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EXPLORING THE IDENTITIES OF PROGRESSED LEARNERS IN FOUR TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Supervisor: Prof. NAZIR CARRIM

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Abstract

The aim of the research on which this thesis is based was to identify learners' perceptions regarding their progression from one grade to the next without meeting pass requirements in four mainstream secondary schools. To this end, the study sought to explore how progressed learners' identities were shaped in an environment where they are considered to be 'low' performing learners. The study intended to offer learners in mainstream secondary schools settings a voice regarding being progressed, as well as to share their personal experiences on the implementation and practice of the progression policy which has led to the creation of the "progressed learners" identity. The participants of this qualitative study comprised four principals, four focus groups made up of five Grade 10 educators and 16 Grade 10 progressed learners, eight of whom were males and eight females from the four different schools. The study adopted a phenomenological approach in which the participants gave their lived experiences pertaining to the progression policy. The study briefly examined the nature and implementation of the progression policy in the South African context in relation to inclusive education internationally and locally. The primary finding of this qualitative study indicated that the experiences and voices of progressed learners are often overlooked by educators in mainstream secondary schools. Furthermore, the findings of this qualitative study indicated that both principals and educators have limited knowledge on the implementation of the progression policy which is inclusive in nature. From the findings it is evident that, given the dearth of knowledgeable principals and educators in the selected schools in the Gauteng province committed to the implementation of the progression policy, the Gauteng Department of Education needs to provide the requisite teacher training to pave the way for the implementation of the progression policy. Consequently, the current policies regulating the implementation of inclusive education in the Gauteng Province are in urgent need of review to create the best opportunities and ensure the best results for the learners concerned.

Key terms: inclusive education; identity; social identity theory; marginalisation; retention; progression

Declaration

Declaration

I, Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Witwatersrand, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university. This thesis is entirely my own work, and any assistance is acknowledged.



Signature

30/NOVEMBER/2020

Date

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- Mr Lefa Nkosi, Mr Velaphi Sibiya and Mr Edward Mabena ... “Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It’s not something you learn in school. But if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven’t learned anything.” – Muhammad Ali

- Mr Tebogo Quinton Mokgata ... knowing you is one of the greatest blessings God has ever showered me with.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather Mahlupheka Joseph Nkonde and my late mother Thabisile Nhlavu Nkonde.

May your souls rest in peace!

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Virus
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CMM	Curriculum Management Model
DBSTs	District Based Support Teams
DoBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
FET	Further Education and Training
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GET	General Education and Training
GHS	General House Survey
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
ILST	Institutional Level Support Team
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LO	Life Orientation
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MEO	Multiple Examination Opportunity
NCESS	National Committee for Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
NSC	National Senior Certificate

RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBA	School Based Assessment
SBSTs	School Based Support Teams
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBs	School Governing Bodies
SIAS	Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SMTs	School Management Teams
SSIP	Secondary School Improvement Programme
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It was upon reading two newspaper articles, one published by the *Mail & Guardian* entitled "Motshekga sows confusion about pushing up pupils" (Verasamy, 2015) and the other by *News 24* entitled "Progressed learners could affect matric pass rate" (Wicks & Raborife, 2017) that I became interested in researching the topic of ***progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools.*** The opening statement of the *News 24* article read as follows: "More than 100 000 progressed learners could have a significant impact on the National Senior Certificate pass rate, which Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga is expected to announce on Wednesday evening, the 2015 matric pass rate fell to 70.7%, from 75.8% in 2014".

In 2011, the South African National Department of Education introduced the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12* (DoE, 2011) as a guideline on how learners should be promoted to the next grade. Furthermore, in 2015, the Department of Education further reviewed this policy and unveiled it as Notice No. R1114 in Regulation Gazette No. 9886 of 28 December 2012, entitled *Guideline for the Implementation of Promotion and Progression Requirements for Grades 10-12* (DoBE, 2015) indicating that a learner could only repeat a grade once in a phase (both Senior and Further Education and Training phases). If the learner did not pass this grade after the second opportunity the learner qualified for progression or social promotion to the next grade. The Department of Education implemented this policy to curb the rate at which learners were dropping – out of school. Furthermore, this was also a measure to "include" every learner within the schooling system.

Progression or social promotion is the process of moving a learner from one grade to the next grade even if the learner has not met the pass requirements of that grade in order for the learner to remain with his or her peers (Hoff, Peterson, & Strawhun, 2014). The practice and the implementation of the policy of progression is mainly aimed at protecting struggling learners, keeping and "including" them in the schooling system, as well as a belief that these learners will get more from exposure to new content in the next grade than they would from repeating their current grade. According to Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnuur, Nickerson and

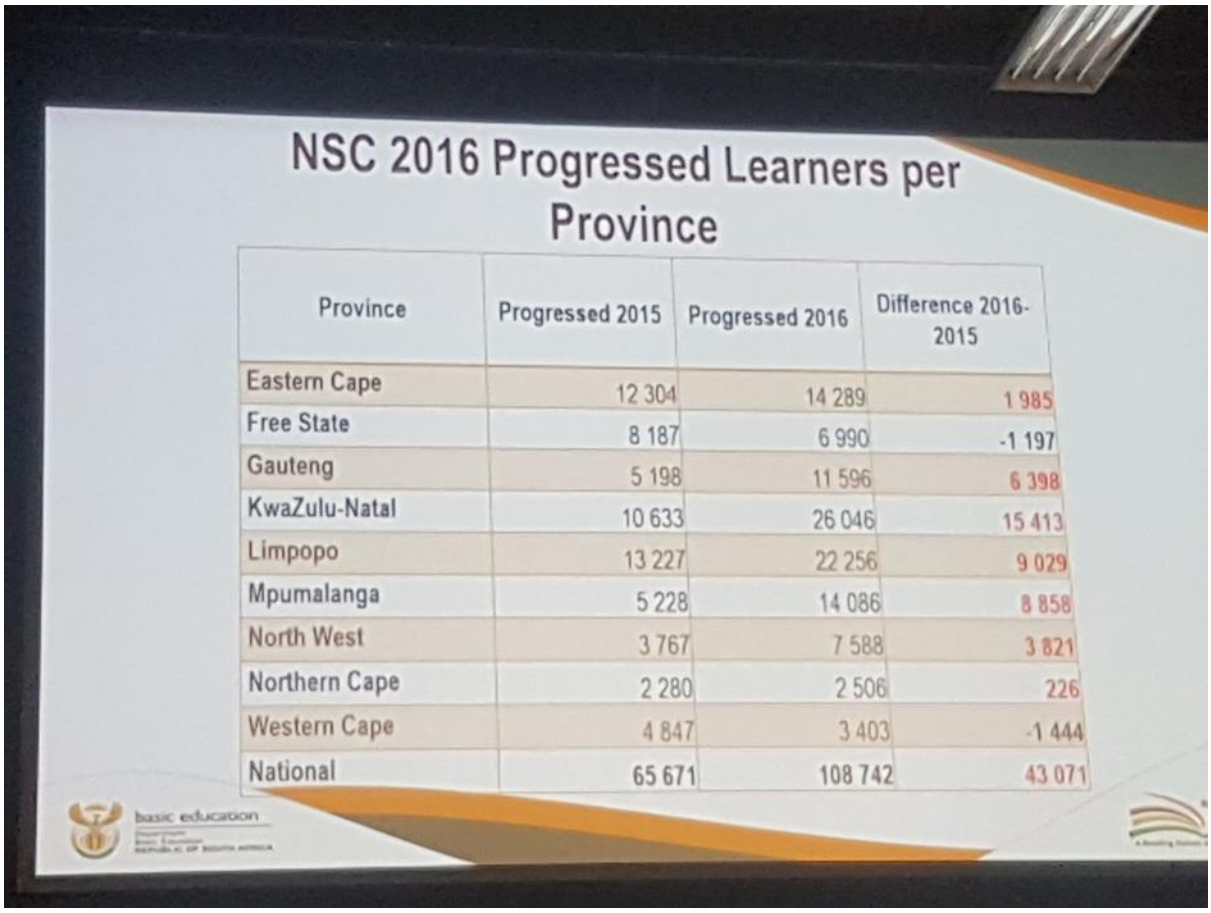
Kundert (2006) progression or social promotion is often considered to be an alternative to grade retention. Renaud (2013, p. 3) clarifies that "grade retention is the practice of keeping students in their present grade because they have not mastered the skills necessary to progress to the next grade". The main idea behind grade retention is that it will offer students more time for learning.

Research on the impact of progression and grade retention is mixed and some researchers such as Renaud (2013) and Frey (2005) have concluded that both practices are unsatisfactory, but social promotion or progression is better as all learners are included in the schooling system. In the South African context, the progression policy was viewed by the Department of Basic Education as a remedy towards combatting the drop – out of learners from the schooling system (DoBE, 2015). Renaud (2013, p. 3) supports this claim, stating that "a review of the literature has shown that grade retention is the strongest predictor of high school drop-out status". Research evidence from Jimerson et al. (2006), Frey (2005) and Martin (2011) indicate that the greatest negative reaction from retained learners suggests that it has a strong, lasting, and detrimental impact on their self-esteem. I strongly feel that the progression of learners is appropriate as it keeps learners in schools together with their age peers.

The implementation of the policy on progression results in these learners developing particular identities as progressed learners because of the challenges they are faced with in grasping knowledge content and the potential stigma associated with being labelled a progressed learner. In an article titled "Progressed matrics not coping" published by the *Mail & Guardian*, (Shamase, 2016), a deputy principal of a high school in a Pietermaritzburg township declared that the policy on progression was problematic and stated that progressed learners were not coping at all with the curriculum and that such a practice put more unnecessary frustration on educators. The same deputy principal encouraged progressed learners who had failed to meet pass requirements to look for alternative schools as they were no longer welcome "in her school". In the same article, another educator from Mamelodi was cited saying that progressed learners are nothing but a nuisance as they demonstrate behavioural problems such as stealing from other learners and elements of bullying. The educator further accused progressed learners of vandalism which had threatened the entire school.

The progression policy should be understood in a comprehensive context though. The Department of Basic Education introduced this policy partially to prevent learners from being retained in a phase for more than two years, and also to prevent learners from dropping out of

the schooling system. This was a way of including and keeping all learners in schools. Furthermore, progressed learners have proved that, given full support, they can perform to their utmost best and produce positive results (Jordaan, 2018). In an article titled "Education system must be overhauled to prepare matriculants" published by the *Mail & Guardian* (Mola, 2016), they stated that out of the 65 671 progressed learners in 2015, 3 297 passed matric with an exemption qualification (a National Senior Certificate pass that allows one to enrol for an undergraduate bachelor's degree at university level), and that this showed that progressed learners could attain their National Senior Certificate regardless of their failure to meet pass requirements in Grade 10 and/or 11. However, as these figures indicate, it was only 5.02% of progressed learners who were able to matriculate in 2016. Quoting from *The Sowetan* in an article titled "Progressed learners do well in 2017 matric, says Lesufi" (Jordaan, 2018), the MEC for education in Gauteng said "I am happy to announce that 68.7% of the progressed learners that wrote have passed, compared to 61% in 2016. These are learners who would have had to repeat Grade 11 in 2017".



Province	Progressed 2015	Progressed 2016	Difference 2016-2015
Eastern Cape	12 304	14 289	1 985
Free State	8 187	6 990	-1 197
Gauteng	5 198	11 596	6 398
KwaZulu-Natal	10 633	26 046	15 413
Limpopo	13 227	22 256	9 029
Mpumalanga	5 228	14 086	8 858
North West	3 767	7 588	3 821
Northern Cape	2 280	2 506	226
Western Cape	4 847	3 403	-1 444
National	65 671	108 742	43 071

Figure 1.1: Shows the number of progressed learners for academic year 2015 and 2016 (DoBE, 2016)

However, whilst the above discussion and figures show the way in which progressed learners are viewed by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa, progressed learners are also learners who have been framed by a specific identity within schools and these also have an impact on these progressed learners' experiences. It is from this background that I felt it was necessary to explore the identity formation of progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools as they are constantly labelled and stigmatised.

The concept identity is derived from the Latin *idem* which means 'the same' (Falsafi, 2010). Yet, the policy on progression seems not to be treating learners the 'same', in the sense that it has created a new identity in the learning environment. Learning, which is the acquisition of knowledge both in formal and informal situations, leads to the creation of one's new identity by discovering new information. Lave and Wenger (1991) cited in Coll and Falsafi (2010), claim that "learning and a sense of identity are inseparable, they are aspects of the same phenomenon". Learners shape their identities from what they learn both at home and in schools. Schools, in particular play a major role towards the development of learners holistically. Falsafi (2010, pp. 10-11) ascertains that

> from a sociocultural point of view learner identity is constantly constructed throughout life and through experiences of learning. These experiences occur in formal as well as informal situations. The educational systems are, hence, influential arenas for learner identity construction, and the experiences and learning outcomes of the students are affected by the learner identity that they develop.

Progressed learners are, therefore, a new social identity created by institutions of learning. Progressed learners seem to be exposed to stigmatisation and marginalisation by the same institutions that should be protecting them from any harm. The policy seems to be unfriendly and negatively impacting on progressed learners.

In a study conducted by Soudien, Carrim and Sayed (2004, p. 20) investigating inclusion and exclusion in South African schools based on policy, they mention that "effective access to education, particularly at the lower levels, crucially depends on how policies are implemented and received at the institutional, community and individual levels". It becomes vital, therefore, that policies are reviewed and evaluated before implementation, to make sure that all stakeholders in education are catered for and how the policies are experienced by them are taken into account. Educational policymakers tend to ignore how some of the policies impact on the experience and construction of learner identity, such as the progression policy (Soudien et al., 2004). The chief focus on the progression policy is to keep learners within the schooling

system, with their peers or age mates. However, little or no attention has been paid to the repercussions of the policy. Often, progressed learners seem to be subjected to dehumanising and humiliating experiences as some educational practitioners in mainstream secondary schools label and stigmatise them (Jimerson et al., 2006). It appears though that progressed learners are not only marginalised by their educators but even by other learners who seem to create a gap between them and progressed learners (them and us). These are the learners who have been able to meet pass requirements as stipulated by the policy. Policy makers seldom solicit from all the stakeholders in education (more especially the learners) how the policy itself affects their day – to – day lives. A closer look at the identity of progressed learners will enable an analytical approach to understanding the connection between intra- and inter-psychological processes that affect their participation in learning activities creating and resulting in this new identity of – progressed learners.

As an educator in a mainstream secondary school, the identities of progressed learners who have not met pass requirements is of particular interest to me mainly because, in my experience, it seems they are subjected to marginalisation and exclusion (labelling which results in stigmatisation), arguably because learners are being advanced despite the fact that they are not academically prepared, and have not earned the promotion. In light of this Sayed (2009, p. 28) argues that "teachers are crucial to ensuring inclusion of marginalised learners at the classroom level". It seems that educators themselves make a clear division between progressed learners and those learners who have met pass requirements. However, progressed learners deserve to be included in the schooling system fairly and justly regardless of their struggle to meet pass requirements, and they must receive as much support as possible from their educators - which is one of the practices of achieving inclusion. UNESCO outlines inclusion as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education" (UNESCO, 2011, p. 4). It makes it evident, therefore, that to curb the marginalisation and exclusion of progressed learners, the system of education must adapt to the needs of the learners, rather than the learners adapting, and thus being marginalised by the demands of the system.

One important way of exploring the identities of progressed learners was to listen to their voices and find out from them how their identity as progressed learners made them feel. Research evidence such as Messiou's (2012) indicates that it has become important to listen to learners,

and it is therefore also evident that using voices in research is increasingly applicable in educational research. Furthermore, Walton (2012) has also made it clear that in order to create effective inclusive environments within the broad field of inclusive education, it is important to listen to the voices of children, and this could minimise their marginalisation. Valuable information is being lost as a result of their voices being ignored. This research thus looks at the experiences of learners in relation to the experiences of their principals and educators.

1.2 Problem Statement

In most South African township secondary schools, some learners are allowed to advance to the next school grade, even when their test scores and overall academic achievement do not prove their preparedness for the next academic year (DoBE, 2015). In an attempt by many schools in South Africa to include learners who are experiencing academic challenges, a new learner identity seems to have been created known as progressed learners. Little is known about the identity formation of learners who have been progressed from one grade to the next as stipulated by the policy entitled *Guideline for the Implementation of Promotion and Progression Requirements for Grades 10-12* (DoBE, 2015). According to Lobatón (2011, p. 62) "identity is constructed and co-constructed by one – self and others bearing in mind the way social dynamics are developed and what the different roles individuals assign or are assigned according to specific situations are". Most South African schools which implement the policy on progression seem to have developed a new learner identity known as progressed learners because of the challenges there are faced with in grasping knowledge content. Identity is a negotiated experience in and across social communities where learning occurs (Falsafi, 2010).

