

Progressed Learners' Participation in Developing Curriculum Support Programmes: A Critical Pedagogy Approach

Makobo Lydia Mogale¹  & Khashane Stephen Malatji² 

¹ Department of Curriculum Studies and Higher Education- Faculty of Education- University of the Free State, South Africa.

² Department of Primary Education- School of Education- Faculty of Humanities- Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

This empirical paper provides a critical analysis of progressed learners' participation in the development of curriculum support programmes through Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Progression policy was promulgated in the Further Education and Training Phase to ensure uniformity and consistency in the implementation of National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements (N4PR) to prohibit learners from spending more than four years in a phase. The policy stresses the development of intervention programmes for identified learners to bridge the content gap. However, literature based on progression policy focus on programmes that teachers develop and implement. The focus of this paper is on progressed learners' contribution to curriculum support. Through Freire's critical pedagogy, it critiques traditional teaching methods where the teacher is the knower who deposits knowledge to novice "progressed" learners. In an argument for a problem posing education, the study employs a qualitative research approach. Data was collected through document analysis and interviews with six teachers. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed a lack of evidence of progressed learner participation in the development of curriculum support programmes. In addition, progressed learners feature when they have to respond to developed programmes. This study concludes that teachers are fixated on traditional learning models. Based on the findings, the study recommends the need to shift to a "dialogue approach" where both the teacher and progressed learners design intervention strategies that communicate directly to the specific needs of such learners.

Correspondence

Makobo Lydia Mogale

Email: MogaleML@ufs.ac.za

Publication History

Received 7th July, 2022

Accepted 19th September, 2022

Published online 17th October, 2022

Keywords: Curriculum support, progressed learners, critical pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Learner participation is increasing from time to time within the education sphere around the globe. This shift to the recognition of learners' voices remains critical towards shaping classroom practices.¹ The increasing shift promotes the transformation process in schools,² for instance, to create a better school environment, school governance, alignment to instructional practices and debates on education

¹ Eric Toshalis and Michael J. Nakkula, "Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice: Toolkit.," *Jobs For the Future*, May 2012, <http://www.studentsatthecenter.org/topics/motivation-engagement-and-student-voice>.

² Antonella Mangiaracina et al., "Learners' Voices in Inclusive Education Policy Debates," *Education Sciences* 11, no. 10 (September 30, 2021): 599, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11100599>.

policies.³ However, the inclusion of learners in the implementation of education policy is still paramount. In an article on student participation in creating better school environments, Flutter contends that student participation requires an extension for opportunities to partake in the planning and design process.⁴ In the same vein, Chimbi and Jita suggest that teacher professional development can be a vehicle for the recognition of learners' voices in classroom practices. They also confirm that learners' representation deviated from school governance.⁵ According to Mangiaracina et. al, key aspects such as the “importance of barrier-free schools, raising awareness, changing attitudes and combating stereotypes support learners' longer-term social inclusion and ensure they are able to become full citizens in their local communities.”⁶

This paper aims to explore progressed learners' participation in developing curriculum support programmes to bridge the content gap. The paper uses critical pedagogy to determine progressed learner participation in the development of curriculum support programmes. Progressed learners mushroomed from the progression policy which was introduced in Further Education and Training in 2013 to ensure consistency and uniformity in the application of National Policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statements Grade R-12.⁷ The policy intends to remedy high school dropout rates through progressing learners who spent more than four years in a phase.⁸ Since its promulgation, grade 12 learner performance has been nerve-wracking. This can be traced from annual announcements for grade 12 results in past years which indicate a decline, especially with the inclusion of progressed learners. The paper intends to address the following question: How can progressed learners' participation enhance effective progression policy implementation? The paper first describes the theoretical framework used as the lens for the study. An overview of learner progression from different countries as well as learner participation in the education fraternity is outlined. This is followed by highlighting the methodology that was used to conduct the study. Findings and recommendations are also presented. The paper taps into the Critical Pedagogy approach to rethink the “progressed” learner participation in curriculum support.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Critical Pedagogy

This study used critical pedagogy (CP) to explore curriculum support for progressed learners.⁹ This theory criticises the traditional “banking system” which regards the teacher as the knower and emphasises “problem solving education” as it corresponds to the core of the conscious and puts communication into practice.¹⁰ In his critique of traditional learning methods which regards the teacher as more knowledgeable, Freire argues for a curriculum that “serves to liberate learners to make links and understand language, experiences and their daily struggle”. Furthermore, in his justification for a pedagogy of the oppressed, Freire critiques the banking concept of education which according to him minimizes learners' creative power. In the same vein, Hoadley, Gultig, and Jansen stress that learning programmes should put learners at the fore and must allow learning to occur through their own

³ Julia Flutter, “This Place Could Help You Learn’: Student Participation in Creating Better School Environments,” *Educational Review* 58, no. 2 (May 2006): 183–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910600584116>.

⁴ Flutter, “This Place Could Help You Learn’: Student Participation in Creating Better School Environments.”

