



The Effects of School Progression Policy on the Progressed Grade 12 Learners' Well-Being At Schools – A Case Study of the Motheo Education District, South Africa

Mamello Admirrow Khobe¹  & Kananga Robert Mukuna¹ 

¹ University of the Free State, Bloemfontein South Africa.

ABSTRACT

The School Progression Policy is an intervention strategy to decrease unnecessary, high dropout rates in the South African Education system. It allows learners to move from one grade to another and thus advance in their careers and exit the basic education school system with a qualification. However, due to this intervention, some learners have experienced social and emotional problems at school, which may affect their well-being. This study explored the effects of the School Progression Policy on the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being in schools. It adopted a qualitative research methodology within a constructivist paradigm and used a case study research design. Thirty-seven learners (23 females and 14 males) and fifteen teachers and SMTs were purposively selected from four schools in the Motheo Education District. Semi-structured interviews were employed for data collection. Thematic results revealed that this policy implementation positively and negatively affected progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being. This study recommended constant empowerment and motivation for the progressed learners and comprehensive orientation at the beginning of the year to prepare and capacitate them to handle the expectations and challenges of Grade 12.

Correspondence

Mamello Admirrow Khobe
Email: m.khobe@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Reforms in policies within Education systems have been introduced to transform school structures, improve the quality of education and mitigate challenges locally and worldwide. These reforms require a holistic assessment of their motives, objectives, applications, and outcomes generated by those within the school systems where they should be implemented.¹

In 2013, the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed the School Progression Policy (SPP), also known as “progression” or “promotion”. Its objective was to uphold the best interests of the learners and prevent them from dropping out of school unnecessarily, thus allowing every learner to attain an exit qualification.² Through this intervention strategy of decreasing unnecessary high dropout rates in the South African Education system, the SPP allows learners to move from one grade to another and thus advance in their careers and exit the basic education school system with a qualification.

¹ D. Senge and R. Winthrop, *Transforming Education Systems: Why, What, and How* (Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution, 2000).

² Department of Basic Education (DoE), *Reviews of National Policies for Education* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2013); Human Science Research Council (HSRC), *Spotlight on Matric 2015: Is Our Education System Failing Our Learners?* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2016), <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/review/hsrc-review-april-to-june-2016>.

This systematic intervention seeks to limit the retention of learners by restricting schools from keeping struggling learners in the school for more than one year in any three-year phase.³ When the learners progress to the next grade, it assumes they will acquire the necessary knowledge to bridge the gaps in the new grade. This raises many theoretical and practical concerns regarding learners' well-being, abilities, opportunities, and logistical support during the teaching and learning process and the availability of support systems needed to facilitate the learners' coping process.⁴

The SPP has stimulated intense debates among educational scholars, with many opposed to the policy. Some argue that the practice of progression results in learners expecting something for nothing, thus weakening academic standards.⁵ McMahon suggested that learners should be held back in a grade until they have mastered the expected knowledge and skills.⁶ Others argued that underachieving learners should repeat the grade for an extra year to master the competencies expected of the level for the given academic year.⁷ McMahon further argued that progression is detrimental because it changes the school model from emphasizing merit to focusing on productivity.⁸ The contention is that progression sends the message that they can proceed without working hard and can also frustrate unprepared learners as it places them in a grade they are unprepared for. Thus, it affects the learners' aspirations and self-esteem and pushes teachers to deal with underprepared learners while simultaneously trying to teach adequately prepared learners.⁹

Despite affording progressed learners a chance to advance in their school careers, the SPP also adversely affects their well-being.¹⁰ For example, Mawhinney et.al., highlighted that the progression affects the learners' self-esteem through the inability to keep up with the material in the next grade.¹¹

Similarly, Khobe reported that the progression might frustrate and discourage learners identified as progressing.¹² It pressures teachers who must provide extra support to the progressed learners.¹³ The study thus aims to explore the effects of the SPP on the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being at schools in the Motheo District, South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fear of retention might hinder the social, emotional, and cognitive development of underperforming learners, resulting in education systems allowing learners to proceed to the next grade with their peers irrespective of their low academic achievement.¹⁴

Those who support the SPP disapprove of retention, arguing that it has harmful emotional consequences on learners. They see retention as synonymous with a traumatic experience, which lowers the school learners' confidence.¹⁵ According to McMahon, retention, especially repetitive retention, increases the likelihood of learners dropping out of school.¹⁶ In addition, holding the learner back from repeating a grade does not

³ Department of Basic Education (DoE), *Reviews of National Policies for Education*; 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>; 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>.