Since learning transforms who we are and what people can do, it is an experience of identity, it is not just an accumulation of skills and information but a process of identity formation (Falsafi, 2010). Media houses such as the *Mail & Guardian* have reported that, recently, progressed learners have attracted a lot of attention from the education fraternity as being responsible for the poor performance demonstrated by the National Senior Certificate results because they have failed to meet the pass requirements as stipulated by the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12* (DoBE, 2011). Soudien et al. (2004, p. 20) claim that "there is need in current development research to voice the concerns of marginalised groups in policy and to link policy processes and outcomes to the ways in which people locate their experience and

relationship with institutions of policy delivery within their multiple and overlapping identities".

Inclusive education, which puts more emphasis on the respect and recognition of learners' diversity is rooted in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996a) and this provided the basis and motivation for the first major policy of inclusive education. The South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 84 of 1996, as amended (RSA, 1996b) together with the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) are some of the official documents that put extra emphasis on the right to access and complete education for all learners including progressed learners. Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, and Tlale (2015, p. 1) claim that:

> In essence, inclusive education is not only about access to education, but also about acceptance and participation in the implementation of inclusive education and the resultant promise of quality education for all (Terzi, 2008). Inclusive schools are therefore about belonging, nurturing and educating all students, regardless of their differences in ability, culture, gender, language, class and ethnicity.

Often voices of school going children are ignored concerning educational issues that concern elements of exclusion and marginalisation in institutions of learning and in most cases, there is lack of knowledge regarding their experiences and how they feel about being marginalised (Messiou, 2012). Walton (2011, p. 84) argues that "listening to children and young people who have been marginalised or excluded provides valuable insights into their experiences". Little research has been conducted to find out about the experiences of progressed learners on how they feel about the policy on progression in the South African context. Walton (2011, p. 84) further ascertains that "South Africa, by contrast, has seen little research with children and young people about their views and experiences of inclusion and exclusion in schools". For this reason, this research focuses on the voice of progressed learners who have been progressed from one class to the next without meeting pass requirements.

Listening to the voices of a small group of progressed learners from mainstream secondary schools foregrounds the importance of understanding an initiative that seeks to break the cycle of poor educational outcomes and deficiency associated with underachieving schools. This study is thus interested in how learners' experiences can be interpreted in addressing prejudiced educational outcomes in the Ekurhuleni metropolitan (the former East Rand) area of the Gauteng Province of South Africa due to the implementation and the practice of the progression policy. Walton (2011, p. 84) claims that "in the context of schooling, children offer crucial and distinct perspectives which are necessary to provide a complete account of schooling (Mason,

2004, p. 44) and their voice could contribute to the improvement of education and increase teachers' understanding of their learners".

1.3 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to identify learners' perceptions regarding their progression from one grade to the next without meeting pass requirements in mainstream secondary schools. The study sought to explore how progressed learners' identity is shaped in an environment where they are considered to be 'low' performing learners. The research intended to offer learners in mainstream secondary school settings a voice regarding being progressed, as well as to share their personal experiences on the implementation and practise of the progression policy which has led to the creation of this new identity. Moreover, the purpose of the research is to offer insights which may be of value to stakeholders in education such as the Department of Basic Education, educational professionals, policy makers, educators and parents on how learners feel when progressed to the next grade without meeting pass requirements. From this perspective, it makes it important that the stakeholders in education listen to what learners have to say about being progressed and it is hoped that this research will arouse interest in people's thoughts and feelings around progression.

A complete understanding of progressed learners' experiences could not only be drawn from the voices of the progressed learners but also from the principals and educators who are the key implementers of the progression policy in schools. According to Munje & Maarman (2016) principals and educators of mainstream secondary schools were instructed by the Basic Department of Education to cautiously and consciously observe the implementation of the progression policy in schools in order to meet the academic needs of affected learners. Principals are essential in schools as they contribute towards the development of a standardized curriculum, assess teaching and learning methods, monitor learner achievement, encourage parent involvement, revise policies and procedures, and oversee facilities. Educators. On the other hand, drive the educational system and they are the ones who interact with learners on day to day basis. Learners are the ones who need support when learning a new skill or piece of information. Educators, therefore, act as the support structure for learners when help is needed. It was from this point of view that the study included principals and educators of the four different mainstream secondary schools who gave their accounts on how the policy on progression impacts on the learners.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to answer to the following research questions:

1. How are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression?
2. To what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education?

1.5 Inclusive Education and the Progression Policy

Inclusive education refers to the process of including all learners in schools regardless of any learning barriers that they might be experiencing. Inclusive education places more emphasis on the rights of learners than on their physical, mental, socio-economic, cultural and even racial backgrounds (DoE, 2011). Kafia (2014, p. 327) states that "inclusive education is defined by UNESCO as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education". From this school of thought, children have a right to quality education regardless of any learning barrier that might arise in the process of teaching and learning. This means that any system of education must adapt and meet the educational needs of the learners rather than the learners adapting to any system of education. Learners learn because they are accepted for who they are and inspired to be all that they can be as they partake in meaningful activities with high expectations. Inclusive education is rooted in the belief that all learners should be given equal educational opportunities unconditionally (DoE, 2011) (see Chapter Two).

Inclusive education puts more emphasis on the principles of human rights and pursues the recognition of all learners in a mainstream school. It further involves a sense of belonging, support and the involvement of all learners in mainstream schools, in addition to formal access and geographical placement (Jones, 2013). The Salamanca Framework explains inclusive education as an educational approach that is aimed at including all children with special educational needs in mainstream education by paying attention to the needs of individual learners. The Salamanca Statement UNESCO (1994b, pp. 7-8) stipulates that:

> Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of students, accommodation of both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities.

In this study, inclusive education is explained from an international perspective as well as from the South African viewpoint. I explain how the education policies and legislation in the South African context are linked to the broader international educational interventions including but not limited to Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Salamanca Declaration. I additionally outline what is understood by inclusive education in general and how it is understood in South African policies and legislation and in its implementation (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3 for more details).

The implementation and practice of the progression policy (social promotion) is considered to be part of inclusive education as it allows learners to proceed to the next grade with their peers, albeit not meeting pass requirements. Progression or social promotion is the practice of keeping learners who fail with their age group in the same class to avoid retention and/or school dropout (Renaud, 2013). Progression is embedded in the values of inclusive education which states that it is every learner's right to fully participate in education regardless of race, gender, creed, (dis)ability and socio-economic background (UNESCO, 1994a). Education systems have an increased responsibility to effectively teach learners whose learning styles and needs vary widely, through inclusive education models. Learners want and need to learn in ways that are accessible to them, and they want to have varied choices for demonstrating what they have learned. Education systems, therefore, need effective models that integrate variations for learning and teaching in the goals, methods, materials, and assessments of instruction. In a study conducted by Engelbrecht et al. (2015, p. 1) that focused on classroom practices of South African teachers, they mention that "an inclusive classroom is thus viewed as a place that both embodies and supports learning for a diverse range of learners, where deficit views of difference and deterministic views about ability are rejected, and participation shapes the experiences and identities of all individuals' party to classroom activities". Learners, therefore, need to be supported in schools instead of being subjected to dehumanising conditions such as being labelled and stigmatised (see Chapter Two Section 2.2.3 for more details).

The justification behind the implementation of the progression policy in the South African context was to curb the escalating drop – out rate in schools which appeared to be a result of an extensive retention of learners. The accommodation of all children in schools regardless of any learning difficulty that might exist, is congruent to the principles of inclusive education, therefore, the progression policy is inclusive in nature. Grade progression promotes learners' self-esteem as they move along with their peers. It eliminates the difficulties learners face with

retention, and it prevents learners from dropping out of school. Jimerson et al. (2006) clearly states that progressing learners from one grade to the next is mainly implemented to curb grade retention which is assumed to have a negative effect on learner achievement, attitude toward schools, school attendance, and learner dropout rates. Furthermore, another study conducted by Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, and Sourfe (1997) reports that learners who repeat a grade do not succeed at a higher rate than learners who are progressed from one grade to the next regardless of the failure to meet pass requirements. In essence, retained learners often learn less than progressed learners within the next year. Progressed learners have been found to have higher emotional health than those who are retained. It shows, therefore, that the progression policy and its objectives are rooted in inclusive education programmes.

My standpoint in this study is that the grade progression policy is rooted in the principles of inclusive education, hence, it strives to keep learners within the schooling system rather than dropping out without attaining at least a minimum qualification. It is from this background that my argument on inclusive education will constantly refer to the grade progression policy. Inclusive education means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded. In this study, progressed learners represent those who have been excluded. It appears though that educators have different and negative presumptions of what inclusive education entails.

Identity refers to who you are as an individual, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you (Falsafi, 2010). Since this study is rooted in the experiences of progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools, it makes it vital, therefore, to understand the role of education towards identity formation. Education is frequently used by individuals to shape their "social identities", framing their understanding of themselves and their relationships with other people. It appears though that the emphasis on education in today's societies makes it challenging for people with low levels of education to develop a positive social identity. Progressed learners, as they are identified in schools using policies and legislation, are viewed as having low capabilities with a homogeneous identity. Identity formation has been most extensively described by Erik Erikson in his theory of developmental stages, which ranges from birth through adulthood. According to Erikson, identity formation, while beginning in childhood, gains prominence during adolescence. On the other hand, Stuart Hall suggest that, identities undergo constant transformation, transcending time and space. According to Stuart Hall's cultural identity, this is the identity or

feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of an individual's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. Hall suggests that people have multiple identities rather than homogeneous identities (see more details in Chapter Two).

1.6 Social Identity Theory

A theory is a model or framework for observation and understanding, which shapes both what we see and how we see it (Wacker, 1998). Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. De Benetti (2009) argues that theories assist researchers in ordering a set of concepts to define and explain some phenomenon. Theories consist, therefore, of reasonable interactions shaped among concepts and set of concepts, providing both a framework for critically understanding a phenomena and a basis for considering how what is unknown can be organised (De Benetti, 2009). Furthermore, a theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. This study used the Social Identity Theory (hereafter SIT) by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979).

Social identity theory proposes that a person's sense of who they are depends on the groups to which they belong. SIT originated from British social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. SIT puts more emphasis on self-esteem which is the motivation underlying inter-group behaviour. SIT comprises of processes which include social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison. Furthermore, SIT entails three strategies used by group members to achieve positive social identity which includes social mobility, social change and social creativity (see Chapter Two, Section 2.9 for more details).

From what I have discussed above, it becomes pragmatic that the implementation of the progression policy in the South African context is aimed at realising the goals and principles of inclusive education however, it appears that a new identity, known as progressed learners has been brought to light. As I have indicated earlier that both the practice of retention and progression cannot be solely implemented in schools based on the assumption that they do not benefit learners, it appears that holding more learners back is the wrong choice and the implementation of the progression policy seems to be accommodative and inclusive. Proponents of the progression policy such as Jimerson et al. (1997), Jimerson et al. (2006), Renaud (2013) and Frey (2005) indicate that learners who are required to repeat a year are

more likely than other learners to ultimately drop out of school, develop undesired behaviour and few catch up academically with their peers. Furthermore, as suggested by Jimerson et al. (1997) it appears that learners who are socially competent are more likely to be accepted by their educators and peers. Peer acceptance has been associated with better academic achievement, however, learners who are rejected by their peers are more likely to experience difficulties in school transitions and to eventually drop out of school (Erdley & Asher, 1999). It is from this perspective that I personally believe that progressed learners should be given a chance to move along with their peers in order to accomplish an inclusive education system. Inclusive education has been defined by Booth and Ainscow (2002) as a practice of maximising participation of all children in schools and minimising marginalisation and exclusion from the ethos, community and curricula of mainstream schools. Inclusive education is rooted on the notion that every child can learn in mainstream schools irrespective of any learning barrier that the child maybe experiencing. It becomes fundamental, therefore, for schools to develop refined inclusive educational structures that would witness appropriate implementation of an inclusive system and this include but not limited to attitudes, qualified educators, appropriate infrastructure, flexible curricular and inclusive assessment tools. In the South African context, scholars such as Walton (2018) and Engelbrecht et al. (2015) point out that learners who are experiencing learning difficulties such as progressed learners are constantly marginalised and excluded, solely because the education system as a whole is failing to meet the principles of inclusive education. It seems that as a result, progressed learners are negatively identified and labelled due to their inability to meet pass requirements. Educational spaces such as schools are obligated to assist learners shape their social identities positively and assist them towards framing their understanding of themselves and their relationships with other people. In essence, inclusive schools become a necessity as they inspire active participation and experimentation with ideas among learners. Furthermore, an inclusive system of education organizes learners to anticipate the need for change and to believe in their own ability to take positive steps for the benefit of society leading to the creation of a positive identity. It is from this viewpoint that progressed learners should not only be viewed and identified as progressed learners but as human beings who are capable of doing a lot of things and this could be accomplished in an inclusive education system.

1.7 Different Approaches to Inclusive Education Research

In this study I have adopted the emancipatory/transformative approach to inclusive education which is embedded in the belief that recognises the intentional collaboration with minority and marginalised groups or people in society whose voice is not heard on certain issues, who are progressed learners in this instance (Barnes, 2003; Mertens, 2007; Oliver, 2002). However, I also recognise the school reform approach which explores and promotes the transformation of school structures with the intention of raising the quality of education in schools; in this instance, I focus on the empowerment of educators and meaningful interventions (Tucci, 2009). In the following section of the study I briefly discuss the approaches used in inclusive education research namely, disability approach, school reform approach, critical theory approach and emancipatory/transformative approach (see Chapter Two Section 2.4 for more details).

1.7.1 Disability approach

Quite often, people who are affected by a certain phenomenon are constantly left out when conducting a research about the phenomenon. The disability approach in inclusive education emanates from the exploration of how disability is understood and the position and experiences of disabled people both within and across different societies (Oliver & Barnes, 2010). The disability approach, as explained by Oliver and Barnes (2010) seeks to evaluate the extent at which different societies limit the opportunities of people living with disabilities by confining their participation in mainstream economic and social activities. The disability approach has been viewed vital towards social policy and the creation of disability policies in different societies even though it has been less influential towards educational policies (Oliver & Barnes, 2010).

1.7.2 School reform approach

This approach is embedded on the view that school administrations and structures need to be transformed in order for schools to obtain quality outcomes (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Dyson, 2003). As an educator in a mainstream secondary school, I became interested in this approach because it appears that we (educators) are expected to offer "a-one-size-fits-all type of education". Learners, both gifted and struggling, are offered the same curriculum and the same assessment strategies. This approach calls upon the changing of attitudes and structures which include organising the school to facilitate transformed teaching and learning, transforming curriculum and instruction, providing learners with the necessary academic and social support,

increasing teacher and principal effectiveness, maximising stakeholder resources and ensuring continuous improvement (Tucci, 2009) – which it appears some mainstream secondary schools seldom adhere to.

1.7.3 Critical theory approach

According to Sandars (2016) critical theory is concerned with the distribution of power in social systems and how one group in society can be controlled and oppressed by another group in society. The critical theory approach offers opportunities and understanding of the different perspective of disadvantaged members of society. It is quite essential to understand critical theory approach from an educational point of view as this would help in understanding the injustices and inequalities that are prevalent in our educational spaces, such as schools (Bethel, 2006).

1.7.4 Emancipatory/transformative approach

In this study I have adopted the emancipatory/transformative approach based on the fact that it focuses on minority or marginalised groups which include women, black people, the disabled, the poor, gay men and lesbians and any other groups of people who have experienced marginalisation and whose voice is seldom heard (Barnes, 2003; Mertens, 2007; Oliver, 2002). In this study, progressed learners took the identity of the minority and the marginalised as the study sought to hear their voices pertaining to their experiences regarding the progression policy in schools, irrespective of how they are identified with regard to educational policies and legislations in the South African context. The emancipatory approach stresses social change as its key objective and oppression as its central focus (Rose & Glass, 2008). Furthermore, the emancipatory/transformation approach in research deals with negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment, taking emancipation as a critical position that through the participative approach leads to a building of awareness (Barnes, 2003; Mertens, 2007; Oliver, 2002).

1.8 Background of the Research Methodology

This study was inspired by the interpretivist paradigm mainly because, as an educator in a mainstream secondary school, I have always wanted to have an in-depth understanding and interpretation of progressed learners' experiences pertaining to the implementation of the progression policy (social promotion). The interpretivism research approach is viewed as an

ideographic research, the exploration of individual cases or events and it has the ability to understand different people's voices, meanings and events (Rahman, 2017). In this study I used a qualitative research methodology because I felt that it was appropriate as it is both process and explorative-oriented, focuses on understandings, it is holistic in its approach and follows a rational and interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

This study was conducted phenomenologically since phenomenology is concerned about the individual experiences of people. Therefore, it usually involves long, in-depth interviews with subjects, and sometimes scholars will interview the same subject several times to get a full picture of their experience with the phenomenon (Wilson, 2015). In this study, participants which included progressed learners, principals and educators gave their interpretation of their experiences pertaining to the execution of the progression policy in mainstream secondary schools and how it impacted on their lives.