⁵ Godsend Tawanda Chimbi and Loyiso C. Jita, “Searching for Learners’ Voices: Teachers’ Struggle to Align Pedagogical-Reform Policy with Instructional Practice,” *Journal of Pedagogy* 12, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 61–83, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2021-0010>.

⁶ Mangiaracina et al., “Learners’ Voices in Inclusive Education Policy Debates,” 599.

⁷ South African, Department of Basic Education, “National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12” (Pretoria: Government Gazette, 2011), <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Policies/PolicyProgPromReqNCS.pdf>.

⁸ South Africa Department of Basic Education., “Guideline for the Implementation of Promotion and Progression Requirements for Grades 10-12.” (Pretoria: Government Gazette, 2015), <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/c0cc1c10/files/uploaded/Guideline-Promotion-Progression-Jun-2015.pdf>.

⁹ Paulo Freire, “From Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” *Race / Ethnicity Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 2 (January 2009): 163–74, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236820631_Chapter_2_from_Pedagogy_of_the_Oppressed.

¹⁰ Freire, “From Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” 163-74.

knowledge and experiences.¹¹ Problem-solving education banks on strengthening learners' critical thinking skills. Therefore, the theory has the potential to unleash progressed learners' ability to acquire "knowledge through a feeling of epistemological curiosity."¹² With dialogue as the basic item in knowledge construction, remedial programmes beyond the normal school timetable as stipulated in the guideline for the implementation of progression policy will become meeting places where information is collectively researched.¹³ In a nutshell, CP is relevant for this paper since it argues for progressed learners' participation in curriculum support programmes developed to bridge the content gap. With CP, the paper seeks to reinvent thinking towards recognition of progressed learners towards effective implementation of the progression policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner progression policy is a trend to allow learners to move from one class to another despite failing to meet promotion requirements. This practice is a common and contentious educational practice globally. Most importantly, the decision and the implementation vary from country to country. In Chicago, the practice is called "social promotion" and focuses on moving with the age cohort.¹⁴ However, evidence of support was not traced, before the policy came to an end.¹⁵ In Uganda "automatic promotion" was put into practice to allow movement for learners regardless of what such learners obtained but such learners do not cope with the workload and responsibilities in the next class.¹⁶ Cameroon also exercised the same practice and referred to it as "automatic progression" but a negative attitude towards this policy has implications on affected learners' motivation to learn.¹⁷ South Africa is no exception, progression policy is by far not yielding positive results with flaws detectable on implementation.¹⁸

Policy-practice distortions that hinder the implementation of well-intentioned policies are a global area of concern within the education fraternity.¹⁹ As a result, the gap that exists between theory and practice remains in question due to implementation that become graveyards for policies.²⁰

¹¹ Ursula Hoadley, John Gultig, and Jonathan D. Jansen, *Curriculum: From Plans to Practices*. (Oxford University Press., 2002).

¹² Abdullah Durakoğlu, "Paulo Freire's Perception Of Dialogue Based Education," *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications* July, 2013, 102–7, <http://www.ijonte.org/FileUpload/ks63207/File/12.durakoglu1.pdf>.

¹³ Durakoğlu, "Paulo Freire's Perception Of Dialogue Based Education," 102–7.

¹⁴ Elaine M. Allensworth, "Dropout Rates After High-Stakes Testing in Elementary School: A Study of the Contradictory Effects of Chicago's Efforts to End Social Promotion," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 27, no. 4 (December 23, 2005): 341–64, <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737027004341>.

¹⁵ Melissa Roderick and Jenny Nagaoka, "Retention under Chicago's High-Stakes Testing Program: Helpful, Harmful, or Harmless?," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 27, no. 4 (2005): 309–40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699564>.

¹⁶ Jeje Moses Okurut, "Automatic Promotion and Student Dropout: Evidence from Uganda, Using Propensity Score in Difference in Differences Model," *Journal of Education and Learning* 7, no. 2 (January 16, 2018): 191, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n2p191>.

¹⁷ Margaret Nalova Endeley, "Teachers Perception and Practice of Automatic Promotion in English Speaking Primary Schools in Cameroon - EA Journals," *British Journal of Education* 4, no. 11 (October 2016): 11–23, <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Teachers-Perception-and-Practice-of-Automatic-Promotion-in-English-Speaking-Primary-Schools-in-Cameroon.pdf>.

¹⁸ Jacobine Mantekana Letshwene, "Key Generic Curriculum Factors Affecting Grade 12 Learner Performance: A Multiple Case Study of South African Secondary Schools" (University of South Africa, 2019), https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/25521/thesis_letshwene_mj.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

¹⁹ Melissa Tuytens and Geert Devos, "How to Activate Teachers through Teacher Evaluation?," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 25, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 509–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2013.842601>.

²⁰ Iyanda Kamoru, Ahmed and Bello Sanusi Dantata, "Problems and Challenges of Policy Implementation for National Development," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 6, no. 15 (2016): 60–65.