⁴ 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>.

⁵ Toby McMahon, "Despite Our Best Intention: Students Relate How Social Promotion Hurt Them and What Changes They Believe Will Help Them," *Interchange* 49 (2018): 499–519; Khobe M.A., "The Role Of School Progression Policy On Grade 12 Learners' Self-Esteem In Motheo Education District" (University of the Free State, 2021).

⁶ McMahon, "Despite Our Best Intention: Students Relate How Social Promotion Hurt Them and What Changes They Believe Will Help Them."

⁷ Nomaroma Kumanda, Jane-Francis Afungmeyu Abongdia, and T N Mafumo, "Learners' Retention: A Case of Two Primary Schools in East London," *Gender and Behaviour* 15, no. 2 (2017): 8769–76.

⁸ McMahon, "Despite Our Best Intention: Students Relate How Social Promotion Hurt Them and What Changes They Believe Will Help Them."

⁹ Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo, "Learners' Retention: A Case of Two Primary Schools in East London."

¹⁰ R Beere, *IESA Newsletter July* (Cape Town: IESA, 2016), <http://www.included.org.za/news/iesa-newsletter-july-2016/>.

¹¹ Lynnette Mawhinney, Decoteau J Irby, and Erica S Roberts, "Passed Along: Black Women Reflect on the Long-Term Effects of Social Promotion and Retention in Schools," *International Journal of Educational Reform* 25, no. 2 (2016): 154–69.

¹² Khobe M.A., "The Role Of School Progression Policy On Grade 12 Learners' Self-Esteem In Motheo Education District."

¹³ Human Science Research Council (HSRC), *Spotlight on Matric 2015: Is Our Education System Failing Our Learners?*

¹⁴ Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo, "Learners' Retention: A Case of Two Primary Schools in East London."

¹⁵ I Kader, *Challenges of Grade Progression and Promotion in Outcomes-Based Education among Educators of Grade Ten Learners in the Western Cape: A Case Study of Emmerose Secondary School*. (Cape Town: University of Western Cape, 2012).

¹⁶ McMahon, "Despite Our Best Intention: Students Relate How Social Promotion Hurt Them and What Changes They Believe Will Help Them."

ultimately translate into a cure for the educational barriers that the learners might be experiencing.¹⁷ According to Lynch, retention requires that learners repeat a grade for a year or sometimes multiple times.¹⁸ It is based on learners' inability to achieve an acceptable score, demonstrating knowledge and skill on graded standardised tests. This suggests that at least, as a possibility, the teaching approach used for the learner, either in the specific year or throughout their educational career to date, has been ineffective or inappropriate for that individual learner.

The argument against retention has a deleterious effect on the affected learners' social and personal adjustment, including discipline. Retained learners are known to have increased risks of experiencing health-related problems such as stress, low social confidence, substance abuse, and violence.¹⁹ The progression is based on moving learners through the schooling system because retained learners reportedly ran the risk of dropping out of their age cohort, ending up in a grade with much younger children, which had social and emotional implications.²⁰ The retention practice, however, does not benefit learners in the end as it results in some behavioural problems associated with over-age for a given grade. If the learner is not progressing with his peers, they may incur psychological damage, such as a low sense of self-worth.²¹