The empirical inquiry was conducted in two phases. Phase one took place in the middle of the second term of schooling where participants (learners) were given a questionnaire in which they were asked to respond to questions regarding their experiences on the progression policy (see Appendix 6). Participants were given 10 days to return the questionnaires. Phase two of the study consisted of interviews which were conducted with all participants (learners, principals and educators) and this took place towards the end of the third term of schooling. I conducted 30-minute semi-structured interviews with learners (see Appendix 7) and principals (see Appendix 9) individually. Furthermore, I then conducted 60-minute focus group interviews with educators (see Appendix 8). Group interviews informed me about the progression policy and a more in-depth understanding of how opinions and knowledge were formed in the selected participants in these schooling contexts (see more details in Chapter Three).

An inductive data-analysis method was used in the study. I used inductive coding, which began with close readings of the text and a consideration of the multiple meanings inherent in the text. Next, I identified text segments that contained meaning units, and created a label for a new category to which the text segment was assigned. According to Dawson (2006) data analysed by themes is called thematic analysis. This nature of analysis is said to be highly inductive in the sense that the themes arise from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher. For the purposes of conducting a thematic analysis of the data generated during the research study,

I used questionnaires and the interview reports to strengthen the authenticity of the study (see more details in Chapter Three).

1.9 Ethical Considerations

In any type of research, the perception and regard of research ethics is of chief significance (Yin, 2011). In this study, I ensured that confidentiality and anonymity of the members was well secured. Confidentiality means not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee, deliberately or accidentally, in ways that might identify an individual. Creswell (2005, p. 39) claims that "in a research context, confidentiality means not discussing information provided by an individual with others and presenting findings in ways that ensure individuals cannot be identified (chiefly through anonymisation)". Through anonymisation, researchers seek to protect research participants from the accidental breaking of confidentiality.

Mason (2002, p. 80) alludes that "many of the ethical guidelines published by professional academic associations emphasise the importance of gaining the informed consent of all participants in research". Prior to every interview conducted as part of the study, every participant was given a full clarification of their rights (for instance, concerning confidentiality and anonymity) during and after the pertinent sessions. In this study, I gave consent letters to the parents or guardians of the learners via the learners who then signed the consent forms on behalf of their children (see Appendix 2 and 3). Parents and guardians were informed about the voluntary cooperation of their children. The participating educators (see Appendix 4) and principals (see Appendix 5) all signed a consent form which informed them that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty even after signing the form. Educators signed a group agreement consent form to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. According to Dawson (2006) it is essential for a researcher to disclose all issues pertaining to the study to the participants, and to provide them with a Code of Ethics before the commencement of the study. The purpose of the study was well explained as well as my position of being a student researcher at the University of Witwatersrand.

I also applied for Research Ethics clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) at the University of Witwatersrand to conduct the study (see Appendix 10). The study did not carry on until I received the Research Ethics clearance from the University. To gain access to the four township schools, I, furthermore, applied for permission to conduct the

study from the Gauteng Department of Education head office in Johannesburg where access to the secondary schools was granted (see Appendix 11). Moreover, to gain access to the four different secondary schools, letters asking for access from the schools were sent to all the Principals of the different institutions (see Appendix 1).

1.10 Definition of Key Concepts

1.10.1 Inclusive education

Inclusive education is commonly understood as education for people living with disabilities, yet it is not true. Inclusive education is far broader than that, and for the purposes of this research, the study of inclusion will be concerned with any learner who may possibly experience any form of exclusion or marginalisation. Walton (2011, p. 85) suggests that "inclusive education is thus concerned with achieving equity by identifying and addressing direct and indirect impediments to access, participation and belonging in school cultures, facilities and curricula". Inclusive education is about quality and equal educational opportunities for everyone.

1.10.2 Identity

Identity refers to who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you. Lobatón (2011, pp. 62-63) claims that "identities are malleable and dynamic, a permanent construction of who we are and who we might become as a result of our participation with others in the experience of life". Furthermore, Terry, Hogg, and White (1999, p. 227) define self-identity as "a collection of identities that reflects the roles that a person occupies in the social structure". They also identify a close link between self-identity and behaviours which are demonstrated in the wider social context.

1.10.3 Marginalisation

Inclusive education is embedded in the notion that all learners can learn. It is in line with the human rights discourse which puts more emphasis on an ongoing obligation towards a fair and just or equitable environment (UNESCO, 1994a). It is, therefore, important for educational institutions to review all policies, strategies and regulations that marginalise and discriminate children based on their physical, mental, socio-economic, cultural and even racial backgrounds. Messiou (2012, p. 1312) defines marginalisation as "the state of being considered unimportant,

undesirable, unworthy, insignificant and different resulting in inequality, unfairness, deprivation and enforced lack of access to mainstream power". Marginalisation refers to the practice whereby something or someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance. This is predominantly a social phenomenon by which a minority or sub-group is excluded, and their needs or desires ignored. Those who have power always show superiority over the vulnerable.

1.10.4 Grade promotion

The advancement of a learner from one grade to the next grade is called learner promotion. According to the national policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the NCS Grades R-12 (DoBE, 2011, p. xi) promotion refers to "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". This occurs when a learner meets the pass requirement of that particular grade.

1.10.5 Grade progression

Progression of learners which is also known as social promotion is the practice of moving learners to the next grade albeit not meeting pass requirements of the current grade with their age group (Renaud, 2013). Progression is often considered the alternative to retention. According to Jimerson et al. (2006) this is done because retention has a negative effect on learner achievement, attitude toward schools, school attendance, and learner dropout rates. Research indicates that learners who repeat a grade do not succeed at a higher rate than kids who are socially promoted. In fact, they often learn less than socially promoted students within the next year. Socially promoted learners have been found to have higher emotional health than those who are retained (Jimerson et al., 1997).

1.10.6 Grade retention

A study conducted by the South African Department of Education in April 2007 under the leadership of GNM Pandor, the then Minister of the Department, was aimed at investigating the extent of retention and dropout in the schooling system. The study defined learner retention as "the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system until the completion of the compulsory schooling phase" (DoE, 2008b). An example of learner retention is when a learner in any grade has not met the pass requirements by the end of the year, the school may

recommend that the learner be retained and repeat that grade. Renaud (2013, p. 3) claims that grade retention is the practice of keeping students in their present grade because they have not mastered the skills necessary to progress to the next grade". Learner retention is the complement of dropout (DoE, 2008b). The intended objective is to ensure the learner has learned appropriately before moving on. Be that as it may, research evidence by Jimerson et al. (2006) indicates that grade retention has a negative effect on learner achievement, attitude toward schools, school attendance, and learner dropout rates.

1.11 Structure of the Report

Chapter One of the study outlined the background to and motivation and rationale for the study. The chapter clarified the problem statement, research questions, and the objectives of the study. The study was explained with specific reference to the research paradigm, qualitative approach, research design (phenomenology), sampling and selection of participants, data instruments and collection process and data analysis. The trustworthiness of the research, ethical considerations and the structure of the report were similarly briefly outlined in this chapter. Finally, the main concepts of inclusive education, identity, marginalisation, grade promotion, grade progression and grade retention were defined in this chapter of the report.

Chapter Two presents a review of the research literature and an explanation of the central concept of grade progression in reference to grade retention. This is followed by an account of inclusive education both from an international and South African perspective. This chapter explains how the education policies and legislation in the South African context are linked to the broader international educational interventions including but not limited to EFA, MDGs, SDGs and the Salamanca Declaration. I explain what is understood by inclusive education in general and how it is understood in South African policies and legislation and in its implementation. I further outline the construction of the identities of progressed learners and specify how this construction of the progressed learners is what is emphasised over and above other identities learners have and is the basis for their experiences and relations with others in the school. As a final point, I outline the theories of identity (Hall and Erikson) and the social identity theory.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology of the study, with specific reference to the research paradigm, qualitative approach, research design (phenomenology), qualitative data collection instruments, sampling, selection of participants and the choice of research site. Next,

the chapter pays special attention to the analysis of the data, the trustworthiness of the research and the role of the researcher. Finally, the chapter illuminates the ethical considerations that I considered.

Chapter Four reports on the findings of the study based on the discussions of the questionnaires (learners), semi-structured interviews (both learners and principals) and focus group interviews (educators) that I worked with. The chapter furthermore focuses on the various themes based on the data collected during the study. The chapter also uses direct quotations from the transcripts of both the semi-structured and the focus groups interviews.

Chapter Five reports on the data analysis and explains the data-analysis measures as based on the discussions of the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (learners), focus group interviews (educators) and semi-structured interviews (principals) that the researcher worked with.

Chapter Six restates the research aim of the study, focusing on the research questions and the objectives of the study. The chapter gives a brief summary of the study, followed by a discussion of the findings. The chapter further discusses the implications and recommendations of the study. In conclusion, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and makes suggestions for further research, focusing on the Gauteng Department of Education.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter has provided background information to the study which explored the identities of progressed learners in four township schools using a phenomenological study. The chapter has outlined the problem statement, research question, aims and objectives as well as the rationale of the study. Finally, the chapter has explained the concepts used in the study for example, inclusive education, identity, social identity theory, marginalisation, retention and progression.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This study explores the experiences of progressed learners in the South African context which makes it essential to know and understand who progressed learners are and how they are identified with regard to educational policies and legislations. The policies and legislations regulating progressed learners need to be understood holistically with regard to the broader educational policy and legislative settings in South Africa. Following the fact that this exploration also addresses the experiences of progressed learners regarding inclusive education, it makes it imperative therefore to clearly understand the fundamental principles of inclusive education and the extent to which the South African educational policy and legislations can be regarded as inclusive. Additionally, having an educational system in South Africa that is entrenched in the values of inclusive education, it cannot be concluded that they are being accomplished in the education fraternity in practice. As a result, it makes it essential to explain how progressed learners' identities are interpreted in policy and legislation as well as in inclusive education and what their experiences are in practice.

In an attempt to address this, this chapter commences by primarily giving a clear understanding of what is meant by progressed learners and how they are identified in educational policies and legislation. To achieve a clear distinctive elaboration of such official provisions for progressed learners I refer to the wider policy and legislative frameworks of education in South Africa. Additionally, I explain how the education policies and legislation in the South African context are linked to the broader international educational interventions including but not limited to EFA, MDGs, SDGs and the Salamanca Declaration. I further outline what is understood by inclusive education in general and how it is understood in South African policies and legislation and in its implementation. As a final point, I outline the construction of the identities of progressed learners and specify how this construction of the progressed learners is emphasised over and above other identities learners have and is the basis of their experiences and relations with others in the school.

In this study I focus on the identity and experiences of progressed learners in South Africa. I view the identity of progressed learners as one that is constructed in educational policy and I

view such identities in relation to inclusive education. I view inclusive education in a broad sense as being more than specialised education or only about the education of people with disabilities. I also note progressed learners are homogenised and only viewed as progressed learners and other aspects of their identities are not considered. In order to explore the experiences of progressed learners I use social identity theory to show the experiences they may have in relation to others in their school environments.

2.2 Grade Progression (Social Promotion)

2.2.1 History of grade progression (social promotion): An international perspective

The US Department of Education (1999) defines progression or social promotion as a practice of allowing learners who have failed to meet pass requirements to continue with their academic endeavours to the next grade with their age mates instead of being held back and made to complete or meet the requirements (Jimerson et al., 2006; Renaud, 2013). Advancing learners in this perspective is known as social promotion mainly because it is often carried out in the presumed interest of a learner's social and psychological well-being, without regard to achievement (Jimerson et al., 2006). During President Bill Clinton's term in office, he called for an end to social promotion as he argued that learners should not be moved to the next grade without meeting pass requirements. President Clinton felt that the USA's academic standards were being compromised (Jimerson et al., 2002; Renaud, 2013). Often, grade progression (social promotion) is explored in relation to grade retention which is considered to be its opposite. Grade retention refers to a policy that regulates learners who have failed to meet pass requirements of a grade to repeat that particular grade the following academic year, instead of progressing on to the next grade (Grossen, Grobler, & Lacante, 2017). I will start by explaining grade retention by giving a brief background of it in relation to the South African context.

2.2.2 Background of grade retention

Grade retention or grade repetition refers to the practice of keeping learners in schools in their present grade after having failed to meet pass requirements and not having mastered the skills necessary to progress to the next grade (Renaud, 2013; Valijarvi & Sahlberg, 2008). In a study conducted by the South African Department of Education in April 2007 under the leadership of Minister Pandor, the then Minister of the National Department of Education aimed at investigating the extent of retention and dropout in the schooling system, learner retention was

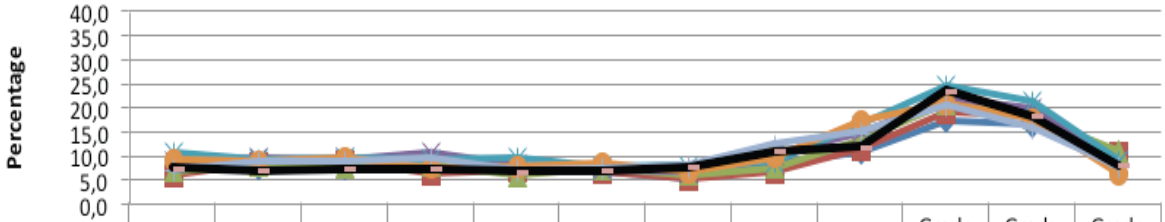
defined as “the continued participation of a learner in the formal schooling system until the completion of the compulsory schooling phase” (DoE, 2008b).

In the South African context, the study mentioned above revealed that grade retention played a fundamental role in the dropout rate at the time the study was conducted. It emanated that learners who were retained became disillusioned and ultimately disengaged from school activities (DoE, 2008b). The study indicated that learners who had been retained felt demotivated by learning the same content of the previous year and that, on its own, exacerbated the situation. The study further highlighted that grade retention was very common in the first grade of schooling mainly because there were insufficient school readiness programmes at the time the study was conducted, serious problems with learners’ learning abilities, or significantly high enrolments which had not been accompanied by appropriate levels of support (DoE, 2008b).

There is a growing consensus among the proponents of grade retention, as stated above, that such practices play a role in curbing learner drop – out. Instead of having learners dropping out of the schooling system, it is better to progress or retain them. Valijarvi and Sahlberg (2008) allude that retention was used on the assumption that learners in general do not develop cognitively and physically at the same pace. If a learner failed to master any given content at the same rate as other learners, it was therefore necessary to retain that learner. This school of thought emanated from the fact that grade retention offered learners a chance to catch up with their age mates psychologically and socially (Valijarvi & Sahlberg, 2008).

As mentioned above, grade retention has also been used in South Africa as a remedy towards drop – out and the assumption that learners would have a complete understanding of the curriculum provided they were held back (DoE, 2008b). Figures 2.1 and 2.2 below show the statistics of learners in South Africa who were retained from the academic years 2009 to 2016. Although repetition rates vary by grade, evidence provided by Figure 2.1 indicates that Grade 1 seems to be plagued by an escalating high repetition rate. There is a possibility that these high repetition rates in Grade 1 may be related to school readiness as there are low rates of participation in pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2007). Consequently, Grade 10 signals high rates of failure and repetition. Since this study focuses on Grade 10 learners, evidence from Figure 2.1 indicates that urgent attention should be given to providing suitable alternative programmes for this grade, which include but are not limited to a focus on both content and mode of delivery that would curb the large numbers of learners who are retained in this grade

(DoE, 2008b). Figure 2.2 indicates the percentages of learners who were retained in 2016 specifically reflecting their different genders per grade starting from Grade 1 to Grade 12. It is essential to understand why females seem to perform better than boys in schools. The graph indicates that the majority of learners who were retained in 2016 were males. In a study conducted by Van Der Berg, Wills, Selkirk, Adams, and Van Wyk (2019) in the South African context, the findings indicated that females were more likely than males to perform exceptionally well in school in terms of completed grade for age and were less likely to drop – out of school. In due course, boys who fall behind are at risk of dropping out of school, not attending college or university, and/or being unemployed (Terrier, 2016). Various possible explanations for the underperformance of boys have been suggested by scholars such as Van Houtte (2004), Karande and Kulkarni (2005) and Ullah and Ullah (2019) which include among others school attitudes between boys and girls, poor family relations, substance and drug abuse, violent behaviour, medical problems, below average intelligence and emotional problems.