The common purpose for learner progression around the globe is to curb the curve of learner retention which usually contributes to school dropouts.²¹ In Florida, learners progressed when they attained a certain level of competence, while in Texas learner progression was attached to graduation when learners improve academically.²² On the contrary, in African countries such as Botswana, learners' progression is viewed as an obstacle to the basic right to education.²³ In Kenya, "social promotion" seems to be contributing to learner dropout.²⁴ Progression policy is also perceived as dangerous to quality education in Rwanda.²⁵ An alarming issue emanates when policies developed with intentions to address educational challenges are perceived as adding to daily problems encountered in the sector.

The proponents of "social/automatic promotion/progression" regard the practice as cost-effective, while opponents of the latter argue about the implications for quality learning.²⁶ Issues such as the lowering of academic standards and the creation of pedagogical problems²⁷ also emanate from debates around an automatic promotion or social promotion.²⁸ According to Stott, Dreyer, and Venter, teachers are opponents to the progression of learners and/or social-automatic promotion.²⁹ While this is the case, Makhanya points out that teachers' concerns on learner progression vis-à-vis repetition are not taken into cognisance because they are not informed by research.³⁰

Policy on progression in South Africa unleashed several incongruities rather than achieving the intended purposes. In the Western Cape Province, the Progression Policy revealed the adjustment of assessment standards to accommodate struggling learners.³¹ While this is the case, a study conducted on the consequences of progression policy in the Further and Education Phase, pointed out demotivated learners who know they will pass regardless of their academic performance in the Free State Province.³² A KwaZulu Natal Province study on learner progression highlighted numerous teacher-learner complex effects on the implementation process and mentioned curriculum reform as the major

²¹ Philasande Dedictus Makhanya, "Effect of the Implementation of the Progression Education Policy at Public Institutions: A Case Study of Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa" (Durban University of Technology, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.51415/10321/3941>.

²² Marielena P. Wright, "Florida Student Progression Policies and Their Effect on Student Achievement" (Florida Atlantic University, 2008), <https://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A34000>.

²³ Aobakwe Bacos Malejane and Kabo Diraditsile, "Botswana's Education System: A Relative Analysis with South Korean Education System," *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, October 11, 2019, 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.9734/jesbs/2019/v32i230168>.

²⁴ Wasilwa Evans Wekesa et al., "Influence of Selected School Factors on Pupils' Progression in Public Primary Schools in Trans – Nzoia West Sub - County, Kenya," *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy* 03, no. 09 (September 30, 2019): 309–15, <https://doi.org/10.36348/JAEP.2019.v03i09.002>.

²⁵ Abel Dufitumukiza, Genevieve Wanjala, and Ibrahim Khatete, "Nine Year Basic Education Policy Interventions and Students' Enrolments Rates at Lower Secondary Level: A Lesson from Rwanda," *Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 94–112, <https://doi.org/10.52547/johepal.2.1.94>.

²⁶ Bushra I Chohan and Samina A Qadir, "Automatic Promotion Policy at Primary Level and MDG-2," *Journal of Research and Reflections* 5, no. 1 (2011): 1–20, <http://www.ue.edu.pk/jrre>.

²⁷ Shireen Motala, "Surviving the System - a Critical Appraisal of Some Conventional Wisdoms in Primary Education in South Africa," *Comparative Education* 31, no. 2 (June 22, 1995): 161–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050069529092>.

²⁸ Jere Brophy, *Grade Repetition* (The International Academy of Education, 2006), <http://www.smec.curtin.edu.au/iae/>; Christian Mambeh Tani, "The Effective Implementation of the Policy of Automatic Class Promotion in Cameroon Public Primary Schools: The Case of North West and South West Regions," *Bulgarian Journal of Science and Education Policy (BJSEP)* 12, no. 1 (2018).

²⁹ Angela Elisabeth Stott, Hercules Dreyer, and Peet Venter, "Consequences of the Progression Law in the FET Phase: A Case Study," *Journal of Education*, no. 63 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.17159/i63a04>.

³⁰ Anita Haidary, "Controversy over Grade Repetition: Afghan Teachers' View on Grade Repetition" (Karlstads University, 2013), <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:695166/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

³¹ Paul Munje and Rouaan Maarman, "A Capability Analysis on the Implementation of the School Progression Policy and Its Impact on Learner Performance," *Journal of Education*, no. 66 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i66a07>.

³² Stott, Dreyer, and Venter, "Consequences of the Progression Law in the FET Phase: A Case Study," 89-110.

finding of the investigation.³³ In the Limpopo Province, studies conducted on progression policy also highlight problems in the implementation process.³⁴ The inconsistencies and challenges identified on learner progression in the same country highlight implications on the effectiveness and are likely to defeat the intended purpose of the policy itself.