The SPP thus recognises that retention hardly ever results in better learning success and often has the contrary effect.²² Martorell and Mariano claim that grade retention is also very controversial for reasons other than its monetary costs.²³ They argue that grade retention is punitive and that being a year behind one's peers may result in disengagement with school. Stressful life events correlate with behavioural problems, and learners see grade retention as one of the most stressful events that can occur to them. For this reason, the South African educational authorities abandoned a system of passing learners to the next grade based only on achieving minimum requirements and repetition by adopting the School Progression Policy.²⁴ The literature shows that other studies lacked the in-depth findings of the progressed learners' insights and voices into their lived experiences on the SPP. Thus, in this intervention, learners experienced social and emotional problems at schools, which may affect their well-being. This study thus explored the effects of the SPP on the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a probing phenomenon, principally soliciting data in words. It explores the 'how' and the 'why' of systems and human behaviours, thus governing them. This approach has helped the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the effects of SPP on the Grade 12 learners' well-being at schools. Based on the purpose of the study, the case study design was used to develop a broader and in-depth understanding of how the SPP affected the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being. This study used semi-structured interviews as a data collection instrument to determine how the SPP affects the self-esteem of the progressed Grade 12 learners. It was employed to understand how the SPP affected the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being in the Motheo Education District. These techniques constitute open-ended questions that are asked and followed by further probing and clarification. This means that all the participants received the same set of questions, asked in the same order or sequence by the interviewer. These questions are related to the effect of the SPP on the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being at schools. This technique was beneficial due to its high response rate, as participants tend to respond to the interviewer next to them.²⁵ The study employed audio-tape recording during the interviews with permission from the participants before the research. This study used a thematic analysis technique to analyse qualitative data. Data was organised and prepared by transcribing the interviews and typing the field notes. All the data were then coded, organising text data into categories and labelling the categories with a code. The coding process was used to generate a description of themes for analysis. These themes appear as findings in this study.

¹⁷ Munje and Maarman, "A Capability Analysis on the Implementation of the School Progression Policy and Its Impact on Learner Performance."

¹⁸ Matthew Lynch, "The True Costs of Social Promotion and Retention," *International Journal of Progressive Education* 10, no. 3 (2014): 6–17.

¹⁹ Lynch, "The True Costs of Social Promotion and Retention."

²⁰ Human Science Research Council (HSRC), *Spotlight on Matric 2015: Is Our Education System Failing Our Learners?*

²¹ Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo, "Learners' Retention: A Case of Two Primary Schools in East London."

²² Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo, "Learners' Retention: A Case of Two Primary Schools in East London."

²³ Paco Martorell and Louis T Mariano, "The Causal Effects of Grade Retention on Behavioral Outcomes," *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 11, no. 2 (2018): 192–216.

²⁴ Kader, *Challenges of Grade Progression and Promotion in Outcomes-Based Education among Educators of Grade Ten Learners in the Western Cape: A Case Study of Emmerose Secondary School*.

²⁵ E. R. Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research*, 6th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017).

The validity and reliability of the results were ensured in line with the criteria stipulated by Lincoln and Guba.²⁶ Thus, the results conformed to the highest standards of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, and thus, the researchers have confidence in the truth of the research findings and the degree to which the findings can be applied in other settings or with other participants. This study applied the ethical considerations principles at all stages of the research. Permission to conduct the research was sought from relevant parties, including the University of the Free State Ethics Committee, the Free State Department of Education, and selected schools. The parents of learners, learners, School Management Team (SMT) members, and Grade 12 teachers signed the consent forms to confirm that they agreed to participate in the study. The researchers ensured that the participants understood that consent for participation was voluntary. The researchers ensured to not unnecessarily consume participants' time or make them incur a loss of resources. The researchers adhered to the policies that ensured participants were not exposed to any risk from participating in this study. The researchers further ensured that data collection would not disturb schooling. The researchers further committed to guaranteeing the participants' anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. The researchers informed the participants that participation would not be based on direct or indirect coercion and inducement. All the participants were informed of all the research details, including the possible and potential benefits and immediate or long-term harm, which may be directly or indirectly linked to the research and their participation. Participants were also informed about their right to decline participation outright or withdraw consent at any research stage.