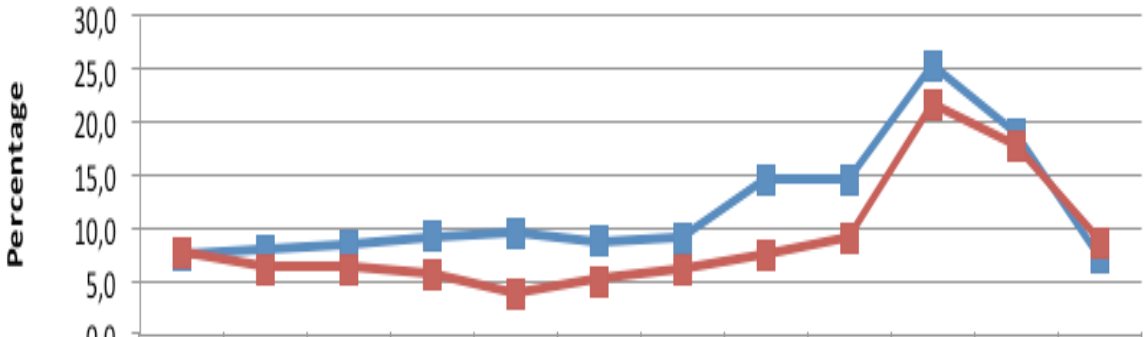
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
2009	6,9	7,4	7,2	7,1	6,8	6,5	5,0	8,2	10,7	17,1	16,3	8,3
2010	5,8	8,4	8,9	6,2	7,0	6,6	5,3	6,6	11,3	19,0	18,2	10,6
2011	6,9	8,3	7,7	8,2	6,0	7,3	6,1	7,6	13,4	21,0	18,1	10,9
2012	9,0	9,7	9,5	10,7	8,2	7,2	6,5	10,3	15,0	22,1	19,9	8,9
2013	10,7	9,1	9,7	9,2	9,4	7,6	7,9	8,6	16,2	24,5	21,1	8,9
2014	9,2	9,0	9,6	7,6	7,8	8,4	6,8	9,8	17,3	21,0	17,7	6,4
2015	7,0	8,7	8,9	9,5	6,9	7,4	7,9	12,3	14,8	20,4	15,6	7,6
2016	7,5	7,0	7,3	7,4	6,8	6,9	7,6	11,0	11,9	23,5	18,3	8,0

Figure 2.1 Percentage of learners who repeated a grade, 2009-2016

Source: Statistics South Africa, General Household Survey (GHS), DoBE own calculations

Within the South African context, scholars such as Kika and Kotze (2018) acknowledge that grade retention is at an alarming rate from Grade 9 up to Grade 11, with Grade 10 having the highest percentage. Figure 2.1 indicates that the majority of learners were largely retained in Grade 10 from 2009 until 2016, with percentages ranging between 17.1% and 23.5%

respectively. Instead of having a decline in the number of retained learners, Figure 2.1 indicates that there has been a massive growth in the number of retained learners between 2009 and 2016 which is congruent with the findings of Kika and Kotze (2018). Such a huge percentage of retained learners in the FET Phase, more especially in Grade 10, raises concerns about the future of the learners regarding their acquisition of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) which is a prime requirement towards access to institutions of higher learning in South Africa.



	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
	Primary Level							Secondary Level				
Male	7,4	7,9	8,4	9,2	9,5	8,7	9,1	14,6	14,7	25,4	18,9	7,2
Female	7,6	6,1	6,1	5,6	3,7	5,0	6,1	7,4	9,0	21,6	17,8	8,7

Figure 2.2 Percentage of repeaters by grade and gender, 2016

Source: Statistics South Africa, General Household Survey (GHS), DoBE own calculations

The rationale behind grade retention, according to its proponents, is to offer academically struggling learners enough time to master academic activities that they could not grasp the previous year (Kika & Kotze, 2018). Supporters of grade retention further claim that grade retention will provide low achieving learners with extra time to amend any social and/or behavioural skills before starting the next grade. These proponents maintain that promoting children to the next grade before they have mastered the requisite knowledge and skills, sets them up for failure down the road (Grossen et al., 2017).

According to Hayes (2004) and Vinovskis (2009) cited in Renaud (2013), in 1983 a document called *A Nation at Risk* published in the USA presented a dismal image of the American education system at that time. This document called for the transformation of the curriculum, expansion of graduation requirements, minimum competency tests, and establishing higher

academic standards (Renaud, 2013). *A Nation at Risk* called upon all American schools to work on the lower standards set by their districts and be more accountable regarding learners' academic achievement. The publication of this document challenged US schools to introduce "high stakes testing" which was a tool aimed at ensuring that curriculum standards were being effectively and efficiently taught (Renaud, 2013). Figures 2.1 and 2.2 clearly indicate that grade retention is at an alarming rate in the South African context which signals poor academic performance in schools. It is without doubt that the South African education system is in dire need of resuscitation in order to eradicate the high rate of grade retention in schools as the *Nation at Risk* attempted to do in the US. As I have already mentioned, scholars such as Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe and Carlson (2000) conclude that grade retention can have a variety of negative effects on learners, and that in many cases grade retention does not work as learners who are held back often never catch up with their peers and are at a greater risk of dropping out during adolescence. As a result, it appears that the South African education system is failing to meet its set academic goals.

There is a growing consensus among scholars who advocate the implementation of progression or social promotion in schools, such as Jimerson et al. (1997), Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002) and Jimerson et al. (2006), that when a learner is held back or retained in the same grade because of failure to meet pass requirements, the learner's self-esteem is likely to be dented which could also lead to feelings of estrangement. Socially promoting learners is consistent with international best practice in countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Korea and the United Kingdom (Motshekga, 2015 cited in Stott, Dreyer, & Venter, 2015). The intention is that instead of obligating learners who are experiencing learning difficulties to frequently repeat a grade, give them the opportunity to progress to the next grade and provide them with additional support (Jimerson et al., 2006).

Since the use of progression or social promotion in schools began in the 1930s, it has been seen as a solution for the perceived negative effects of holding a learner back which is known as retention (Carifio & Carey, 2010). Forty years later in the 1970s the practice of social promotion virtually disappeared, nevertheless, in the 1990s the practice of social promotion reappeared in the USA. Declining academic performance prompted the abolishment of the practice of social promotion. Learners were being socially promoted whether grade-appropriate skills were achieved or not. This shortfall greatly affected further success in the learners' academic endeavours. Carifio and Carey (2010) argue that in New York the practice of social

promotion came to an end in 1982, however, as indicated earlier on it then reappeared in the 1990s. This was as a result of poor educational performances from learners and the declining standards set by district offices. The interpretation of Figure 2.1 and 2.2 above gives a clear picture that South Africa also experienced poor educational performances from learners hence there was a high rate of grade retention, more especially in Grade 10. Introducing the progression policy in South Africa was seen as a remedy towards curbing the high rates of grade retention, which according to its opponents, was associated with a high probability of dropping out of school. It appears that the progression policy is particularly effective at keeping learners with minimal potential within the schooling system until the last grade.

2.2.3 A South African perspective of grade progression

The South African Department of Basic Education (DoBE) which was formerly known as the National Department of Education witnessed a paradigm shift when it launched the *Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools* in 1998 aimed at limiting grade repetition or retention to once within a phase (DoE, 1998). This meant that a learner could not be made to repeat a grade more than once and could not be held in the same phase more than four years. Kika and Kotze (2018) claim that the grade progression policy, from the time when it was officiated in 1998 has been largely applicable to the General Education and Training Phase (hereafter GET) which comprises of the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3), Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) and Senior Phase (Grade R-Grade 9). Nevertheless, it was from 2013 that the policy on grade progression was implemented in the Further Education and Training Phase (hereafter FET) (Grade 10-12) following a circular issued by the minister of basic education (Kika & Kotze, 2018; Stott et al., 2015). The first group of progressed learners to reach Grade 12 was in 2014 and according to Motshekga (2015) cited in Stott et al. (2015), the National Senior Certificate results went down by 2.6 % compared to the academic year of 2013.

The 2.6 % decline above is an indication that some learners exited the schooling system without achieving the fundamental qualification which is a National Senior Certificate in the South African context. The implication is that the South African education system as a whole experienced poor academic performance in schools and as a result it failed to cater for the educational needs of all learners. The underlying factors include among others the curriculum, ineffective teaching and/or behaviour management practices, ineffective school management practices, lack of home-based support by parents and physical and/or psychological problems affecting learners (Wegner, Minnaert, & Strehlke, 2013). Assisting learners to cope with and

overcome problems that arise because of learning difficulties is essential for any education system. Learners at risk of school failure need to be identified as early as possible in their school careers if they are to receive the help they need. This task usually falls to the educators, school counselors, or parents, because many failing learners are hostile to or disconnected from the educational system and will not or do not know how to ask for help (Wegner et al., 2013).

In 2012, the South African National Department of Basic Education introduced the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12* as a guideline on how learners should be promoted to the next grade (DoBE, 2012). The policy stipulated in this document applies to public ordinary and special schools and those independent schools that offer the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12*. Furthermore, *Circular E35 of 2015* was issued by the department of basic education which implied that a learner who has not met the promotion requirements in either Grade 10 or Grade 11, after repeating the grade, may be progressed to the next grade. The purpose of this circular was to align the regulations stated in the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12* with the minimum requirements of the National Senior Certificate to ensure that a learner who is progressed meets certain basic criteria, which will assist the learner to cope with the demands of the next grade (DoBE, 2015). The following criteria on progression from either Grade 10 or Grade 11 were stated in the policy:

- The learner must have failed to satisfy the promotion requirements of either Grade 10 or Grade 11, and repeated either Grade 10 or Grade 11;
- The learner must have passed the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) and another three of the seven subjects offered;
- The learner must have attended school on a regular basis. Absenteeism in excess of 20 days, without a valid reason, will disqualify the learner from being progressed;
- The learner must have complied with the prescribed School Based Assessment (SBA) requirements for that academic year. (DoBE, 2015, pp. 2-3).

It is important to note that the National Department of Education further published *Assessment Instruction 48 of 2016* and *Circular E22 of 2016* which both addressed the criteria to be used when dealing with the implementation of progression in Grades 10-12 which supplemented *Circular E35 of 2015.*

In terms of the regulations pertaining to the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12*, circulated on 28 December 2012, a learner may only be retained once in both the GET and FET

phases in order to prevent the learner from spending more than four years in a phase (DoBE, 2012). This suggests that a learner who fails to meet the pass requirements of a grade for the second time, proceeds to the next grade. Nevertheless, when progressed learners reach Grade 12, they are expected to meet the necessary pass requirements for them to be awarded the National Senior Certificate (NSC).

The Department of Basic Education advised schools to provide necessary and additional support to learners who were faced with academic challenges so that they would be able to meet pass requirements should they progress to the next grade (DoBE, 2012). Munje and Maarman (2016) assert that the school progression policy in the South African context requires that learners be offered appropriate academic support in order to cope in the next grade, because such learners are likely not to meet pass requirements due to their inability to master the entire content. Such support would enhance learner dignity and self-esteem and help to maintain learners with their age cohort. In support of the grade progression policy in South African schools, Kika and Kotze (2018) admit that districts and schools are obligated to generate intensified, adequate academic intervention strategies aimed at empowering progressed learners such as early identification of learners at risk of failing. This would assist progressed learners to catch up with the curriculum in the next grade. As learners are made to progress to the next grade without mastering skills taught in the previous grade, certainly, academic support becomes inevitable and essential in the next grade.

The rationale behind the implementation of the progression policy was to curb the escalating drop – out rate in schools which appeared to be a result of extensive retention of learners (DoBE, 2015). Principally, holding learners back does not actually help them that much (Jimerson et al., 2006). Normally, if they do not pass the first time around, having them do exactly the same thing again but this time separated from their friends and peers and shamed by everyone knowing them as “the dumb learners who got held back”, does not fix anything (Jimerson et al., 2002; Valijarvi & Sahlberg 2008). It is crucial to note that even if learners are progressed to the next grade without meeting pass requirements, it does not necessarily mean that meeting the pass requirements is guaranteed in the next grade. In most instances, progressed learners are viewed as not having the necessary academic skills for the next grade. They also do not receive the necessary support. One of the major reasons progressed learners might not be offered support is that a lot of school-based educators together with principals have little or no knowledge about the implementation of the grade progression policy (Kika &

Kotze, 2018; Munje & Maarman, 2016). As a result, progressed learners are negatively affected academically as they are likely to struggle to handle the workload of the new grade (Munje & Maarman, 2016).

When the progression policy was implemented in the South African context, schools were expected to design and advance their own measures towards the realisation of the policy and meeting the academic needs of learners (Munje & Maarman, 2016). In essence, School Management Teams (SMTs) which are made up of principals, deputy principals and heads of department, were tasked to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of educators in implementing the policy at school level. This meant constant supervision by school managers in making sure that the policy was appropriately implemented at school level and making it a point that progressed learners received the necessary academic support (Munje & Maarman, 2016). In addition, the Department of Basic Education through district offices (provincially and nationally) were further tasked to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policy in schools. Again, this meant that district officials had to offer support in schools towards the implementation and realisation of the progression policy at school level. Nonetheless, Kika and Kotze (2018) observed that inappropriate monitoring and evaluation by the Department of Basic Education was a detrimental factor as the majority of schools could not systematically interpret the aims and objectives of the policy. Some institutions ignored the policy directives and ended up using their own discretion which was completely contradictory to the policy (Kika & Kotze, 2018; Munje & Maarman, 2016). This included but was not limited to progressing under-age learners who had not exceeded the stipulated number of years in a phase. Furthermore, Munje and Maarman (2016) noted that in as much as the progression policy specifies the principles applicable when learners are to be progressed to the next grade, for instance, their age and number of times they may have repeated a grade, it seldom gives clear indications as to how and when and by whom that particular support should be given thus leading to misinterpretation in the implementation of the policy by many educators in schools.

In a speech delivered by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, during the release of the 2015 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results on the 5th January 2016, it was revealed that 65 671 progressed learners sat for the 2015 NSC examinations, which was 9.8% of the total number of full-time candidates registered for the 2015 NSC examinations. The minister stated that out of the progressed learners that wrote the examinations, 22 060 passed the 2015 NSC examinations, which represented 37.6 % of all progressed learners. The

minister further pointed out that 3 297 progressed learners obtained Bachelor passes, meaning these would-be-high-school dropouts now had the opportunity to go to university. A total of 8 473 progressed learners obtained Diploma passes and some 10 264 obtained Higher Certificate passes. The minister further revealed that there was a total of 1 081 distinctions attained by progressed learners, and these ranged from a total of 40 in Mathematics, to 30 in Physical Science, and 31 in Accounting (Motshekga, 2016).

The below table is an adaptation from a presentation from the Director General's meeting with Provincial Education Departments (GDE) which shows the total number of progressed learners for academic years 2016 and 2017.

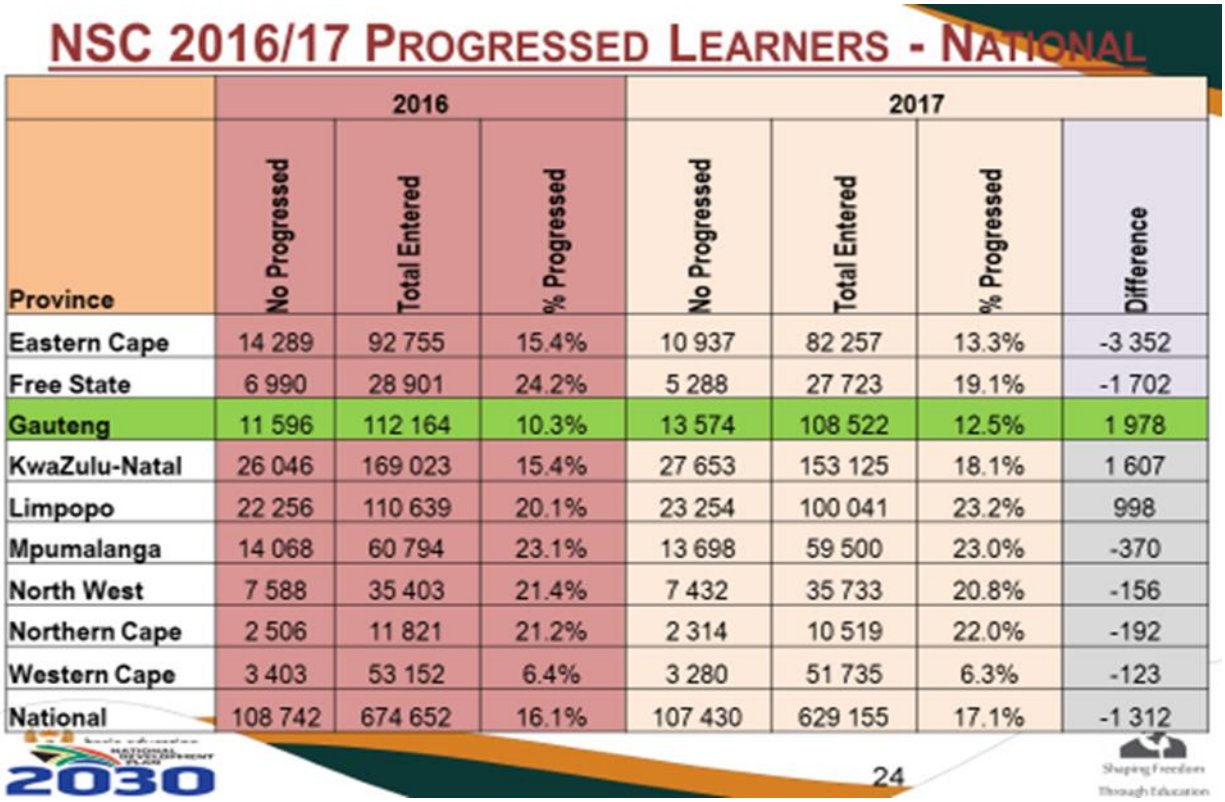


Figure 2.3: Progressed learners 2016-2017

In 2017 the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, during the release of 2016 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results on the 4th of January 2017 revealed that in 2016 there was a total number of 108 742 progressed learners. This was an increase of 43 071 from 2015 equivalent to 65.5% from the number of progressed learners in 2015, and 16.1% of the total number of full-time candidates registered for the NSC examinations. In total, 29 384 progressed learners passed which represented 27% of all progressed learners, and 6.6 % of all learners who passed the 2016 NSC examinations. The minister revealed that 3 335 progressed

learners obtained Bachelor passes, 12 636 obtained Diploma passes, and 13 385 obtained Higher Certificate passes. The minister further indicated that there was a total number of 2 361 distinctions (compared to 1 081 in 2015) attained by progressed learners including distinctions in Accounting, Mathematics and Physical Science. In total, 29 384 progressed learners passed the 2016 NSC examinations (Motshekga, 2017).