Progression policy stipulates curriculum support beyond the normal timetable for identified learners to master the content of the missed and current class.³⁵ Thus, learners regardless of their condition to be in the next class curriculum support is vital to bridge the content gap. Progressed learners carry varied barriers that are likely to affect them at a later stage.³⁶ Nkosi and Adebayo point out several challenges that teachers come across in the implementation of the progression policy. That is, a depreciating curve on learners' performance, learners struggling to cope, lack of self-esteem, insufficient parental involvement and lack of confidence.³⁷ Amidst provision for curriculum support research indicate the implementation process within borders of Inclusive Education.³⁸ Tani and George recommend the need for the provision of learning support since there was no indication of support by the teacher.³⁹ This gives an assumption that the focus is on moving learners from one class to another without strategies to ensure they master the content in their classes. Arguably, studies on progression focus on learners' responses to intervention programmes. There is no evidence for progressed learners' contribution to curriculum support programmes as stakeholders of the policy are yet to determine the gap this study intends to close.

In South Africa, education legislation and policy play a major role to define and regulate participatory spaces for learners. The South African Schools Act of 1996 legislated learner participants drawing from the movement for increased youth participation around the globe.⁴⁰ However, learner participation in policy implementation particularly progression policy is still an anticipated occurrence. Amongst others, stipulations for the implementation of progression policy argue that teachers develop and implement curriculum support for identified learners to bridge the content gap. Therefore, this study argues for progressed learner participation in the development of curriculum support programmes. Thus, using a "dialogue" as the foundation for knowledge structure where the teacher and progressed learners agree on curriculum support.

³³ Makhanya, "Effect of the Implementation of the Progression Education Policy at Public Institutions : A Case Study of Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa."

³⁴ Lydia Mogale Makobo and Mpho Calphonia Modipane, "The Implementation of the Progression Policy in Secondary Schools of the Limpopo Province in South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 1 (February 28, 2021): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n1a1853>.

³⁵ South Africa Department of Basic Education., "Guideline for the Implementation of Promotion and Progression Requirements for Grades 10-12. ."

³⁶ Letshwene, "Key Generic Curriculum Factors Affecting Grade 12 Learner Performance: A Multiple Case Study of South African Secondary Schools."

³⁷ Thandi Priscillia Nkosi and Rufus Olufemi Adebayo, "An Exploration Of The Progression Policy And Its Ef," *Eurasian Journal Of Business And Management* 9, no. 3 (2021): 194–207, <https://doi.org/10.15604/ejbm.2021.09.03.002>.

³⁸ Lydia Mogale Makobo, Khashane Stephen Malatji, and Lydia Kgomotso Mphahlele, "Support Teams' collaboration on Curriculum Support for Progressed Learners in Limpopo, South Africa: Teachers' perspectives," *Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation* 32 (2011):3.

³⁹ Christian Mambeh Tani and George Epah Fonkeng , "The Influence of Human Resources on the Effective Implementation of the Policy of Automatic Class Promotion in Public Primary Schools in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon," *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review* 6, no. 6 (2019): 145–54.

⁴⁰ Marie-Françoise Lückér-Babel, "The Right of the Child to Express Views and to Be Heard: An Attempt to Interpret Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 3, no. 3–4 (1995): 391–404, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/157181895X00177>.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study is placed within the interpretivism paradigm for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon which leads to deep insights to assist in the description of reality.⁴¹ The paradigm was used as the general basis of reality in order to establish progressed learners' participation in the development of curriculum support programmes to bridge the content gap. The study used an exploratory case study design of three secondary schools of the Mopani East district in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Six Grade 12 teachers were purposively selected since the focus was on learner progression to the Grade 12 class. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to establish the extent to which teachers involve progressed learners to determine intervention strategies that respond to individual needs as per the reason for progression. Other considerations were participants' willingness to share documented plans for intervention towards effective implementation of progression policy and minutes of the meetings thereof. In line with qualitative research, an intense investigation from a natural setting was conducted.⁴² Data was analysed through thematic analysis.⁴³ The process involved familiarizing oneself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining as well as naming themes and producing the report.

This paper is generated from a doctoral thesis so, ethical issues were approved by the Tshwane University of Technology, and permission to conduct the study was granted by the Limpopo Department of Education together with the schools under study. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the study anytime. Codes were used to protect the identities of schools and participants during the presentation and analysis of findings. Thus, S for School followed by alphabet A, B, and C. Teachers' responses were coded numerically as T1 up to T6.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which teachers involve progressed learners when they develop and put into practice intervention strategies to bridge the content gap. Evidence generated from data revealed the "missing progressed learners voice" on the plan and implementation of curriculum support. Moreover, the study revealed varied approaches to intervention programmes mainly within the borders of Inclusive Education. Thus either a whole school intervention, departmental intervention, or individual teacher remedial plan was analysed. The findings of the study resulted in the emergence of three themes that assist to explain silent progressed learners' voices in the development of curriculum support programmes. The three themes are; a plan for intervention, varied insights on curriculum support and a possible approach for progressed learner participation.

Plan for intervention

The idea for the progression of learners does not only speak to minimising continuous retention but, to ensure that identified learners move with age cohort while receiving adequate support in order to bridge the content gap between missed class and current class. It was expected of teachers to have a plan for intervention in this regard. Intervention plans were different but, covered similar aspects. Thus, subject-related challenges indicated content that challenged either all learners or specific learners, activities to address challenges, responsible person (s), time frames and progress date. In some instances, the plan for intervention had areas that required more efforts towards improvement of the overall performance with the inclusion of learners identified for progression. That is the use of the Subject Improvement Plan (SIP). However, within the context of this study, SIP was perceived to be

⁴¹ Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism," *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 3 (2020).