RESULTS /FINDINGS

This study found that the SPP could negatively and positively affect the well-being and feelings of progressed learners at schools in the Motheo Education District. These findings are presented subsequently:

Negative Effects

This study uncovered some of the negative effects of the SPP among progressed learners at schools. These effects included feelings of stupidity or dumbness, inadequacy, sadness, down, failure, disappointment, and shame, enabling others to move forward, struggling, laziness, and making ineligible learners.

a. Stupidity or Dumbness

The results revealed that feelings of stupidity could negatively affect learners' progress in schools. Most learners reckoned they could not learn; they hardly understood the concepts and lacked the reasoning capacity to improve their grades. They mentioned that this made them feel different from their counterparts, who often laughed at them for being progressed and not answering questions in class. The following extracts from three of the participating learners illustrate this:

"I do not even like school because I feel like an idiot. Some learners are happy sometimes, but I feel like leaving school immediately" (Learner 4).

"I sometimes feel bad for having progressed. When we are in class, some other teachers often say that I am progressed. I feel like an idiot" (Learner 5).

"It makes me feel out and stupid. I feel different from other children" (Learner 24).

"It makes me feel dumb and ignorant. When I get into class, and a teacher asks who were progressed, I feel ashamed. I do not raise my hand because I feel others would laugh at me" (Learner 30).

Some participants revealed that these learners felt different from other learners. They felt like they did not know anything. They felt like leaving school because being progressed made them feel like an idiot.

b. Inadequacy

The results revealed that the feeling of inadequacy adversely affected progressed learners at schools. They reckoned they could not adapt to the social, emotional, and intellectual demands of Grade 12. They declared that they felt inadequate in some way regarding the requirements of Grade 12. Moreover, they stated they felt deficient or inferior compared to their counterparts. They thought they were inferior, especially when exposed to things they did not know or could not do. The following extracts from two learners demonstrate this feeling:

²⁶ Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (sage, 1985).

“It makes me feel like less of a person because I just could not do whatever I wanted to do”
(Learner 18).

“It makes me feel less of a human being. Being progressed makes me feel like less of a human being because there are things we do not know when we are progressed” (Learner 37).

c. Sadness

The results revealed that sadness could affect progressed learners at schools. The learners mentioned that they felt disadvantaged, helpless, and disappointed. They reported that they were disappointed at being progressed, as other learners seemed to be passing when they were not progressing. These learners mentioned that they even thought of quitting school because they felt down due to progress. Moreover, they felt sad when they thought of other people's or their counterparts' opinions about their progression to Grade 12. The following extracts from two learners demonstrate this notion:

“I thought of quitting school. I thought about what people would say about me because I am an extrovert, and I have even progressed. I was hurt; I thought I should quit school” (Learner 11).

“I feel sad about being progressed because other learners are passing without being progressed”
(Learner 29).

These extracts revealed that these learners felt sad due to being progressed. The learners alluded that other learners seemed to have done better than them without being progressed.

d. Feeling moody

The results indicated that progressed learners sometimes felt moody at school. They declared that they experienced down and low moods and felt a bit crappy, fed up, and teary due to being progressed. They mentioned that they did not expect to be progressed because they did not feel that they fit the profile of learners to be progressed at the apex of their basic schooling career. Moreover, they mentioned they were uncomfortable being scolded for minor mistakes by the teachers. The following extracts demonstrate this view:

“Being progressed made me feel down because I did not think I was the kind of a person who would get progressed. I did not think that I would be progressed the year that I went to Matriculation” (Learner 8).

“They laugh at us, and when we make mistakes, some teachers scold us. They tell us that this is how we progressed, and that does not go well with us” (Learner 9).

These extracts reveal that these learners felt down due to being progressed. Being progressed took a knock on how they perceived themselves as they never thought they would be progressed.

e. Failure

The results showed that the feeling of failure affected progressed learners at schools. These learners stated that they felt they could not measure up to the schooling system's requirements, standards, and goals. The participants highlighted that learners were unable to perform certain essential tasks, making them feel unworthy as they could not carry out tasks independently without assistance. The participants further underlined that this feeling of being a failure was exacerbated by the negative comments they heard about being progressed. The following extracts from the three learners authenticate this finding:

“I feel like a failure. I feel like giving up in life. People sometimes give me negative words and stuff”
(Learner 21).