In 2018 the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, revealed that in 2017 there were 107 430 registered progressed learners. The minister indicated that of the progressed learners, who wrote the 2017 NSC examinations, 18 751 passed which represented 55.1% of all progressed learners, and 4.7% of all learners who passed the 2017 NSC examinations. Furthermore, 5.6% achieved Bachelor passes, 25.2% achieved Diploma passes and 24.3% achieved Higher Certificate passes. A total of 1 801 distinctions were attained, including distinctions in critical subjects, such as Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics and Physical Science. In total, 18 751 progressed learners passed the 2017 NSC examinations (Motshekga, 2018).

In 2019 the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, announced the following statistics regarding the performance of progressed learners: Gauteng's progressed learners passed at 70.3%; Free State's progressed learners passed at 65.2%; Mpumalanga's progressed learners passed at 64.7%; KwaZulu Natal's progressed learners passed at 63.4%; North West's progressed learners passed at 56.9%; the Eastern Cape's progressed learners passed at 56.5%; the Northern Cape's progressed learners passed at 40.2%; and the Western Cape's progressed learners passed at 33.6%. According to the minister, in 2018 there was a large number of progressed learners, since the policy was promulgated in 2015.

According to the statistics offered by the minister, from 2015 to 2018 the number of progressed learners increased significantly. The number of progressed learners who passed the NSC also went up from 2015 to 2018. The above statistics are an indication that the introduction of the grade progression policy in South Africa has given learners the opportunity of realising their educational aspirations rather than dropping out of the schooling system. In 2015, at least 34% of the total number of progressed learners managed to receive their National Senior certificates. However, in 2016 and 2017 there was a slight decline as the total number of progressed learners who obtained their National Senior Certificates stood at 27% and 17% respectively, compared to 2015. In 2018, a total number of 33 412 progressed learners sat down for the NSC examination and 60.2% of 33,412 progressed learners passed the exams. This is an indication

that the progression policy, by and large, attempts to include all learners even those faced with learning difficulties (Motshekga, 2019). Even though the total number of progressed learners who sat down for the final examinations for academic years 2015 to 2018 did not achieve the National Senior Certificate, few learners were spared from the conundrum of exiting school without any Grade 12 certificate (NSC).

As part of the South African grade progression policy, the Department of Basic Education further issued *Circular E28 of 2017* which addressed the Multiple Examination Opportunity (hereafter MEO) option in the writing of the National Senior Certificate examinations. The MEO only relates to the writing of the NSC examination in two sessions mainly for progressed learners. The policy offered progressed learners the leeway of choosing to write all six subjects or less in the November examination of that particular academic year and this would be determined by their performance during the annual September preparatory examinations (DoBE, 2017). It was stipulated in the policy that principals were of paramount importance pertaining to the communication of the MEO policy to all parents of progressed learners. Furthermore, principals were expected to submit data pertaining to progressed learners in their schools to the Department of Basic Education through provincial education departments, this included among other issues the number of progressed learners who would sit for the examinations for that particular academic year (DoBE, 2017). Kika and Kotze (2018) suggest that many schools used the MEO as a tool to manipulate their pass rates considering that pass rates are actually determined by the number of learners who sit for all six subjects in the first examinations. Schools would progress a large number of learners from Grade 11 so that a lesser number could sit for the end of the year NSC examinations. The following conditions were advanced by the Department of Basic Education regarding the MEO (DoBE, 2017):

A. The learner must:
    i. be a progressed learner;
    ii. Have completed all his/her SBA requirements in all seven subjects;
    iii. Have attended school regularly (not absent for more than 20 days without a valid reason);
    iv. Have written the Preparatory examination (prelims) in all subjects;
    v. Have failed a minimum of three subjects;
B. The learner allowed the Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO), must write a minimum of three subjects in his first year (excluding LO) and must write the remaining subjects in the June Examination of the following year.

C. The decision relating to the Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO), will be made by the school principal, after having considered the above factors and on the basis of the performance of the learner in the Preparatory Examination (DoBE, 2017, p. 2).

As indicated above, the MEO was primarily introduced by the DoBE with the intention of assisting vulnerable learners to attain a matric certificate more especially progressed learners. According to the DoBE (2017) the MEO was introduced as part of the progressed learner policy to combat the high dropout rate. Regarding the MEO, struggling matric learners were granted a chance to complete their examinations over a period of two years instead of a single academic year. One of the core requirements for learners to qualify for the MEO, was that the learner had to be a progressed learner who had completed all their school-based assessment requirements in all seven subjects. Even though the NSC pass rate for progressed learners has been lower than that for non-progressed learners, many progressed learners have pass matric, the MEO being one of the contributing factors. According to the DoBE (2017) the MEO has enabled the bulk of progressed learners who were at risk of dropping out of the schooling system to acquire their National Senior Certificate. I have now explained the grade progression policy in the South African context, given the current available statistics and the multiple examination opportunity. Next, I shall discuss inclusive education both from international and South African perspectives.

The rationale behind the discussion of inclusive education in this chapter is embedded in the idea that the progression policy is inclusive in nature as it allows learners who have failed to meet the stipulated pass requirements of a certain grade to proceed with their peers to the next grade, therefore, adhering to the principles of inclusive education. Inclusive education is an educational approach aimed at educating all children regardless of diverse abilities and learning difficulties in the same space using the same available resources (Mitchell, 2015). Inclusive education strives to tackle the learning needs of all children with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion (Hasan, Halder, & Debnath, 2018). The progression policy, which is also known as social promotion, is inclusive in the sense that when learners with learning difficulties are isolated and taught only in special education classrooms, they are not given the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of learners. Jimerson et al., (2002) suggest that by creating inclusive settings, learners experiencing learning barriers are now able to socially interact and develop relationships with their peers. The progression policy also allows learners experiencing difficulties in learning to improve their social skills and their

behaviour by having appropriate examples in the general education classroom. Furthermore, when learners experiencing learning barriers become part of a general education classroom, they are more likely to become socially accepted by their peers (Jimerson et al., 2006). The more learners without learning difficulties have contact with their peers who experience learning difficulties, the greater the chance they will learn tolerance and have a greater acceptance of other's differences. When learners are exposed to diversity they are also exposed to reality. In inclusive settings, learners with and without learning difficulties are forming friendships, gaining an improved sense of self-worth, and are becoming better human beings by learning tolerance.

The progression policy which is inclusive in nature does not only benefit children socially but academically as well. When learners of diverse abilities and learning difficulties are brought together in regular education classrooms, it appears that they have more opportunities to learn and to make educational progress in academic achievement (Ferguson, Desjarlais, & Meyer, 2000). Learners experiencing difficulties in learning can benefit in inclusive settings academically because of the individualised and small group instruction to all learners, and they are given a chance to be exposed to a richer curriculum (Mitchell, 2015; Sharma, Dunay, & Dely, 2018). It is with this understanding that I shall discuss inclusive education extensively both from an international and a South African perspective in the next section.

2.3 Inclusive Education

2.3.1 International background on inclusive education

Inclusive education manifested itself initially in the Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway and Iceland where parents of children living with disabilities demanded that their children be involved in mainstream schools (Andriichuk, 2017; Walton, 2018). In these countries, learners with disabilities were victims of educational segregation and marginalisation until human rights activists stood up in favour and support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stipulated that learners with disabilities be included in mainstream classrooms so that they could also enjoy equity and equality within the educational fraternity (Walton, 2018). According to Thomas and Vaughn (2004) cited in Walton (2018) the concept *inclusive education* was first used in Canada where it was used interchangeably with concepts such as *integration* and *mainstreaming*.

The United Nations (UN) as a global body has made endless efforts towards the realisation and implementation of inclusive education by putting emphasis on children's rights, disability rights and education. Such a move by the UN has contributed vastly towards the initiatives made by the international community in making sure children's rights in education are protected. The Charter of the United Nations in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 are prominent documents highlighting the necessity of respecting and observing children's rights (UN, 1948). In an endeavour to promote and protect children's rights in all aspects of life, in 1959 the United Nations launched the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UN, 1959). Furthermore, in 1989 the United Nations launched a revised United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which emphasised equal opportunities amongst children towards accessing the right to meaningful and quality education that would assist children to realise their full potential (UN, 1989). According to Winter and O'Raw (2010) inclusive education is grounded in fundamental human rights. This implies that education systems need to respect and observe learners' rights regardless of their racial, cultural, socio-economic and any other related background. Everyone is entitled to education; therefore, it is indeed an essential human right as it is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948).

According to the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UN, 1975) people living with disabilities have full rights to intermingle with anybody in all spheres of life including educational spaces. The United Nations further declared the period 1983 to 1992 as the Decade of Disabled Persons in a bid to make the entire world realise the necessity of accommodating, welcoming and accepting people living with disabilities (Siegal, 1999). It furthered the reality that people living with disabilities are also entitled to equitable and quality educational opportunities.

The international community made efforts to promote inclusive and accessible education immediately after the first World Conference on Education for All which was held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (Miles & Singal, 2010). During this conference more emphasis was placed on the large numbers of children who were vulnerable and marginalised and who were also excluded from education systems worldwide. The Education for All conference made an impact by acknowledging the importance of early childhood, acknowledging women's literacy and recognising the significance of basic literacy skills as part of lifelong learning (Miles & Singal, 2010). This was all done to make sure that education was accessible to all citizens of the world regardless of gender, race, socio-economic background and/or religion.

In 1994, over 300 participants, including 92 governments and 25 international organisations met in Salamanca, Spain, with the purpose of promoting the objectives of inclusive education (Hasan et al., 2018; Walton, 2018). The resulting Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994b) was framed by a rights-based perspective on education (Makoelle, 2012; Walton, 2018). As stated in the Salamanca Statement, the main principle of inclusive education is that all children have the right to be educated alongside their peers in a regular or a mainstream school wherever possible and to be exposed to a child-centred pedagogy aimed at meeting their educational needs (UNESCO, 1994a; Miles & Singal, 2010). Ndlovu, Mtonga, Serenje-Chipindi, & Muzata (2016, p. 128) define inclusive schooling and education as "a place where every pupil regardless of his or her disability belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met". The Salamanca conference was a turning point in the history of inclusive education as all the participants signed an agreement which later came to be known as the Salamanca Declaration, which advocated the following:

> Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p. 3)

According to Hasan et al., (2018), in April 2000 more than 1100 participants from 164 countries gathered in Dakar, Senegal, for the World Education Forum. This forum consisted of educators, prime ministers, academics to politicians and non-governmental bodies to the heads of major international organisations. At this forum they adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments. This document reaffirms the goal of education for all as laid out by the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand 1990 and other international conferences. According to Hasan et al. (2018) in an effort to achieve full inclusive education systems in every country, the broad vision of EFA lives on in the six EFA goals which are now articulated as:

- To expand early childhood care and education;
- Provide free and compulsory primary Education for All;
- Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults;
- Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent;
- Achieve gender equality by 2015; and
- Improve the quality of education. (UNESCO, 2000).

An endeavour to stabilise and neutralise the gap between the richer and poorer countries of the world, the United Nations adopted both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the years 2000 and 2015, respectively. This was aimed at, among other things, improving the education standings of the poorer countries in the developing world. For instance, goal two of the MDGs put emphasis on the achievement of a universal primary education and goal four of the SDGs concentrates on the creation of inclusive and equitable education through universal completion of primary and secondary education and access to pre-primary education that would equip one with the necessary academic skills and lifelong learning by 2030 (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). In the following section I shall discuss both the MDGs and SDGs.

2.3.1.1 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In year 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration at the United Nations Millennium Summit where 147 heads of state met to discuss issues directly affecting humanity and nature (Attaran, 2005). This became a 15-year plan as the MDGs were introduced in 2000 and monitoring was to be conducted until 2015. From this summit emanated eight goals with measurable targets and clear deadlines for improving the lives of the world's poorest people and they are known as Millennium Development Goals (Attaran, 2005) which are as follows:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:
    - Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day.
    - Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education:
    - Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women:
    - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
4. Reduce child mortality:
    - Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five.
5. Improve maternal health:
    - Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:

- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Halt and begin to reverse the incidents of malaria and other major diseases.

7. Ensure environmental sustainability:
    - Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources.
    - Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.
8. Develop a global partnership for development (Attaran, 2005).

Education was one of the goals that the United Nations General Assembly focused on (goal number 2). The intention was to open doors for all boys and girls internationally to complete a full course of primary education. Education was to be made accessible to all.

The outlook of the MDGs is inspiring in the sense that the major aim was to address complex issues affecting vulnerable citizens of the world, more especially in developing countries. This was a process to be gradually undertaken in a space of 15 years. Pragmatically, proponents of the MDGs claim that this move by the United Nations played a significant role towards the eradication of poverty in the whole world as it went down by 50% (Attaran, 2005). Nevertheless, critics believe that targets set by the MDGs were not met as some countries focused on certain aspects of the problems and did not address others. Gupta and Vegelin (2016) argue that the end results of the MDGs were unevenly based on the fact that the MDGs only applied to countries of the global south which were considered to be poor and lacked enough resources to meet the stipulated targets. These so-called poor countries viewed the whole process as an instruction rather than an intervention by the more developed countries which resulted in some of the goals not being realised (Attaran, 2005). Some critics argue that one critical factor that led to the failure of the MDGs was that most of the data that was submitted to the United Nations was not sufficient and reliable. For instance, life indicators such as births and deaths, were not directly registered in the poorest countries (Attaran, 2005). Consequently, it became difficult to work with inappropriate statistics to attain positive results. After realising the failure of the MDGs, the United Nations soon adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 which I shall discuss next.

2.3.1.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Yet again, 15 years later after the introduction of the MDGs, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a document

that was dubbed "*Transforming our World*" (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). The goals and targets are globally inclined, meaning they apply to all countries around the world, not just poor countries as it was with the MDGs. SDGs calls upon governments, businesses, civil society and people everywhere to come together in order to act towards the attainment of the goals (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). The 17 SDGs that were agreed upon are as follows:

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to transform our world:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
   Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
8. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation
9. Reduce inequality within and among countries
10. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
11. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
12. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
13. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
14. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss
15. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
16. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. (UN, 2015, pp. 17-28).

Goal number four of the SDGs, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, clearly indicates that the United Nations General Assembly was eager to promote quality education for all that would benefit all global citizens. Countries were encouraged to adopt an inclusive education system that would benefit even those who were previously marginalised and excluded from the education sphere.

For further discussion, I will now elaborate on both the second MDG (achieve universal primary education, ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015) and the fourth SDG (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) in relation to the progression policy and inclusive education. As I have outlined earlier, one major reason for introducing the MDGs and the SDGs was geared towards the reduction of extreme poverty in its multiple dimensions globally from 2000 to 2015 (MDGs) and from 2015 to 2030 (SDGs) respectively. By and large, education is one among other essentials that is an instrument that could be used towards the eradication of poverty in our societies, thus, it is important to people of all ages (Pârgaru, Gherghina & Duca, 2009; Türkkahraman, 2012). Education is understood as a societal institution through which members of the society are equipped with significant expertise, including but not limited to basic facts, job skills and cultural norms and values. Idrisa, Hassana, Ya'acoba, Gill, and Awal (2011) allude that education is generally seen as the foundation of society which brings economic wealth, social prosperity and political stability. Additionally, through education, individuals are able to improve their personal lives and help society to run smoothly. Pârgaru et al., (2009, p. 647) give the following summary about the benefits of education in our societies:

> Education leads to lower incidence of health problems, reduced mortality and increased life expectancy. Health education, if included in the general education, tied to common organisms or other means of communication, can be more effective and less costly. In a world of evolution, of technological know-how, education plays an essential role. It is a top rank social institution that can contribute to increased democracy and equality, facilitating the rapport between man and nature.