⁴² John W. Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (March 30, 2007): 236–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>.

⁴³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

insufficient as the focus was on whole rather than remedial programmes that communicate directly to the progressed learners. The improvement strategy in **SB** indicated that:

“Teachers should form functional committees, report for duty to teach before attending meetings/workshops scheduled for 10:00 in the morning and beyond, be committed and engaged in extra classes as well as strive for improving learner’s levels of performance.....while School Management Teams were to take charge of the formation of subject committees and monitor their functionality, develop curriculum management plans, implement, monitor and support, establish Grade 12 camps towards term 3 and 4, monitor afternoon and morning studies (developing timetable) as well as educators one on one” (Document analysis).

In School C, the SIP indicated that:

“Extra lessons preferably Saturday.... Outsourcing will be done timely so that learners can be taught from a different perspective or angle mostly on a topic that they had not yet mastered” (Document analysis).

Participants of this study declared uncertainties on remedial programmes specifically for learners identified for progression. While school participants mentioned that they do extra classes, morning lessons, tutorials, etc there seemed to be no idea of the activities done during those lessons. **T6** enunciated that:

“We do extra classes and Saturday classes; we have a roster in our school for monitoring those activities. The remedial classes help because after I am able to do revision with them” (Interviews).

In line with the above-quoted statement, **T4** mentioned the unavailability of documented programmes utilised to assist or deal with learner progression. A documented plan serves as evidence for curriculum support and assists in the tracking measures practised. The unavailability of such documents could be seen as non-compliance and defying policies in the education system. In addition, progressed learners’ contribution is by far not visible.

While there was an indication of commitment towards curriculum support, progressed learners’ contributions towards improvement were silent. In addition, Subject Improvement Plan was a generic document towards improvement in specific subjects not necessarily for the effective implementation of the progression policy. The major setback in the intervention was the umbrella approach of the whole class/school intervention toward improvement. The policy on progression clearly indicated each stipulation and role for each stakeholder. Therefore, there is still a need to put measures in place on how each role was fulfilled. Moreover, there is a need to differentiate between SIP and intervention plans for progressed learners.

Varied Insights on Curriculum Support

The main objective of the policy on progression was to ensure that learners exit Grade 12 successfully which is in line with children’s basic rights. Hence, the policy further emphasises curriculum support. However, this study reveals curriculum support within the umbrella of Inclusive Education. Thus, the confusion between Inclusive Education and curriculum support for learners identified for progression. Moreover, there was no indication of progressed learner participation in the process. This was picked from data on the plan for remedial programmes. Progression policy has its stipulations for effectiveness. On the other hand, the Inclusive Education (IE) policy also has its guidelines that differ from the latter. When exploring the intervention strategies in schools, it was realised that a lot was done to assist progressed learners. However, strategies were implemented through guidelines for inclusive Education. This was a challenge to the aim of the study because the focus was on intervention strategies for the learner's progression. This study acknowledges inclusivity due to an element of

support. However, the focus was on curriculum support as the broader aspect of progression policy implementation. **T1** had this to say:

“I don't really have a remedial programme specifically for QPs(learners who qualify for progression), what I do is I organise extra classes for learners who might have challenges, sometimes I'm guided by tests or informal activities we do then I look at how best I can assist them” (Interviews).

On the other hand, **T5** alluded that:

“We have a lot of work, all I do is to ensure that I use the Screening, Identification Assessment and Support Policy to sort out classroom problems. I am an inclusive pedagogue, so I ensure that I attend to diverse needs of learners so that at the end every learner is clear during teaching and learning” (Interviews).

Blending Inclusive Education (IE) and learner progression curriculum support as pointed out in the data remains a challenge and possibly an obstacle to the success of this policy. Although the two policies are clearly articulated, there seems to be a challenge to pick the thin line that exists between the two in terms of teaching and learning. This could compromise the intentions of each of the two policies.

A Possible Approach for Progressed Learner Participation

Some of the participants mentioned that they organise extra lessons for learners who fall behind while others argued for extended opportunities during the presentation as they teach. This was identified as a challenge because the progression policy stipulates curriculum support beyond the normal school timetable. **T1** had this to say on curriculum support:

“I sometimes work with the learners during lesson presentations by doing group work learning. When I see that, some elements show confusion I keep the others busy with work and work with those that have problems. Their tasks also highlight areas that need to be strengthened, so I train them on that” (Interviews).

T2 indicated that intervention outside the school's normal timetable brings out positive results. This was picked from this allusion:

“I have a remedial timetable for them. I am staying next to the school so I categorise them according to their needs and decide to remain maybe with a maximum of three hours to work with them. I need to mention that this has done wonders in my subject, we even improved last year” (Interviews).

