice-recorded.

Responses will be treated with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of the actual names. Participants will be contacted well in advance for interviews, and they will be purposively selected to participate in this study. Participation will always remain voluntary

which means that participants may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without incurring any penalties.

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated. You may also contact the Research Office through:

P. Mohun  
HSSREC Research Office,  
Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Mthunzi Maphumulo  
[REDACTED]  
E-mail: [214548696@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214548696@stu.ukzn.ac.za)  
[Mthunzie.maphumulo@gmail.com](mailto:Mthunzie.maphumulo@gmail.com)

## Appendix B: Permission letter to school principals

Education Leadership Management and Policy,  
School of Education,  
College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus, KwaZulu Natal

17 January 2022

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Attention: Principal

Dear Principal

### **REQUEST TO FOR YOUR CHILD TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN RESEARCH**

#### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER for Progressed Learners**

My name is Mthunzi Maphumulo. I am a **Master of Education** student from the Education Leadership Management and Policy cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research titled **‘Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation’**.

Promotions of learners from one grade to another have been a daunting task characterised by dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and challenges. The Department of Education, in response to these concerns, introduced a promotion of the Learner Progression Policy to address those learners who did not meet the requirements to pass to the next grade. This policy was triggered by a high number of learners who failed the Grades and had to repeat them.

As per the progression policy, teachers are expected to offer progressed learners support in order for them to catch up and also be on the same level as their classmates. But this often does

not happen because teachers will be focusing more on finishing the syllabus without even checking if there are students who need to be monitored and given support to meet the demands of the current grades. **The objectives of the research are as follows:**

The study aims to explore the experiences of progressed learners and policy implementation impacts on their academic lives.

The Learner Progression Policy aims to ensure that no learner may repeat a grade more than two times in the same phase. All learners from Grade R to Grade 12 are affected by this policy. The application of this policy makes it possible that some learners in the grade would not have met the standards required to be promoted to the grade. This study will explore how this policy is implemented, and the (un)intended consequences thereof. The study will also seek to understand the challenges and lived experiences of learners that have progressed through this policy.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: \_\_\_\_).

Your anticipated positive response in this regard is highly appreciated.

Thank you

Yours faithfully



My contact details are as follows:

Email: 214548696@stu.ukzn.ac.za/mthunzie.maphumulo@gmail.com

Cell phone: 0[REDACTED]

My supervisors are Prof. Myende and Prof Bhengu. He is a lecturer in the Education Leadership Management and Policy cluster, School of. Education, College of Humanities, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

My supervisor's contact details are:

Email: myendepe@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: 0312603534

**Appendix C: Declaration by principals**

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

**I ..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the study entitled “Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation” by Mthunzi Maphumulo. I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.**

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

## Appendix D: Permission by KZN Department of Education

Title was amended to: **Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation.** Data were conducted within the specified period of KZN DOE.



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 3921062 / 033-3921051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za  
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7019

Mr Mthunzi Maphumulo

3145

Dear Mr Maphumulo

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNER PROGRESSION POLICY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF 5 SCHOOLS. PROGRESSED LEARNERS LIVED EXPERIENCES AND HOW THIS POLICY AFFECTS THEM.;** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## Appendix E: Consent letter to parents/guardians

Education Leadership Management and Policy,

School of Education,

College of Humanities,

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Edgewood Campus, KwaZulu Natal 17

January 2022

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

3145

Attention: Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian

### REQUEST TO FOR YOUR CHILD TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN RESEARCH

#### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Mthunzi Maphumulo, I am a **Master of Education** student from the Education Leadership Management and Policy cluster, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research titled: '**Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation**'. Promotions of learners from one Grade to another have been a daunting task characterised by dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and challenges. The Department of Education in response to these concerns introduced a promotion of learner's policy to address those learners who did not meet

the requirements to pass to the next Grade. This policy was triggered by a high number of learners who failed the Grades and had to repeat them.