Considering the nature of the second MDG and the fourth SDG, they are both consistent with the fundamental principles of the progression policy and inclusive education. As I have indicated earlier in my discussion, that the practice by South African schools of progressing learners on to the next grade without meeting pass requirements of a particular grade (social promotion) is consistent with both the second MDG and the second SDG in the sense that it strives to keep learners in school regardless of their academic intelligences for that reason, offering all girls and boys equitable quality educational opportunities. According to the South African progression policy, learners should be viewed as equal, able and capable individuals, hence, they are offered a chance of progressing with their peers to the next grade with the assumption that they will catch up in the subsequent grade. The progression policy is against holding back learners and making them repeat grades which is associated with a variety of

negative consequences such as separating learners from their natural peer group, increasing chances that they will struggle academically or drop out of school, increasing the likelihood that they will suffer from low self-esteem, ridicule, and bullying, or increasing the risk of social, emotional, behavioural and psychological problems (Jimerson et al., 2006). For these reasons, my conviction is in line with the full attainment of both the second MDG and the fourth SDG which are inclusive in nature. In essence, the realisation of all the MDGs and the SDGs rest upon equitable quality education for all. For instance, Vladimirova and Le Blanc (2015) argue that sending young girls to school could be a remedy towards an intergenerational spread of poverty by ending the ongoing sequence of early marriage and motherhood and the health and other risks associated with these events. Such a practice promotes inclusion, self-reliance and empowerment of women in our societies which is I believe, long overdue. As women acquire more education, they increasingly move out of traditional household or agricultural production activities and enter wage-paying work. Additionally, greater educational attainment shapes the attitudes of both girls and boys to gender equality, with greater education leading to more positive attitudes towards gender equality among both males and females (Vladimirova & Le Blanc, 2015).

A study that was conducted by Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) in England revealed that inclusive education emphasises the reduction of barriers to learning by respecting rights of all children and increased participation of all learners in schools and further encourages schools to tolerate the diversity of learners. According to Sharma et al. (2018) almost all over the world children living with disabilities and those who experience learning barriers are constantly exposed to multiple forms of discrimination and they are also victims of stereotypes and social prejudice. Inclusion is about respect, tolerance and full acceptance of children's diverse educational needs. The implementation of the progression policy in the South African context confirms the pragmatism of both the second MDG and the fourth SDG which are firmly rooted and congruent to the fundamental principles of inclusive education. Next, I shall discuss the different approaches to inclusive education research.

2.4 Approaches to Inclusive Education Research (Social Model)

In this study I have adopted the emancipatory/transformative approach to inclusive education. The social model of inclusive education promotes inclusion, hoping to remove the barriers set by society by including all children regardless of their abilities in mainstream education. However, I also recognise the school reform approach which explores and promotes the

transformation of school structures with the intention of raising the quality of education in schools in this instance, I focus on the empowerment of educators and meaningful interventions (Tucci, 2009). Under the philosophy of inclusive education, children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are to be taught in mainstream education alongside their peers. Schools need to cater for children with both physical and learning disabilities, ensuring that their needs are met. The social model, as a way of understanding SEN, incorporates gaining knowledge of the child by recognising both their strengths and weaknesses. In the following section I shall discuss the approaches used in inclusive education research namely: disability approach, school reform approach, critical theory approach and emancipatory/transformative approach.

2.4.1 Disability approach

The disability approach in inclusive education research seeks to explore how disability is understood and the position and experiences of disabled people both within and across different societies (Oliver & Barnes, 2010). Allan (2007) claims that many scholars have proclaimed that research on inclusion has to be congruent to politics. The proponents of the disability approach such as Len Barton and Mike Oliver, explore the question of politics in relation to specific struggles providing a wealth of insights and ideas, and examine the nature and value of a social model of disability. The rise of disability politics has had an important impact on research in essence, the proponents of this approach criticise exclusionary barriers while advancing a more democratic and participatory society based on principles of equity and equality. This approach, according to Oliver and Barnes (2010), puts more emphasis on the fact that disabled people who had some experiences of research and writing were clearly represented. In this study, I could not use this approach mainly because none of the participants have experienced any form of disability, instead they have experienced learning barriers which became a principal aspect contributing to their progression from one grade to the next, seldom meeting the pass requirements of the preceding grade.

2.4.2 School reform approach

Advocates of the school reform approach in inclusive education research explore and promote the transformation of school structures with the intention of raising the quality of education in schools (Tucci, 2009). Educational reforms, as advanced by the school reform approach, focuses on a comprehensive examination of their reasons, objectives, application and results generated by those within the school systems where they are implemented. Proponents of the

school reform approach such as Booth and Ainscow (2002), Dyson (2003), and Allan and Slee (2008), affirm that the school reform approach is an effort to make education available to more children equally and equitably. This could be attained through the use of a comprehensive, unified school design to transform all aspects of a school in an effort to improve the performance of each of its learners (Tucci, 2009). In order to attain a school reform approach, the following aspects are to be considered:

- organising the school to facilitate transformed teaching and learning
- transforming curriculum and instruction
- providing students with the necessary academic and social support
- increasing teacher and principal effectiveness
- maximising stakeholder resources
- ensuring continuous improvement (Tucci, 2009)

My standpoint is that the school reform approach is essential because I believe that in order to achieve quality results our schools need to change holistically. The process of improvement must take place across the curriculum, teaching methods, school management and leadership, teacher development, funding, parent involvement, monitoring and evaluation.

2.4.3 Critical theory approach

Critical theory in inclusive education is about questioning how our educational system can best offer education to all people. According to Sandars (2016), critical theory is concerned with the distribution of power in social systems and how one group in society can be controlled and oppressed by another group in society. Dell'Angelo, Seaton, and Smith (2012) further attest that critical theory seeks to understand how extant power imbalances are created, reified and reproduced across time. The critical theory approach offers opportunities and understanding of the different perspectives of disadvantaged members of society. It is quite essential to understand the critical theory approach from an educational point of view as this will help in understanding the injustices and inequalities that are prevalent in our educational spaces, such as schools. Bethel (2006) suggests that critical theory plays a pivotal role in challenging the existing rankings of disadvantaged, indigenous educational outcomes and thereby provides a venue for alternative thinking and outcomes. According to Dell'Angelo et al. (2012), having a clear examination of societal power imbalance, the critical theory approach could be used in introducing new practices capable of stimulating consciousness and understanding of where

and how one is located within a given social system, and ultimately how individuals of various positions in that system might create change.

My conviction is rooted in the perspective that the critical theory approach is essential in the sense that it could be useful in empowering educators in making sure that their learners develop critical-thinking skills and to take critical action. Dell'Angelo et al. (2012) suggest that the critical theory approach requires educators to have a sound knowledge base from which to support learners as they delve more deeply into content, thus providing opportunities for inquiry by giving learners time for planning, processing and debriefing. As mentioned by Sandars (2016), critical theory in education is about enquiring how our educational system can best offer education to all people without prejudice. Knowing and understanding the nature of progressed learners as they are identified with regard to educational policies and legislations, would enable schools to determine the appropriate support for such learners and all learners experiencing or likely to experience difficulties in learning. Since critical theory teaches that knowledge is power, therefore it means that understanding the ways one is oppressed enables one to take action to change these oppressive forces. I shall next discuss the Emancipatory/transformative approach in inclusive education research.

2.4.4 Emancipatory/transformative approach

This study is inspired by the experiences of progressed learners in schools that form a minority and experience exclusion, despite inclusive policies. In an endeavour to address their plight, I used the emancipatory/transformative approach mainly because of its ability of confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs (Oliver, 2002). The emancipatory/transformative approach in research is embedded in the belief that recognises the intentional collaboration with minority and marginalised groups or people in society whose voice is not heard on certain issues. According to Rose and Glass (2008), the emancipatory approach is aimed at recognising the psychological cognitive, moral, political and social reality of all the participants of the research, including the researcher itself, with the aim of focusing on the understanding of the group to provoke a systematic change that lets transforming the practice and structures (Mertens, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016). Furthermore, this approach focuses on minority or marginalised groups which include but are not limited to women, black people, the disabled, the poor, gay men and lesbians and any other groups of people who have experienced marginalisation and whose voice is seldom heard (Barnes, 2003; Mertens, 2007; Oliver, 2002). For the purpose of this study, progressed learners will take the identity of the minority and the

marginalised as the study seeks to hear their voices pertaining to their experiences regarding the progression policy in schools, irrespective of how they are identified with regard to educational policies and legislations in the South African context.

The emancipatory approach stresses social change as its key objective and oppression as its central focus (Rose & Glass, 2008). This approach in research deals with negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment, taking emancipation as a critical position that through the participative approach leads to building of awareness. This study is in line with the emancipatory/transformative approach to research mainly for its concern about who is left out. The benefits of the emancipatory approach include its focus on social action and its privileging of the voices of the marginalised groups of people in societies. It seeks not only to generate new knowledge, but to actually remove barriers and promote social inclusion and equality. It appears that progressed learners in schools are a minority, therefore, I felt the need to initiate a strong relationship with the schools in order to understand their plight. Mertens (2009) claims that the emancipatory/transformative approach is useful towards addressing social inequalities and for enacting positive social individual changes for marginalised groups. It is essential to note that an inclusive education system which is a sensitive and a complex field in education, places emphasis on the power relations of schooling and challenges any form of inequalities and injustices in education (Slee, 2011). It is from this perspective that I decided to explore the experiences of progressed learners in schools.

An emancipatory/transformative approach calls for the complete transformation of policies, attitudes, educational institutions and societies. It also calls for a complete change of all the structures in order for an inclusive education system to be attainable. In the same way, in support of this view Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006, p. 297) suggest that "inclusion becomes not an aspect of education or a policy or set of policies for education but a principled way of viewing the development of education and society". Consequently, my conviction is entrenched in the notion that policies and legislations regulating education in South Africa must be reviewed for a possible inclusive society that would witness the inclusion of progressed learners without any form of marginalisation and exclusion taking place. In the following section, I shall discuss inclusive education in the South African context.

2.5 Inclusive Education in South Africa

I have already indicated earlier that my greatest concern is to outline inclusive education in an extensive sense as being more than specialised education or only about the education of people with disabilities. In an attempt to attain my goal, I will start by giving a clear distinction between special education and inclusive education. Special education refers to methods of instruction, support and services provided to learners who experience academic, behavioural, health, physical or other unique needs beyond those met by learners in regular or mainstream classrooms (Sharma et al., 2018). Learners or individuals with disabilities or learning difficulties who may or may not be enrolled in mainstream schools are offered with unique teaching and learning strategies in order to cater for their academic needs in their own spaces. Special education is important because children with special needs have equal rights to education. Nonetheless, having learners taught in "special" schools appears to encourage segregation of children with disabilities from children without disabilities (UN, 2014). It was from this perspective that inclusive education was advanced. Inclusive education means educating learners with special educational needs together with learners who do not experience any learning difficulties in mainstream or regular education settings (Mitchell, 2015). Inclusive education discourages marginalisation, segregation and exclusion of learners based on any given factor; rather, it promotes integration which is a process of placing learners with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions as long as they are able to adjust to the standardised requirements of such institutions (Price, 2018). Engelbrecht (2006) further suggests that inclusive education is not just only an educational strategy, but it plays a vital role in contributing towards making South African societies democratic. Additionally, inclusive education is considered to be the preferred educational setting, as specified in Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2014).

The South African education system has been influenced by both the shift from an apartheid regime to a democratic dispensation together with the international movement towards the attainment of inclusive education (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Walton, 2012). South Africa's history is rooted in a long period of marginalisation and exclusion of the so-called inferior races by the White race in all aspects of life including education (Makoelle, 2009). It was from this historical background that South Africa joined the entire world (following international platforms such as EFA, 1990) towards an attempt to implement an inclusive education system that would incorporate every citizen. One major objective of the South African democratic

government was to fully transform the apartheid education system which was characterised by inequalities and injustices to an accessible education system for all learners, regardless of any learning barriers that might hinder teaching and learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Walton, 2018). This was seen as a drastic transformation from the old model of special education delivery to an inclusive education system. The following section will discuss inclusive education and the approach that is adopted in South Africa in policy and legislation and in implementation.

2.5.1 Legislative and policy framework in support of inclusion in South Africa

South African inclusive education is entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 as amended (RSA, 1996a) which is aimed at bringing about societal change that is, from being discriminatory to being accommodative and inclusive (Walton & Lloyd 2011). This followed the long years of racial segregation which were rooted in apartheid laws from 1948 until 1994. The different races were subjected to different 'forms' of education: whites, unlike the supposedly inferior races, received a quality education whereas people belonging to the so-called inferior races who lived with any form of disability suffered the most as they were not 'included' within the education fraternity. It was from this long period of turmoil that the need arose to grant everyone across the racial groups a fair and just educational opportunity that would be inclusive for all. The underlying feature of the Constitution of South Africa is that it is consistent with the principles of inclusive education which includes but is not limited to human dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights (RSA 1996a, section 1(a)), freedom from discrimination (RSA 1996a, section 9(4)), and the fundamental right to basic education (RSA 1996a, section 29(1)). Learners who are experiencing learning difficulties or likely to experience learning difficulties such as progressed learners, therefore, should not be exposed to any form of discrimination or segregation based on their learning abilities. Institutions of learning should, consequently, develop strategies to protect the interest and rights of all learners irrespective of any academic challenge they are faced with, considering that basic education is a fundamental right for all.

The National Education Policy Act (DoE, 1996) introduced by the National Department of Education aimed at amending and addressing educational injustices that transpired during the apartheid era was informed largely by the Constitution of the Republic and international provisions. This was a major educational transformation by the ruling government as it endeavoured to "bring" the constitution into schools by way of reaffirming schools about the

importance of learners' rights. This was a shift from the traditional policies of marginalisation and exclusion to a new framework driven by the creation of an inclusive education system. The progression policy aims at ensuring that all learners who experience barriers to learning will be able to access inclusive and quality education on an equal basis with other young people in the communities in which they live, by being given a chance of proceeding to the next grade regardless of meeting the pass requirements of that grade. In essence, the National Education Policy Act (1996) is inclusive in the sense that it views learners not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge in schools but as equal citizens.

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996 as amended) (RSA, 1996b) is yet another official legislative framework to consider towards the realisation and implementation of an inclusive education model. The South African Schools Act ensures that schools are inclusive in South Africa by considering the following:

- Public schools must admit learners and "serve their educational requirements" without discrimination (Section 5(1));
- No admission test may be used to determine the admission of a learner to a public school (Section 5(2));
- Where learners have "special education needs", the rights and wishes of the parents must be taken into account when determining their placement (Section 5(6));
- Where it is "reasonably practicable", learners with "special education needs" should be served in the mainstream and relevant support should be provided for these learners (Section 12(4));
- Physical amenities at public schools should be made accessible to disabled learners (Section 12(5)) (Walton, 2006, p. 37).

Since in this study I am concerned about the inclusion of progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools, it is quite evident that the sections quoted above from SASA are consistent with the principles of an inclusive education system. SASA is aimed at ensuring that all learners have access to quality education without discrimination and makes schooling compulsory for children aged seven to 15. SASA makes a provision for democratic school governance through School Governing Bodies (SGBs) which have been implemented in public schools countrywide. This enables parents, learners (in public secondary schools), educators and non-teaching staff an opportunity to voice their concerns and offers full participation towards the governance of their schools.

Inclusive education is rooted in the belief that education is an essential right for every child (UNESCO, 2004). Furthermore, children's abilities vary, consequently, education systems

should consider the diverse educational needs of all children. In as much as parents might have different choices and perceptions about where their children should be taught, as it is in South Africa, mainstream schools should be opened to all children even those experiencing learning difficulties and those with special educational needs such as progressed learners in this context. Progressed learners, like any other learners, are entitled to be offered the necessary academic support in inclusive academic spaces in order for them to realise their educational goals.

In 1996, the South African national government through the minister of education and the Department of Education launched the National Committee for Education Support Services and National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCESS/NCSNET) to explore and make recommendations about special needs and support within the education fraternity in South Africa (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & van Deventer, 2016; Walton, 2018). By March 1997, a report produced by the NCESS/NCSNET was completed and they began with the task of writing up the recommendations into an education policy (Engelbrecht et al., 2016) Both commissions considered strongly the principles of inclusive education based on equity and quality of education for all children such as progressed learners, which is the major focus in this study. Embedded in the recommendations made by both commissions was that progressed learners in mainstream schools are entitled to be included in the schooling process without prejudice, discrimination, segregation and/or marginalisation. When both commissions had completed their task in September 2001, the Department of Education unveiled the report as White Paper 6 which shall be discussed next (DoE, 2001; Engelbrecht et al., 2016) jointly with the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (DoBE, 2008a).