It is evident that there are educators who go the extra mile to develop and implement curriculum support programmes specifically for progressed learners. This is an indication of the possibility of support beyond inclusive education. However, involving progressed learners in the planning stage is critical. This could be a motivation as they will be involved and accountable in their own learning rather than imposing intervention strategies with an expectation that they will respond positively.

Participants in this study mentioned that learners progressed for various reasons. That is; age cohort (number of years spent in the phase), subject adjustments and recently pending condone in mathematics subject. Therefore, intervention strategies must be categorised according to reasons for progression. Moreover, it is vital to engage learners identified to establish areas that require support. This approach is likely to address specific challenges. **T3** stated:

“...in my view, these learners must be categorised according to their progressed model and be supported like that. Those who progressed due to age cohort must be treated differently from whose marks were adjusted and so forth” (Interviews).

It can be noted from the above data that categorising identified learners has the potential to address challenges. This participant's view would enhance relevance in curriculum support strategies. However, the gap between theory and practice remains a paramount challenge. The policy on progression was intended to minimise unnecessary school dropouts and to ensure that learners' right to basic education is fulfilled. Thus, ensuring all learners have an opportunity to enter grade 12 and exit successfully. It is worth noting that there is no progression in grade 12. Such learners still need to meet promotion requirements regardless of their condition in that class. Annual grade 12 announcements indicate that only a fraction of these learners pull through. Subsequently, the results seem to be better with the exclusion of progressed learners which highlights challenges in academic support. Within the context of this study, curriculum support was an obstacle. Therefore, there is a need to relook into the practices in place and address flaws such as progressed learner exclusion in developing curriculum support.

DISCUSSION

This study identified the loophole in the plan for the development of intervention programmes which is the exclusion of progressed learners. This had a negative implication on putting plans into practice because the expectation progressed learners' positive responses. The anticipation was for progressed learners to adjust to the workload of the previous and that of the current class. The issue of knowledge construction was ignored. They were in this case, the "empty vessels" who need to be filled with knowledge. This could be regarded as the banking system which brings forth the traditional mindset that the "knowledgeable" teacher teaches and the "novice" learner learns.⁴⁴ Within the context of this study, progressed learners "voice" on how and what to plan for curriculum support goes in the direction of a problem-posing education system that banks on the teacher and learner's collaboration toward effective extended learning opportunities.⁴⁵ In agreement with this finding, Chimbi and Jita argue that teachers need professional development to make the recognition of learners' voices more audible in the classroom.⁴⁶ Progressed learners "voice" on how and what to plan for curriculum support goes in the direction of a problem-posing education system that banks on the teacher and learner's collaboration towards effective extended learning opportunities.⁴⁷

The study picked various perceptions of curriculum support which had implications for the approach. That is curriculum support within and beyond inclusive education. Looking at the implementation of IE and the dynamics that come with the policy, teachers are said to have developed some sort of attitude toward offering support when needed.⁴⁸ Moreover, a conceptualisation that informs implementation, as well as a lack of resources hinder the approach to cater diverse needs of learners. So, curriculum support amongst the stipulations towards effective implementation of the Progression Policy is no exception to the challenges of developing suitable intervention strategies. This has implications for identified learners' ability to access basic education until they obtain Grade 12 because it will be of no use to progress them and not support them academically. Therefore, issues of colonialism and apartheid could not be overlooked as teachers are still fixated on how they were trained.⁴⁹ This then clashes with current learning conditions which acknowledge a learner-centred approach.

The policy on Progression emphasises support to learners identified for progression outside the normal school timetable. Therefore, it is vital that support be offered as per each stipulation. This has the potential to allow opportunities to measure the success or failure of the interventions put in place.

⁴⁴ Durakoğlu, "Paulo Freire's Perception Of Dialogue Based Education," 102-107.

⁴⁵ Freire, "From Pedagogy of the Oppressed," 163-174.

⁴⁶ Chimbi and Jita, "Searching for Learners' Voices," 61-83, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2021-0010>.

⁴⁷ Freire, "From Pedagogy of the Oppressed," 163-174.

⁴⁸ Petra Engelbrecht, Mirna Nel, Norma Nel, and Dan Tlale. "Enacting understanding of inclusion in complex contexts: classroom practices of South African teachers." *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 3 (2015).

⁴⁹ Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, and Tlale. "Enacting understanding of inclusion in complex contexts: classroom practices of South African teachers."