As per the progression policy, teachers are expected to offer progressed learners support for them to catch up and also be on the same level as their classmates. But this often does not happen because teachers will be focusing more on finishing the syllabus without even checking if there are students who need to be monitored and given support to meet the demands of the current grades. **The objectives of the research are as follows:**

The study aims to explore the experiences of progressed learners and policy implementation impacts on their academic lives.

The learner progression policy aims to ensure that no learner may repeat a grade more than two times in the same phase. All learners from Grade R to Grade 12 are affected by this policy. Application of this policy makes it possible that some learners in the grade would not have met the standards required to be promoted to the grade. This study will explore how this policy is implemented and the (un)intended consequences thereof. The study will also seek to understand the challenges and lived experiences of learners who are progressed through this policy.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: ).

Your anticipated positive response in this regard is highly appreciated.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully



.....

My contact details are as follows:

Email: [214548696@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214548696@stu.ukzn.ac.za)/mthunzie.maphumulo@gmail.com

[REDACTED]

My supervisors are Prof. Myende and Prof Bhengu. He is a lecturer in the Education Leadership Management and Policy cluster, School of. Education, College of Humanities, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

My supervisor's contact details are:

Email: [myendepe@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:myendepe@ukzn.ac.za)

Phone number: 0312603534

## **Appendix F: Consent letter to participants**

Education Leadership Management and Policy,  
School of Education,  
College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Edgewood Campus, KwaZulu Natal  
17 January 2022

Dear Learner

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PROGRESSED LEARNERS RE: REQUEST TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN MY RESEARCH**

#### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is Mthunzi Maphumulo. I am a Master of Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal within the Education Leadership Management and Policy Discipline in the School of Education. I am conducting research titled: **‘Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation.** I am requesting you to participate in my research. I have already requested your parents to allow me to involve you in the study. Your parents have already agreed.

You are invited to please participate in the study because you are a student who was progressed from the previous grade. To gather the information, I am interested in requesting you to participate in this project by reflecting on your lived experiences with the progression policy and how it is affecting you. The duration of the interview will be 40-60 minutes. In addition, I would like to know if being progressed has any effect on your studies and how are you managing to cope with the demand of having to meet the demands of the new grade you are in. In the one-on-one (individual) interview, you will be asked questions regarding the progression policy and the implications associated with being progressed. The interview will be conducted online using Zoom, or in person using a voice recorder.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: **HSSREC/00003461/2021**).

Please note that:

- Your participation is voluntary. If you do not participate, you **will not be penalized** in any way. No marks will be deducted from your project if you decline to participate.
- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person but reported only as a population member's opinion.
- The individual interview will last for about 40-60 minutes and will depend on your availability.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be in the form of interview transcripts, completed diary entries and completed portfolios and will be stored in secure storage and destroyed by shredding after five years. Digitally recorded data will be deleted after five years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are **no financial** benefits involved.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

My contact details are as follows:

Email: **214548696@stu.ukzn.ac.za/mthunzie.maphumulo@gmail.com** Cell  
phone **[REDACTED]**

My supervisors are Prof. Phumulani Myende and Prof. Thulani Bhengu They are lecturers in Education Leadership Management and Policy cluster, School of. Education, College of Humanities, Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

My supervisor's contact details are:

Email: **myendep@ukzn.ac.za/bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za**

Phone number: **031 260 343**

## Appendix G: Declaration by participants

### DECLARATION OF CONSENT

**I ..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the study entitled ‘Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation’ by Mthunzi Maphumulo. I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research project.**

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

**I voluntarily give permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded.**

**My identity will not be disclosed, and pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity**

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher [REDACTED]

**Appendix H: Child assent form**

**Title of project: EXPERIENCES OF PROGRESSED LEARNERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.**

**Researcher's name:** Mthunzi Maphumulo

**Name of participant:**

.....

1. Has the researcher explained what s/he will be doing and wants you to do?

 YES NO

2. Has the researcher explained why s/he wants you to take part?

 YES NO

3. Do you understand what the researcher wants you to do?

 YES NO

4. Do you think anything bad can happen to you during the research?

 YES NO

5. Do you know that your name and what you say will be kept a secret from other people?

 YES NO

6. Did you feel you need to ask the researcher any questions about the research?

YES

NO

7. Has the researcher answered all your questions?

YES

NO

8. Do you understand that you can refuse to take part if you do not want to take part and that nothing will happen to you if you refuse?