Walton (2016) suggests that inclusive education is a discourse and this has been by supported by scholars such as Rose (2010) and Kalijanpur (2011). Fairclough (2001) cited in Walton (2016, p. 10) defines discourse as "language use conceived of as socially determined" and "all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments". A discourse could be written or spoken communication or debate. From viewing inclusive education as a discourse, Walton (2016) discusses three domains linked to inclusive education which she describes as the professional domain, the policy domain and the public domain. In this section of this study, I will pay attention on the policy domain discussed by Walton (2016) pertaining to the realisation of an inclusive education system in South Africa. Walton's (2016) emphasis is on how language has been used

in the White Paper 6 (DoBE, 2001) and the SIAS policy (DoBE, 2008a) pertaining to the realisation and implementation of an inclusive education system. I will discuss the objectives of both the White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy next.

According to Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel, Koskela, and Okkolin (2017), the prime objective of the White Paper 6 was to ensure a transition from the medical-model method and labelling to a socioecological model focusing on intrinsic (disabilities) and extrinsic (environmental and systemic factors) barriers to learning that could hinder learners from effective learning within the South African context. Furthermore, Engelbrecht et al., (2016) suggest that the White Paper 6 makes mention of significant principles that are congruent to an inclusive education system namely: principles of social justice, human rights, a healthy environment, participation, social integration and redress, equal and equitable access to education, community responsive and cost effectiveness (DoE, 2001; Engelbrecht et al., 2016). On the other hand, the SIAS provides a framework in order to standardise the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in schools (DoBE, 2008). The SIAS policy is aimed at improving access to quality education for vulnerable learners who experience barriers to learning, including learners in ordinary and special schools. Barriers may include family disruption, language, the impact of poverty, learning difficulties, disability, large classes and an inflexible curriculum (DoBE, 2008a).

In sketching the background to inclusive education in South Africa, Landsberg (2005) explains that South Africa adopted the same route as other countries with regard to the implementation of specialised education. There were slight differences though in terms of delivery between the previously racially isolated groups during the apartheid era. To redress the educational injustices of the past, the South African Department of Education as it used to be known, took a vital stand and implemented the *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (DoE, 2001). This policy provided guidelines for the new education system it was going to create in South Africa so that all learners would have equal opportunities to be educated (DoE, 2001). The White Paper 6 became a cornerstone of inclusive education in South Africa as it assimilated the essential principles of inclusive education. The White Paper 6 is framed with a broad conception of inclusive education, which is informed largely by constitutional and international provisions. This is most captured in “the barriers to learning”. The White Paper 6 was a response to the

historical experience of exclusion in South Africa, furthermore, claims to be responding to the noted negative effects of marginalising people with disabilities.

According to Walton (2006, p. 39) the White Paper 6 entails the following principles which are rooted in inclusive education:

- All children and young people can learn and need support;
- Difference, including different learning needs, is valued as part of the human experience;
- Education can be enabled to meet the needs of all learners;
- The home and community form an important source of learning;
- Attitudes, behaviours and teaching methodologies will have to change to meet the needs of learners;
- Participation of learners in the educational process should be maximised;
- The individual strengths of learners should be encouraged.

The above principles from the White Paper 6 are consistent with some of the inclusive education principles as outlined in some international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement. This is evidence, therefore, that South Africa as a state is pursuing and sharing the same sentiments with global states regarding the implementation and realisation of inclusive education. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994b) calls for the early identification and support of learners experiencing learning barriers which is synonymous with the content of the White Paper 6. In relation to this study, learners experiencing academic challenges such as progressed learners, need to be supported at an early stage of their schooling by both institutions of learning and parents.

The SIAS policy (DoE, 2008a) is an official document launched by the South African Department of Basic Education in making sure that an inclusive education model is effectively realised. The purpose of the SIAS policy is to "provide a policy framework for the standardisation of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school" (DoE, 2008a, p. 9). The SIAS policy further explains the protocol that has to be followed in schools in identifying and addressing barriers to learning that affect individual learners. The SIAS strategy provides guidelines on early identification and support, the determination of the nature and level of support required by learners and identification of the best learning sites for support.

The SIAS policy also provides guidelines on the central role of parents and teachers in implementing the strategy. As part of inclusive practices, progressed learners should be identified and provided with the necessary support at an early stage by both the schools and their parents. Full participation of educators, parents and the community in supporting learners experiencing learning barriers such as progressed learners, becomes a prerequisite towards the achievement of inclusive education and, indeed, provides positive influence on the learners' academic accomplishments (Jafar, 2015; Lemmer, 2007; Matshe, 2014; Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Schools were, therefore, expected to initiate School Based Support Teams (SBSTs) which in conjunction with the District Based Support Teams (DBSTs) were tasked to implement the SIAS document (DoE, 2001). The functions of SBSTs include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Coordinating all learner, teacher, curriculum and support in the school;
- Identifying school needs with a focus on barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and school levels;
- Being competent and proactive in the use of the SIAS Policy and guiding teachers through the SIAS support provision process;
- Developing appropriate in-class and school-based strategies to address these needs;
- Encouraging collegial/peer support;
- Drawing upon additional resources from within and outside the school to address these challenges;
- Monitoring and evaluating the work of the team within an "action-reflection" framework (Landsberg, 2005, p. 6).

Walton's (2016) suggests that in as much as South Africa has witnessed political transformation since the advent of democracy in 1994, little has been done towards the realisation of inclusive education as outlined in the White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy. Pragmatically, the White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy focus more on educational access and support for learners with disabilities, while according to Walton (2011), concerns such as poverty, language differences, inflexible curricula, inaccessible environments, inadequate support services, teacher training and lack of parental involvement have been overlooked in the South African context. As a result, the realisation and the implementation of inclusive education in the South African context seems to be at a slow pace. Walton (2016) suggests that the realisation of an inclusive education system rests upon the involvement of all stakeholders, most of all educators.

It appears though that South African educators are not well equipped or empowered enough to properly implement inclusive education in schools (Mkhuma, Maseko, & Tlale, 2014). To this end, educators are expected to cope with large-class sizes, learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, developmental variations of learners' skills, social problems, and what educators view as unacceptable behaviour, yet little or no educational support is offered to them. Initially, educators were viewed as the key resources in the accomplishment of the goals to establish inclusive education and training, and their knowledge would be improved and new skills developed (DoE, 2001). Walton (2016) claims that educators in the South African context are willing to work towards the attainment of an inclusive education system, however, their lack of knowledge appears to be a shortfall. Educators need adequate knowledge, skills and training to address diversity and to teach learners with special educational needs in effective inclusive classrooms. Most educators, especially in the former disadvantaged schools, as suggested by Walton (2016), do not have the ability to manage diversity and consequently, they experience feelings of fear and hopelessness. Walton (2018) further argues that the successful implementation and accomplishment of inclusive education in schools will be determined by the readiness of educators to take responsibility for the education of all learners. Additionally, Engelbrecht et al. (2015) claim that inclusive education skills offered to South African educators tend to be fragmented and short-term with little knowledge thus not enabling them to deal with the diversity of learners. It is further noted that teacher education training is insufficient as it lacks practicality in the sense that aspiring educators leave tertiary institutions without having direct contact with learners experiencing barriers to learning and development, particularly those with disabilities (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Fundamental factors in inclusive education implementation include school and classroom-level implementation such as school reviews and plans, training and supporting all teachers in inclusive practices not just "specialised" ones and supporting school leadership to enact an inclusive vision for their schools (DoE, 2001).

Specifically, Walton (2016) raises her concerns about the disappointment with regard the attainment of the primary goal of the SIAS policy. Primarily, the SIAS policy provides information and also gives instruction on how an inclusive education system could be implemented through the identification of learners who are experiencing or likely to experience learning difficulties in schools by educators. Yet again, lack of knowledge from educators seems to be a propelling factor for such a conundrum. In support of this claim, Mkhuma et al., (2014) argue that educators' lack of appropriate skills regarding identification results in

prejudices, non-identification, over-identification as well as misidentification of learners in schools. Proper identification of learners who experience or who are likely to experience barriers to learning is essential, as this would inform the kind of educational intervention to be offered to such learners.

The Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning is another document that was launched by the Department of Basic Education in 2010 to make inclusive education a reality (DoBE, 2010a). These guidelines were aimed at helping educators to develop knowledge on how to meet the needs of diverse learners in a classroom. The guidelines provide educators with advice and a variety of lesson plans to assist educators to incorporate inclusive approaches into their classrooms. The guidelines place emphasis on diversity and that learners need to be accepted the way they are: schools, therefore, need to create a welcoming and conducive environment for every learner in order for inclusive teaching and learning to take place. The guidelines are meant specially to assist teachers to plan to address the diverse needs of their learner populations in an educationally sound and consistent way (DoE, 2010). The guidelines are primarily intended to support educators who work to create inclusive educational environments in which all learners can attain knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will better their lives. The guidelines further seek to clarify the concept of barriers to learning by providing more information on what constitutes barriers to learning, while providing strategies that foster greater participation for all learners (DoE, 2010).

The *Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom through Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (DoE, 2011) provide practical guidance to school managers and teachers on planning and teaching to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners. This document has recently been redrafted to incorporate curriculum changes in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) – which is the current curriculum in use in South African schools – and the revised document forms part of the CAPS orientation programme for teachers and education officials in the provinces. As stated earlier in this chapter, progressed learners are learners who have failed to grasp part of the curriculum of that particular academic year, hence, they fail to meet the pass requirements. The National South African Department of Education aligned itself to the principles of inclusive education by inculcating a curriculum that seems inclusive to all learners more especially, learners experiencing learning barriers such as progressed learners. Fundamental to the accommodation of diversity in our schools is a

flexible curriculum and assessment policy that is accessible to all learners, irrespective of the nature of their learning needs (DoE, 2001).

This study was conducted in four South African township mainstream schools. To understand the role of inclusive education in South Africa, one needs to take into consideration the different types of schools as envisaged by the White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy which I shall discuss next.

Mainstreaming refers to the process of accommodating and teaching learners with special needs, such as progressed learners, in regular classes during specific time periods based on their skills. This means that regular education classes are combined with special education classes. According to the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001, p. 17), mainstreaming is an effort to "make learners 'fit in' or be brought into the ordinary classroom with ordinary learners". In a comparative study that was conducted by Engelbrecht et al., (2017), ***mainstream*** classrooms are grounded on accepting and appreciating all learners in general education schools and classrooms without segregating, marginalising and/or excluding learners based on ability or other individual or sociocultural characteristics. As part of the aspiration discourse, it appears though that mainstreaming is not fully functional in South Africa, following that a majority of educators deployed in mainstream schools lack the knowledge of dealing appropriately with learners experiencing barriers. Consequently, learners' educational needs are not realised due to educators' insufficient knowledge of mainstreaming.

The main focus in mainstream schools is on the learners' academic achievements. There has been an on-going debate in terms of differentiating between mainstreaming and inclusion and whether the two are similar or not (Walton, 2006). Both mainstreaming and inclusion place emphasis on supporting learners faced with learning barriers in schools rather than focusing on individual learner support. Furthermore, in the South African context, mainstreaming and inclusion suggest full respect and recognition of diversity in schools. For example, South Africa has got 11 official languages, different racial groups, different ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds and different religious groups. In order to achieve the principles of inclusive education in schools, educators need to be conscious and cautious about the diverse learners in their classrooms.

Another type of school to be considered in the South African context is the ***full service school*** which, according to the Guidelines for Full-Service/Inclusive Schools is defined as a school

"that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners" (DoBE, 2010b, p. 7). Through the provision of quality education to all learners by meeting the full range of learners, full-service schools are mainstream schools which are designed to serve the needs of children and their parents, by inclusiveness in service and by flexibility in approach (Best Practices Briefs, 1998–1999) Full-service schools are designed to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education while promoting a sense of belonging so that all learners, staff and families experience a sense of worth in the learning community (DoBE, 2010b). According to Inclusive Education South Africa (2018) the most important characteristics of the full-service school is the co-ordinated and organised provision of support to accommodate a wide range of learning needs. Full-service schools were established by converting primary schools and equipping and supporting them to provide for a wide range of learning needs. The support would include physical, material resources as well as professional staff development (DoE, 2001). Within the South African context, full-service schools have been allocated the following key roles:

- *Site-based support:* this body consist of the School Management Team (SMT), Principal and Educators, non-teaching staff, School Governing Body (SGB) and all relevant stakeholders. This team is referred to as the Institutional Level Support Team (ILST).

- *Supporting neighbouring schools:* this include but not limited to sharing and exchanging resources, skills or technology; offer advisory assistance to educators; share examples of good practice; and encourage sustainability and development.

- *The relationship between full-service schools and resources centres (traditional special schools):* full-service schools have a responsibility to reach out to surrounding schools.

- *Collaboration with district-based support teams (DBST)*: the prime responsibility of the DBST is to offer development and assistance to site-based support teams aimed at helping learners mainly with curriculum related issues. Secondly, to offer direct support learners in case site-based support structures are able to do so. (DoBE, 2010; Engelbrecht et al., 2016).

Special schools, according to Save the Children (2002) refers to institutions that are strictly structured with regard to distinctive impairments; for example, children who are blind attend a school for the blind, children who are deaf attend a school that caters for learners who are deaf, and children who are autistic attend schools for autistic learners. In this way, such institutions develop different cultures and an ethos based on the form of curriculum offered; hence, they are special. According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2008a), these institutions convey educational content to learners requiring highly intensive educational and other support. Special schools are necessary because in most cases, learners with special educational needs are widely subjected to discrimination in mainstream schools and they are constantly deprived of equal opportunities to learning and teaching. The majority of learners with special educational needs require extensive care and supervision. In the South African context, it has emanated that factors such as poorly trained educators make it difficult to have learners with special educational needs fully accommodated in mainstream schools. For instance, autistic learners require special attention, blind leaners require certain equipment such as braille for them to learn efficiently, while most of mainstream schools and educators lack such resources and knowledge. The following section of this chapter focuses on identity with more attention on Stuart Hall (three concepts of identity), Henri Tajfel and John Turner (social identity theory), and Erik Erikson (identity formation in adolescence). Progressed learners are framed and defined as only progressed learners. The other dimensions of who they are, are not recognised in policy and legislation. Identities are complex and people are more than one thing (Hall, 1995).

2.6 Identity

When conducting studies pertaining to identity, questions such as "who are you?" and "who am I?" are likely to come up (Howard, 2000; Vignoles, 2017). In order to respond positively to such questions, it is essential to consider our individual characteristics, preferences, goals, and behaviour patterns that we associate ourselves with which are the cornerstone of our identities. The understanding of identity differs from one discipline to the next and as a result it becomes a challenge to have one unique definition. Buckingham (2008, p. 1) argues that "identity is an ambiguous and slippery term". The concept of identity is derived from the Latin *idem* which means *the same* (Buckingham, 2008; Falsafi, 2010). For the purpose of this study, I will define identity as who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed

by the world, the way you view the world, and the characteristics that define you (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Jenkins, 2008).

Our identities as individuals are a distinctive possession as we are distinguished from one another by using them. Vignoles (2017) and Fearon (1999) suggest that in order to conceptualise identity one needs to understand the difference between personal (or individual) and social (or group identities). An individual's identity is what makes one person differ from the rest and this goes further than the physical body of an individual. Fearon (1999) suggests that by using ordinary language, at least one can use identity to refer to personal characteristics or attributes that cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a social category. In a statement by William James (1892) cited in Vignoles (2017), one's identity is associated with one's possessions such as clothes, house, spouse, children, ancestors, friends, reputation, work, land and even a bank account. All the mentioned possessions give one the same emotions of triumph should they multiply in number and emotions of disappointment should they diminish and die (Vignoles, 2017). On the other hand, Buckingham (2008) and Fearon (1999) point out that identity could be in the form of a relationship that prevails collectively or in a social group, for instance, national identity, cultural identity or gender identity which denotes that our identity is partially shared with other people with whom we share the same sentiments over something. Significant to social identity is one's identification with other people whom we assume are the same as us or at least in some way (Buckingham, 2008).

2.6.1 Learner identity

According to Lawson (2014, p. 4) "a learner identity can be broadly defined as how an individual feel about himself or herself as a learner and the extent to which he or she describes himself or herself as a learner". Individuals with a learning identity see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn. Institutions of learning play a pivotal role in helping learners to develop a learner identity. Msila (2007, p. 147) argues that "education is always about identity formation". The identities that are formed and the learning that takes place are mutually influential. Learning forms identities and identities shape learning (Coll & Falsafi, 2010). Learner identity is positively linked with both the academic and social context of learning as well as with concepts of engagement and a sense of belonging in education. For further understanding of the concept identity, I will next discuss identity according to Stuart Hall.

Learners in any academic setting represent a wide array of social and cultural identities: as boys or girls, as foreigners or locals, as individuals with particular beliefs, as members of families, organisation, ethnic groups or society at large (Zacharias, 2010). Despite their multiple identities, progressed learners are framed and defined as only progressed learners. It is important for educators to acknowledge the identities that learners bring into the classroom because people possess more than a single identity (Hall, 1995). Hall (1995) declares that educators are influential in learners' identity construction. Educators can either create or impose identities on learners as it appears with progressed learners. I believe that educators themselves need to be aware of the identity issues of progressed learners. It is from this idea that I will discuss Hall's three concepts of identity in order to conceptualise progressed learners' identities as multiple, diverse, dynamic and contradictory.