Moreover, it allows the development of relevant support that communicates directly to their needs as per reasons for progression while at the same time recognising the voice of progressed learners. While this study found that intervention strategies put in place are mostly done within the umbrella of IE, it is worth noting that this could be the reason amongst others that some of the schools under study do not really have records of progress with regard to the latter. Progressed learners are likely to lose focus and interest in schoolwork.⁵⁰ Then, they eventually drop out of school which indicates defeat within the education sector. Learner participation has the potential to enhance social learning. Listening to learners is recognised as the main factor that promotes the change process in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends recognition of progressed learners' voices on developing intervention programmes relevant to them as per their reasons for progression. Perhaps, progressed learner representation in school-based support teams could assist in learners' recognition during meetings. This is likely to motivate them as they contributed to their own learning. Professional development is also necessary to engage teachers in a learner-centred approach and its importance for the active learning process. It is also recommended that school-based support teams provide necessary support beyond the normal school timetable to ensure that identified learners bridge the academic gap. Within the context of this study, it remains important that the stakeholders (inclusive of progressed learners) develop and implement intervention strategies relevant to identified learners at hand.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on curriculum support and the extent to which progressed learners are included in the plenary and implementation towards the effective implementation of the progression policy. It appears that progressed learners were not actively involved which is in this case considered a major hindrance to curriculum support. While intervention plans varied from school to school or teacher to teacher, the teacher-learner dialogue was vital from development to implementation. This has the potential to enable the learning process within which both the teacher and progressed learners learn simultaneously. Learners are not empty vessels and can be informed by varied schools of thought toward constructing knowledge. Therefore, this study banks on the importance of progressed learners' contribution toward active engagements during the curriculum. That could reinforce the commitment to improvement. "In dialectical thought, word and action are intimately interdependent."⁵¹ Therefore, teachers and progressed learners' engagement is important.

This study is limited to one district in Limpopo Province and five schools in one circuit. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to a broader population of South African schools or even the Province of Limpopo. A similar study can be conducted in other circuits of the district. A further study on the reflection of intervention strategies can be conducted to establish its impact on progressed learners. The current study found that learners identified for progression were not sufficiently supported due to the lacking voice in the plenary stage. So, researchers may look at other factors that prohibit adequate curriculum support for learner progression.

⁵⁰ Makhanya, "Effect of the Implementation of the Progression Education Policy at Public Institutions : A Case Study of Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa."

⁵¹ Freire, "From Pedagogy of the Oppressed," 163-174.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Iyanda Kamoru, and Bello Sanusi Dantata. "Problems and Challenges of Policy Implementation for National Development." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 6, no. 15 (2016): 60–65.
- Alharahsheh, Husam Helmi, and Pius Abraham. "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism." *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 3 (2020).
- Allensworth, Elaine M. "Dropout Rates After High-Stakes Testing in Elementary School: A Study of the Contradictory Effects of Chicago's Efforts to End Social Promotion." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 27, no. 4 (December 23, 2005): 341–64. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737027004341>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Clarke Victoria. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Brophy, Jere. *Grade Repetition*. The International Academy of Education, 2006. <http://www.smec.curtin.edu.au/iae/>.
- Chimbi, Godsend Tawanda, and Jita Loyiso C. "Searching for Learners' Voices: Teachers' Struggle to Align Pedagogical-Reform Policy with Instructional Practice." *Journal of Pedagogy* 12, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 61–83. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2021-0010>.
- Chohan, Bushra I, and Qadir, Samina A. "Automatic Promotion Policy at Primary Level and MDG-2." *Journal of Research and Reflections* 5, no. 1 (2011): 1–20. <http://www.ue.edu.pk/jrre>.
- Creswell, John W., W Hanson illiam E., VClark Plano, icki L. and Morales Alejandro. "Qualitative Research Designs." *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (March 30, 2007): 236–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>.
- Department of Basic Education. "National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12." Pretoria, 2011. <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Policies/PolicyProgPromReqNCS.pdf>.
- Dufitumukiza, Abel, Wanjala Genevieve, and Khatete Ibrahim. "Nine Year Basic Education Policy Interventions and Students' Enrolments Rates at Lower Secondary Level: A Lesson from Rwanda." *Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 94–112. <https://doi.org/10.52547/johepal.2.1.94>.
- Durakoğlu, Abdullah. "Paulo Freire's Perception Of Dialogue Based Education." *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications* July, 2013, 102–7. <http://www.ijonte.org/FileUpload/ks63207/File/12.durakoglu1.pdf>.
- Endeley, Margaret Nalova. "Teachers Perception and Practice of Automatic Promotion in English Speaking Primary Schools in Cameroon - EA Journals." *British Journal of Education* 4, no. 11 (October 2016): 11–23. <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Teachers-Perception-and-Practice-of-Automatic-Promotion-in-English-Speaking-Primary-Schools-in-Cameroon.pdf>.
- Flutter, Julia. "'This Place Could Help You Learn': Student Participation in Creating Better School Environments." *Educational Review* 58, no. 2 (May 2006): 183–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910600584116>.
- Freire, Paolo. "From Pedagogy of the Oppressed." *Race / Ethnicity Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 2 (January 2009): 163–74. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236820631_Chapter_2_from_Pedagogy_of_the_Oppressed.
- Haidary, Anita. "Controversy over Grade Repetition: Afghan Teachers' View on Grade Repetition." Karlstads University, 2013. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:695166/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Hoadley, Ursula, Gultig John, and Jansen Jonathan D.. *Curriculum: From Plans to Practices*. . Oxford University Press., 2002.