“It makes me feel like a failure, and it was my first time to be progressed. It makes me feel like I am not worth it. I cannot do anything” (Learner 31).

“I feel like I am not a good learner. I am a failure. I cannot do things alone” (Learner 33).

These extracts reveal that these learners felt as if they were failures due to being progressed. The learners said they felt like they were not good and therefore felt like giving up on life.

f. Disappointment

The results demonstrated that progressed learners experienced disappointment. The learners reckoned that they were experiencing dissatisfaction following their failure to attain their goals and measure up to the expectations of Grade 11. They mentioned that they did not expect to be progressed to Grade 12, which created a feeling of disappointment when they thought they had passed their examinations. The following extracts from two learners make this view evident:

“I was feeling so disappointed because I did not think I would be progressed” (Learner 10).

“When I got my report, I was not happy. I knew I had passed from the way I wrote in December, but when the report came, I was not happy” (Learner 13).

These extracts reveal that these learners felt disappointed due to being progressed. They indicated that they felt this way because it came as a surprise, as they did not expect to be progressed.

g. Shame

The results show that being ashamed negatively affected progressed learners at schools. This was confirmed only by learners. They indicated they felt distressed, embarrassed, and overcome by feelings of disgrace, especially when the teachers publicly mentioned those who progressed in class. The extract below demonstrates this finding:

“I feel ashamed, especially when I am in class, and the teacher comes and points at those who were progressed” (Learner 19).

This extract reveals that the learners were overcome by shame due to being progressed. This was exacerbated by the teachers pointing at them in class.

h. Unable to move forward

The results revealed that the SPP could bar progressed learners from moving forward at school. These learners mentioned that they could not learn as effectively as they would in Grade 12 because they failed some subjects in Grade 11 and thus progressed to Grade 12. They mentioned that they struggled further and had more difficulty grasping concepts in Grade 12 than in Grade 11. The following extracts from three of the learners illustrate this finding:

“It is not good because it often negatively affects the learners. Learners are unable to move forward, as others drop out of school because being labelled progressed embarrasses them” (Learner 11).

“I see it as something that is not good. Sometimes, some learners become unable if they progress from one grade to the next. Then, they struggle far more than they used to do in the previous grade” (Learner 12).

“It is not right because you will progress a learner who does not understand anything and they get stuck going forward” (Learner 35).

These learners believed the progression policy was not working and referred to it as retrogressive.

i. Struggling

The findings demonstrated that the SPP made the learners struggle as they seemed to lack knowledge of the content. The following extracts from two of the participating teachers illustrate this notion:

“When they arrive in Grade 12, they get very much frustrated, and they lack the listening skills. They do not have the stamina to do Grade 12 work” (Teacher 9).

“I do not like the policy because we are just pushing these learners through the system, whereas they do not even know the content. We are struggling with these progressed learners” (Teacher 10).

These extracts illustrate that these teachers view the progression policy as further exacerbating the challenges facing the learners who struggle with content gaps and some comprehension aspects. Teacher 9 also mentioned that the policy is ineffective because the progressed learners do not have the mental fortitude for Grade 12.

j. Laziness

The results revealed that laziness could affect the school progression policy. Participants indicated that some of the learners were inclined towards being unwilling to work hard and exert themselves despite having the capability to do so. They further mentioned that some learners do not exert themselves and simply think that there is a chance that they may be progressed once again. The following extracts from three learners illustrate this view:

“There are learners who think that if they have progressed to another grade, they just have to pull back, anticipating that they will be progressed to the next grade. Progressing learners is not good because they will relax” (Learner 6).

“I do not think it is a good thing because when one is progressed, they think of being progress again. We do not go all out with our studies” (Learner 7).

“It is also not good because you get to Grade 12 and there is no effort because they pushed you. You did not do it yourself” (Learner 33).

These learners believed that the policy was not a good thing and revealed that the policy creates a sense of laziness and some kind of entitlement. They mentioned that it makes the learners not go all in and exert themselves in their studies.