YES

NO

9. Do you understand that you may come out of the study at any time if you no longer want to continue?

YES

NO

10. Do you know who to talk to if you are worried or have any other questions to ask?

YES

NO

11. Has anyone forced or put pressure on you to take part in this research?

YES

NO

12. Are you willing or happy to take part in the research?

YES

NO

13. Are you willing or happy to allow the group discussion to be recorded?

YES

NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Child**

17 January 2022  
**Date**

## Appendix I: Research instruments

The title of the study: **Experiences of progressed learners in a secondary school and the implications for policy implementation.**

The following questions will be asked during the interview conducted with you. I am asking you to give me permission to audio- record the discussion so that all issues discussed are well captured.

Interview Schedule for Learners:

A: Opening

My name is Mthunzi Maphumulo, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Master of Education Candidate. I thought it would be a good idea to interview you so that I can better understand how the progression policy practices affected you.

B. I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your education, some experiences you have had with progression policy, and your experiences about the same policy and what can be done to ensure it responds to the needs of learners.

Let me begin by asking you some questions about where you live and your family.

1. How long have you lived where you currently live?
2. In your family, how many of you are still in school and how many have completed matric (grade 12) or who are in tertiary institutions?

Now let us speak about the main topic since I now have some background about you all.

**What are the experiences of progressed learners in Secondary Schools?**

- **How would you describe your life in a new grade after being progressed?**
- **Tell me what does it mean to be a progressed learner to you?**
- **How were you informed about the issue of being progressed and its meaning?**
- **Can you share with me how the information about you being progressed was handled and how were your parents involved in the process?**
- **Share with me, since you were progressed how does it feel to be at school?**
- **What kind of support do you receive from teachers?**
- **How do you find this support? Is helpful and how helpful it is?**
- **Do other learners who were progressed receive this same support?**
- **How is your family involved in the support you received from school?**

- **What challenges do you experience as a progressed learner and how do you deal with these challenges?**

**How do progressed learners in secondary schools experience school life and what implications do these experiences have for the implementation of learner progression policy?**

- Do you understand why you progressed and what it means for you?

**What meanings do progressed learners in secondary schools attach to being progressed?**

- Were you provided with information regarding the progression policy before being progressed?
  - Do you receive any support as a progressed learner in school and at home?
  - As a progressed learner, are you coping with your current grade?
  - How would you describe the feeling of being progressed and being in a new grade as a progressed learner?
3. How long have you been in the school?
  4. Have you ever progressed before? If yes, from which Grade to which Grade?
  5. How did you feel when you were progressed and why?

**How does being progressed in secondary schools affect learners' academic lives?**

6. Did you find any problems in the Grade you progressed to?
7. How did your parents feel that you were progressed?
8. Did your parents support you? If yes, in what ways?
9. Do you think progressing learners is a good thing or bad thing and why?
10. Are there any challenges in the schools associated with the progression policy?
11. If you were allowed to change the progression of learners, what is it that you would change or keep?

Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about you. Let me briefly summarise the information that I have recorded during our interview. This will assist in confirming your answers and ensuring that I captured everything correctly.

## Appendix J: Turnitin originality report

### Learners' Experiences of Being Progressed and the Implications for Policy Implementation

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>7</b> %	<b>6</b> %	<b>0</b> %	<b>2</b> %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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**Appendix K: Language clearance certificate**

**Registered with the South African Translators' Institute (SATI)**

**Reference number 1000686**

08 January 2024

*Experiences of Progressed Learners in a Secondary School and the implications for Policy Implementation*

This confirms that I edited substantively the above document, including a Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various tracked changes to correct errors and clarify meaning. It was the author's responsibility to attend to these changes.

Yours faithfully



Dr. K. Zano

Ph.D. in English

[kufazano@gmail.com](mailto:kufazano@gmail.com)/[kufazano@yahoo.com](mailto:kufazano@yahoo.com)