- Letshwene, Jacobine Mantekana. "Key Generic Curriculum Factors Affecting Grade 12 Learner Performance: A Multiple Case Study of South African Secondary Schools." University of South Africa, 2019.
https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/25521/thesis_letshwene_mj.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
- Lücker-Babel, Marie-Françoise. "The Right of the Child to Express Views and to Be Heard: An Attempt to Interpret Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child." *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 3, no. 3–4 (1995): 391–404.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/157181895X00177>.
- Makhanya, Philasande Dedictus. "Effect of the Implementation of the Progression Education Policy at Public Institutions : A Case Study of Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa." Durban University of Technology, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.51415/10321/3941>.
- Makobo, Lydia Mogale, Khashane Stephen Malatji, and Mphahlele Lydia Kgomotso. "Support Teams' collaboration on Curriculum Support for Progressed Learners in Limpopo, South Africa: Teachers' perspectives." *Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation* 32 (2011).
- Makobo, Lydia Mogale, and Mpho Calphonia Modipane. "The Implementation of the Progression Policy in Secondary Schools of the Limpopo Province in South Africa." *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 1 (February 28, 2021): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n1a1853>.
- Malejane, Aobakwe Bacos, and Kabo Diraditsile. "Botswana's Education System: A Relative Analysis with South Korean Education System." *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, October 11, 2019, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.9734/jesbs/2019/v32i230168>.
- Mangiaracina, Antonella, Kefallinou Anthoula, Kyriazopoulou Mary, and Watkins. Amanda "Learners' Voices in Inclusive Education Policy Debates." *Education Sciences* 11, no. 10 (September 30, 2021): 599. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11100599>.
- Motala, Shireen. "Surviving the System - a Critical Appraisal of Some Conventional Wisdoms in Primary Education in South Africa." *Comparative Education* 31, no. 2 (June 22, 1995): 161–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050069529092>.
- Munje, Paul, and Maarman Rouaan. "A Capability Analysis on the Implementation of the School Progression Policy and Its Impact on Learner Performance." *Journal of Education*, no. 66 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i66a07>.
- Nkosi, Thandi Priscillia, and Adebayo Rufus Olufemi. "An Exploration of the Progression Policy and Its Effects on Learner Achievements in Kwazulu-Natal." *Eurasian Journal of Business And Management* 9, no. 3 (2021): 194–207. <https://doi.org/10.15604/ejbm.2021.09.03.002>.
- Okurut, Jeje Moses. "Automatic Promotion and Student Dropout: Evidence from Uganda, Using Propensity Score in Difference in Differences Model." *Journal of Education and Learning* 7, no. 2 (January 16, 2018): 191. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n2p191>.
- Roderick, Melissa, and Nagaoka Jenny. "Retention under Chicago's High-Stakes Testing Program: Helpful, Harmful, or Harmless?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 27, no. 4 (2005): 309–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699564>.
- South Africa Department of Basic Education. "Guideline for the Implementation of Promotion and Progression Requirements for Grades 10-12. ." Pretoria, 2015. <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/c0cc1c10/files/uploaded/Guideline-Promotion-Progression-Jun-2015.pdf>.
- Stott, Angela Elisabeth, Dreyer Hercules, and Venter Peet. "Consequences of the Progression Law in the FET Phase: A Case Study." *Journal of Education*, no. 63 (2015).
<https://doi.org/10.17159/i63a04>.
- Tani, Christian Mambeh. "The Effective Implementation of the Policy of Automatic Class Promotion in Cameroon Public Primary Schools: The Case of North West and South West Regions." *Bulgarian Journal of Science and Education Policy (BJSEP)* 12, no. 1 (2018).
- Tani, Christian Mambeh and Fonkeng Epah George. "The Influence of Human Resources on the Effective Implementation of the Policy of Automatic Class Promotion in Public Primary

Schools in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon.” *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review* 6, no. 6 (2019): 145–54.

Toshalis, Eric, and Nakkula Michael J.. “Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice: Toolkit.” *Jobs For the Future*, May 2012. <http://www.studentsatthecenter.org/topics/motivation-engagement-and-student-voice>.

Tuytens, Melissa, and Devos Geert. “How to Activate Teachers through Teacher Evaluation?” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 25, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 509–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2013.842601>.

Wekesa, Wasilwa Evans, Kanjogu, John Kumi, and Thuku Stephen Ndichu. “Influence of Selected School Factors on Pupils’ Progression in Public Primary Schools in Trans – Nzoia West Sub - County, Kenya.” *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy* 03, no. 09 (September 30, 2019): 309–15. <https://doi.org/10.36348/JAEP.2019.v03i09.002>.

Wright, Marielena P. “Florida Student Progression Policies and Their Effect on Student Achievement.” Florida Atlantic University, 2008. <https://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A34000>.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr Makobo Lydia Mogale is a lecturer and emerging researcher in the discipline of Curriculum Studies. Her research interests include education policy and practice, particularly progression policy implementation; teacher professional development; curriculum development and Instructional practices. She published articles on progression policy in local and internationally accredited journals.

Dr Khashane Stephen Malatji is a senior lecturer and acting director in the School of Education at Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. His research interests cover teaching and learning; evaluation of teaching; curriculum development; assessment; quality assurance and teacher development in higher education. He published extensively in accredited local and international journals.