From the views mentioned above, it emerged that some participants corroborated the feeling that the policy made the learners lazy and limited their potential. These teachers revealed that it made the learners reluctant to seriously engage in their studies. The following extracts from Teacher 8 and Teacher 9 illustrate this observation:

“I do not like it because it limits other learners. If you know that you did not perform well and repeat, it is better because at least you are developing and learning something. Progression is not nice because the learner is carried over without foundation. The problem is that most learners exploit the advantage of progressing despite poor performance” (Teacher 8).

“I am not in favour of it. I have seen learners not being engaged and not being serious about their responsibilities. So, we find teachers sweating far greater than the learners themselves. Learners are just given things without putting more effort into their education as they feel they will progress in the following year” (Teacher 9).

These extracts illustrate that these teachers' views regarding the policy created laissez-faire among the learners. Teacher 9 mentioned that the learners seemed unengaged and put little effort into their education.

Positive Effects

The study demonstrated the positive effects of the SPP among progressed learners at schools. These included opportunity, second chance, and motivation.

a. Giving Opportunities

The results showed that being given opportunities could result in positive feelings for progressed learners at schools. The participants highlighted that they felt they were in a favourable situation that allowed them to improve their academic careers. They also felt that the circumstances were favourable, showing they were worth being in Grade 12 and proving their worth. The following extracts from two learners make this view more evident:

“It makes me feel like I failed myself sometimes, but it also allows me to prove to myself that I am also worthy of being in Grade 12” (Learner 20).

“At the beginning, it was not nice for me, but as time passed, it felt like an opportunity to grab because I had been allowed to make a difference” (Learner 26).

These extracts reveal that these learners did not initially experience the positive feelings arising from being progressed. However, they later felt they had been allowed to prove their worth and make a difference.

b. Given a second chance

The results suggested that being given a second chance could result in positive feelings for progressed learners at schools. The participants stated that they felt they were being given another chance to redirect their energies toward academic achievement and prove themselves in achieving their academic goals after underachieving in Grade 11 and progressing to Grade 12. They further mentioned that this encouraged them to work hard to capitalise on this second chance. The following extracts from the two learners illustrate this:

“First of all, it makes me work hard because the system gives me a chance to prove myself that I can be a better person and I just have to work hard. So, it encourages me” (Learner 1).

“For me, it was just another level to improve myself, you see” (Learner 23).

These extracts revealed that these learners experienced positive feelings about being progressed. They felt like they had been given another chance to prove and improve themselves. Learner 1 mentioned that they were propelled to work hard because they had been given an opportunity to progress to Grade 12.

c. Motivation

The results indicated that motivation could be a positive feeling for progressed learners at schools. The participants said that they felt that they were at a point where they could initiate the necessary goal-orientated activities and behaviours that would enable them to meet their academic needs and goals. They stated that although they were not motivated initially, they transitioned and started feeling motivated. These learners mentioned that progressing indicated they had some potential and were encouraged to perform and work harder. In the following extracts, four learners confirm this finding:

“Being progressed makes me feel like a failure sometimes. However, it now motivates me to put more effort and study harder. When you fail, you are not a failure. It is just that you have missed something you should have grasped” (Learner 6).

“It made me lose confidence, but then I realised that my progression shows that I have potential” (Learner 17).

“It teaches me to be a better person and to do better. I tell myself that I am at the same level as the others” (Learner 25).

“At first, I thought I was foolish, but it changed when I started seeing that I deserved to be in Matriculation when I started performing in term one. Thus, I started performing very well” (Learner 34).

These extracts revealed that some learners did not initially experience positive feelings about being progressed. Nonetheless, they later felt motivated and propelled to work harder. The extracts cited above clearly show the spectrum of the feelings that the participants experienced. While the majority experienced negative emotions as a result of being progressed, a few of them later experienced positive emotions emanating from progress.

DISCUSSION

These findings revealed that the SPP positively and negatively affected the progressed learners' well-being at schools in the Motheo Education District. Most progressed learners at schools were affected negatively by the SPP, which made them feel stupid, dumb, sad, and down, and they had a sense of failure and disappointment. These findings suggested that being progressed made them feel inadequate, unable to learn and understand concepts, and incapable of the reasoning capacity required for the grade to which they had progressed. These findings corroborate the previous studies, which postulated that despite affording progressed learners a chance to advance in their school career, the SPP also adversely affects their aspirations, self-esteem, and well-being and may lead to learners becoming frustrated and discouraged over being identified as progressed learners.²⁷ The findings also indicated that the learners felt like they did not belong with their classmates, who would even laugh at them for being progressed, not answering questions in class, and not adapting to the social, emotional, and intellectual demands placed on them by Grade 12 content. They were reportedly sad and disappointed at

²⁷ Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo, “Learners’ Retention: A Case of Two Primary Schools in East London”; Beere, *IESA Newsletter July*; Human Science Research Council (HSRC), *Spotlight on Matric 2015: Is Our Education System Failing Our Learners?*

the reality of being progressed and even thought of quitting school. This was so because they could not measure up to the standards and goals set by themselves and the schooling system. According to Dian et al., these are negative effects as they explain how the learner experiences adverse emotions such as hostility or fear.²⁸

However, some learners were positively affected by the SPP as it was applied at schools. According to Dian et al., a positive effect is the degree to which the learner feels enthusiastic, active, and alert.²⁹ For instance, they saw educational progression as providing an opportunity, a second chance, and the motivation to do well. The learners highlighted that, because they had progressed, they felt that they had been afforded a favourable opportunity that allowed them to improve their schooling career. They felt that progressing was like being given another chance to redirect their academic effort toward achievement, thus proving to themselves that they could attain their educational goals after failing in Grade 11 and progressing to Grade 12.

These findings implied that SPP comes with disappointments to the majority of the learners. The learners end up questioning their learning, understanding, and reasoning abilities. The negative feelings associated with being progressed also bring frustration to the majority of the learners. As Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo phrase it, progression can frustrate learners as it places them in grades whose concepts they are incapable of grasping, adversely affecting their aspirations and self-esteem.³⁰ The policy compels teachers to deal with underprepared learners while simultaneously trying to teach adequately-prepared learners.

Consequently, this undermines the positive perception progressed learners may hold about themselves and their abilities. The study employed purposive sampling with a small population. The researcher cannot generalise the findings because the scope was limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that the progressed Grade 12 learners should be orientated at the beginning of the year to prepare and capacitate them to deal with the expectations and challenges of Grade 12. This should be done to develop and engage learners at personal, psychological, cultural, and socio-economic levels to achieve their full academic potential. The orientation should be conducted to foster inclusiveness and a healthy learning environment. Furthermore, the study recommends constant empowerment and motivation for the progressed Grade 12 learners. Learners should be empowered to express themselves about the issues affecting their everyday lives, which could be used to solve the issues impacting their lives. The focus should be on enabling them to navigate the learning processes and empowering them with the necessary study skills to bridge the gap between the progressed learners and their non-progressed counterparts. This includes skills hinging upon organisational abilities, time management, appreciating the various learning styles, reading for specific purposes and comprehension, active listening, note taking, anxiety management, and examination skills.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored how the SPP affected the progressed Grade 12 learners' well-being in the Motheo Education District. Concerning the effects of the School Progression Policy, the study found that the SPP disappointed most learners as it adversely affected their perception of themselves. These negative feelings led to frustration for the learners, undercutting the positive perception that progressed learners may have of themselves and their abilities. On a positive note, the study found that the SPP allowed learners to exit the schooling system with a qualification at least. They felt that being progressed was like being given a second chance to direct all their efforts toward achieving their academic goals. The results of this study are significant because they bring to light, from the learners' perspective, the plight of the progressed learners and what can be done to help them achieve their academic potential fully.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Mr. Mamello Admirrow Khobe is a PhD student at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein South Africa. He is also a Deputy Chief Education Specialist at the Motheo Education District, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Dr. Kananga Robert Mukuna is a Senior Lecturer (Educational Psychology) in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. He is also a Managing Editor for the International Journal of Studies in Psychology (IJSPSY).