2.6.2 Stuart Hall: Three concepts of identity

Stuart Hall identified three different ways of conceptualising identity, namely:

- Enlightenment subject
- Sociological subject
- Post-modern subject

2.6.2.1 Enlightenment subject

The origin of the enlightenment subject is traced back to when the world experienced a shift from a theological and metaphysical thinking to a scientific understanding of the world (Barker, 2005). The enlightenment subject was premised on the idea that a human being is an individual with a constant and unchanging identity from birth until death (Hall, 1989). The enlightenment subject differed from the theological and metaphysical thinking towards human beings; human beings were now viewed as having the following characteristics: rational, conscious, active and universal, unified and homogenous. I shall discuss the characteristics of the enlightenment subject next.

Rational: Proponents of the enlightenment subject advocated the importance of reason and rationality as a means and way of gathering information using special skills and experimentation (Barker, 2005).

Conscious: Proponents of the enlightenment subject such as Barker (2005) suggest that an individual's mind is regarded as having fundamentally articulate abilities. This means that human beings are able to adapt and make sense of their immediate environment and beyond.

Active: Advocates of the enlightenment subject proclaim that individuals are active in their attainment of knowledge and in their relations to their environments.

Universal, unified and homogeneous: The enlightenment subject is under the impression that reason, science and rationality are the same everywhere and can be applied anywhere around the world. The proponents of the enlightenment subject proclaim that knowledge is universal and objective as well. Furthermore, the enlightenment subject stresses that all human beings are essentially the same regardless of ethnicity, race, class and language. Human nature has been and always will be the same all over the world (Barker, 2005).

Considering the enlightenment subject, it denies the notion of multiple identities as it suggests that a person is viewed as a fully centred, unified individual endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action with a single identity (Hall, 1995). This study is interested with progressed learners whom I believe possess multiple identities. Progressed learners are only seen as progressed learners and related to as such, yet they are more than just that. Progressed learners' identities need to be understood in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, family structure, home language, where they live and possibly activities they enjoy.

2.6.2.2 Sociological subject

The sociological subject is based on the notion that an individual's identity is created in relation to how that particular individual interacts with other people. This is mainly dependant on the different institutions, values, languages, religion and cultures that certain individuals are exposed to (Barker, 2005). The sociological subject emphasises acculturation which refers to the modification of a culture of a group or an individual as a result of constant contact with a different culture (Barker, 2005). Sociological subject is premised on the notion that a person acquires the culture of the society that they inhabit, starting at birth. In understanding the sociological subject, Stuart Hall discusses different philosophies and different theories in order to understand the different interactions of people in different societies. These include but are not limited to Karl Marx (Marxist thinking), Freud and the unconscious, Saussure and structural

linguistics, Foucault and disciplinary power and disciplined subjects, feminism, anti-racism and social movements.

Marxist thinking

Marxist thinking was advanced by Karl Marx in the mid-19th century, rooted in the continuous class struggle at that time which was a result of the exploitation of the poor by the rich (Adler, 2010). Advocates of Marxist thinking argue that Marx did not contest wealth, nor did he compliment poverty. He hated capitalism, not for its accumulation of wealth, but for the fact that power and wealth was centred upon a small number of people; he hated it because in this system, wealth means political power which is still evident in our current societies.

Freud and the unconscious

Sigmund Freud who lived between 1856 to 1939 was the founding father of psychoanalysis, a method for treating mental illness and also a theory which explains human behaviour (McLeod, 2018). Associated with Freud's psychoanalysis are three concepts: consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness (1900; 1905) whereby he describes the features of the mind's structure and function (McLeod, 2018). Consciousness, according to Freud, refers to the small amount of mental activity we know about, for instance, thoughts and perceptions. Sub-consciousness refers to the things we could be aware of if we wanted or tried, for instance, memories and stored knowledge. Unconsciousness refers to the things we are unaware of and cannot become aware of, for instance, instincts – sexual and aggressive (McLeod, 2018). Core to the Freudian theory is that the unconscious part of the mind manages behaviour to a greater degree than people suspect. In that way it contributes to one's identity formation.

Saussure and structural linguistics

According to Saussure, language is the main focus of linguistics, because linguistics looks at the general systematic nature of language and is concerned about how that system produces meaning (Joseph, 2015). According to Saussure, whatever reality we have access to is already arbitrated to the language, we have no access to a reality that is independent from language. Structural linguistics has a close link with interpretivism which helps towards describing objects, human beings or events, and also deeply understanding them in social contexts (Pham, 2018).

Foucault and disciplinary power

Foucault, a French post-modernist, made a distinctive and massive contribution towards the understanding of power in our societies. Alim (2019) argues that Foucauldian literature argues that power is what makes us what we are. Foucault's theories largely pay attention to the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions. According to Foucault, power in our time is largely exercised through disciplinary means in a variety of institutions such as prisons, schools, hospitals and militaries. Progressed learners, as they are framed and identified with regard to educational policies and legislations are a product of the South African education system.

Feminism, anti-racism and social movements

Feminism denotes the inclusion of women and access to institutions that predominantly reject them as well doing away with elements of exclusionary structures tantamount to discriminatory practices in all aspects of life (Madison, 2005 cited in Mertens, 2009) Feminism recognises the multiple identities that women have; this includes among others women of colour, lesbian women and women with disabilities. Anti-racism is an active process of ascertaining and eradicating racism by transforming systems, organisational structures, policies and, practices and attitudes so that power is restructured and equitably shared (Kivel, 2002). For the purpose of this study, progressed learners share the same sentiments with the above-mentioned minorities as they are also subjected to marginalisation, exclusion and segregation by the same educational policies and legislations that should be protecting them.

The idea that man is unified, rational, universal and homogenous as advocated by the enlightenment subject is a fallacy according to the sociological subject. In this era, fragmented cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which gave us firm locations as social individuals in the past and the blending of reality together with computer-generated commodities are shifting our personal identities, and undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects (Hall, 1989). Identities are being decentred or dislocated causing a series of identity crises among young people. From this school of thought, in this epoch man is fragmented, dispersed, decentred, de-essentialised and marked by multiplicity, contradictions and fluidity.

2.6.2.3 Post-modern-subject

The postmodern subject is considered to have no fixed, essential or permanent identity. It is always changing, formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways in which we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems that surround us (Hall, 1989). Hall suggests that we all have inconsistent identities which at times brings about confusion as they pull us in different directions. I still maintain that progressed learners should not be viewed only as progressed learners as they are identified by policy, but they are learners who need to be identified with regard to their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, family structure, home language, where they live, and possibly activities they enjoy. Postmodern educators, therefore, need to focus on individual differences in learning rather than uniformity of thought, knowledge, practice and curriculum. They need to identify and respond to learners with different learning styles including progressed learners. Hall's argument above is adjacent to the identities of progressed learners in the sense that they are not confined at one point. The same progressed learners, as they are labelled in schools, beyond schooling spaces have multiple and inconsistent identities which include being teenagers, male or female, gay or lesbian, African, Christians and many more. It is from this school of thought that I will discuss the social identity theory by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) which helps to illustrate how these social relations occur and how they construct and reinforce the identity of progressed learners as progressed learners.

2.7 Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social identity theory as suggested by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) specifies that an organisation can change individual behaviours if it can modify their self-identity or part of their self-concept that derives from the knowledge of, and emotional attachment to the group. Schools, specifically, through educators are responsible for delivering classroom instruction that helps learners to learn. To achieve this, educators are expected to prepare effective lessons, grade learners work and offer feedback, manage classroom materials, productively navigate the curriculum and collaborate with other staff. In the process, learners' social identities are shaped, framing their understanding of themselves and their relationships with other people. I have indicated earlier that education gives us a knowledge of the world around us and changes it into something better. In addition, education develops in us a perspective of looking at life and helps us build opinions and have points of view on things in life which also sharpens our identities. It is from this perspective that progressed learners' social identities should be fully

comprehended in line with the social identity theory Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) in order to know their experiences in schools, not only as defined and framed in educational policies and legislations.

This study is informed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner's (1979) social identity theory (SIT) and is rooted in the notion that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs (Trepte, 2006). I have structured this section as follows: firstly, I will outline self-esteem which is the motivation underlying inter-group behaviour. Secondly, I will outline the difference between personal and social identity. Thirdly, I will outline the processes of SIT which include social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. Last but not least, I will outline the three strategies used by group members to achieve positive social identity which include social mobility, social change, and social creativity. I will discuss social mobility because it refers to the process where-by individuals attempt to leave or dissociate themselves from an in-group. I will discuss social change because it refers to a proactive collective effort to improve the positive values and emotions associated within the in-group. Lastly, I will discuss social creativity because it refers to shaping group members with a new sense of their group's, and thereby their own identity.

2.7.1 Self-esteem

Tafjel and Turner's (1979) SIT has been chosen as the theoretical framework in this study because it attempts to explain identity formation in accordance with the social groups that human beings associate themselves with in identifying who they are. SIT advocates that individuals get their self-esteem from the groups they belong to. According to Tafjel and Turner (1979) cited in Trepte (2006, p. 255) "to enhance their self-esteem, people want to develop a positive social identity". One of the features of SIT is self-esteem as human beings are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive self-esteem. Positive self-esteem, according to Branden (2001, p. 123) gives us the strength and flexibility to take charge of our lives and grow from our mistakes without the fear of rejection.

An individual with a low self-esteem finds it hard to fulfil expectations as they lack confidence. A study conducted by Coll and Falsafi (2010, p. 211) suggest that "failure to learn can cause feelings of doubt about belonging". A sense of belonging is part of one's identity, a person is identified by where they belong. As a result of failing to meet the stipulated pass requirements it is likely that progressed learners' self-esteem is negatively affected, and their identity and

sense of belonging compromised. Coll and Falsafi (2010) give an example of a small boy who attempts and fails to play football as expected. The boy's sense of belonging in the football team might be vastly compromised, both by himself and the others which might lead to an injured self-esteem. Constantly, progressed learners are reminded of how they have failed to meet pass requirements and are subjected to multiple academic interventions 'aimed' at improving their academic endeavours such as extra morning and afternoon classes. This kind of isolating practices may make them feel different from the rest of the learners. Such practices are likely to tamper with their identity and sense of belonging. Coll and Falsafi (2010) claim that learning is one of the ways of constructing identities and therefore the identity of a person as a learner is essential to other identity construction. From this school of thought, learner identity is the core identity in a schooling environment.

A lack of self-esteem could also influence each part of our lives, from our ability to our choice of associates, and also impact our physical and psychological well-being. Furthermore, Lim, Saulsman, and Nathan (2005, p. 7) suggest that "self-esteem is how we value ourselves; it is how we perceive our value to the world and how valuable we think we are to others. Self-esteem affects our trust in others, our relationships, and our work – nearly every part of our lives". SIT proposes that there is always a direct relationship between positive social identity and self-esteem. According to Branden (2001), when individuals lack their self-esteem, it becomes difficult for them to set and reach their goals and it becomes difficult for them to unleash their best potentials.

2.7.2 Personal and social identity

Identity denotes the ways in which individuals are distinguished in their relations with other individuals. Identity is better understood by our social interaction with other people, in that we come to know who we are through our interactions with others. According to Jenkins (2008), identity refers to an individual's knowledge of who they are and this is mainly grounded in one's language and cultural background. Jenkins (2008) concludes that people of different identities tend to display different attitudes to one another some of which are discriminatory, marginalising and characterised by prejudices. Terry et al. (1999, p. 227) define self-identity as "a collection of identities that reflects the roles that a person occupies in the social structure". They also identify a close link between self-identity and behaviours which are demonstrated in the wider social context. When people are conscious of their personal identity, they turn to

socially identify themselves with people with whom they share the same sentiments and this leads to social identity.

Social identity refers to a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Abrams and Hogg (1990, p. 196) affirm that social identity is "the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups, together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership". Tajfel (1979) proposes that the groups, for instance social class, family and football team which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. Trepte (2006) suggests that SIT (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) begins with the premise that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups, and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. The creation of group identities involves both the categorisation of one's 'in-group' with regard to an 'out-group' and the tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group.

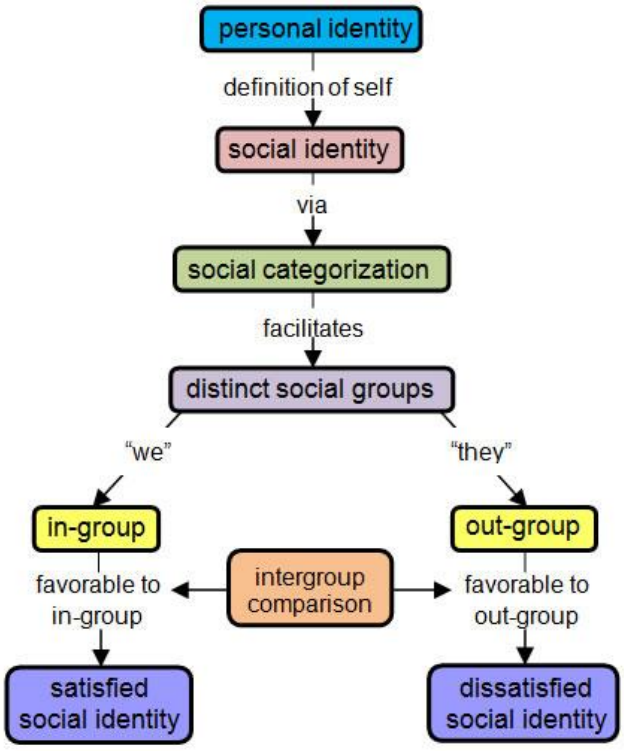


Figure 2.4: Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory

The figure above outlines SIT which begins by stating that personal identity is the initial stage in which individuals tend to differentiate their unique self from all other people. The second stage highlighted in the figure is social identity, which is the internalisation of often stereotypical, collective identifications (Jenkins, 2008). Social identification results in social categorisation which suggests that our societies are structured categorically and organised by inequalities of power and resources. According to Jenkins (2008) a proper understanding of social categories leads to a meaningful understanding of social groups; SIT therefore, focuses on how categories become distinct social groups with the emphasis on inter-group processes. SIT states that people who belong to a certain group view themselves as the 'in-group' members and those who do not belong to this group as 'out-group' members. Peoples' knowledge of 'in-group' and 'out-group' affiliations leads to intergroup comparison and this brings about endless competition amongst groups which sometimes leads to discrimination and marginalisation, for instance, racial discrimination. Figure 2.4 finally illustrates that people in their different groups will display either a satisfied social identity (in-group) or a dissatisfied social identity (out-group).

2.7.3 Processes of identity formation

There are three processes that create the in-group or out-group approach, these include social categorisation, social identification and social comparison.

2.7.3.1 Social categorisation

Social categorisation refers to one's ability to see oneself as part of a group. Social categorisation becomes a road map for social accomplishment of the individual as it orders the social setting in terms of groupings of persons in a way which makes sense to the individual (Ongur, 2010). All people have social identities and these are the groups we see ourselves as being part of. Being a member of a group (categorisation) leads to individuals having different attitudes towards people who do not belong to their group. Jenkins (2008) suggests that this is evident, for instance, in two different groups of fans supporting two different teams. One group will have different views towards the other group and this might lead to enmity. Tajfel and Turner (1979) cited in Trepte (2006, p. 257) claim that:

> Social categorisations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action they create and define the individual's place in society.

Individuals will self-categorise themselves differently according to the contexts in which they find themselves and the contigencies with which they are faced, and this leads to social identification.

2.7.3.2 Social identification

Social identification demonstrates how identity is defined as a conception of the self, the content of the self or the knowledge about who I am constructed in terms of rules and orders applying to social contexts. Mael and Ashforth (1992, pp. 104-105) define social identification as the "perception of belongingness to a group classification. The individual perceives him or herself as an actual or symbolic member of the group (I am a man, I am a fan of the local football team)". Through social identification individuals distinguish themselves as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group, as sharing a common destiny and experiencing its successes and failures. The moment individuals categorise themselves, they automatically perceive others they meet as either part of their in-group (the ones who share the same social identity) or the out-group (Jenkins, 2008). Individuals pay particular attention to in-group members and adopt their values, attitudes, appearance and behaviour. Jenkins (2008) concludes that humans tend to adopt the identity of the diffferent groups they are inclined to and in the process individuals compare their groups (in-group) with other groups (out-group). That is known as social comparison which shall be discussed next.

2.7.3.3 Social comparison

Social comparison refers to individuals' views of their social identity as superior to others which is mainly generated from regarding the products of their in-group (the things their in-group do, their attitudes or utterances) as better than the products of an out-group (Jenkins, 2008). Social comparison leads to prejudice and if members of the in-group have the power to influence the out-group, social comparison is likely to lead to discrimination. Trepte (2006, p. 258) claims that "the aim of social comparison, in terms of SIT, is to evaluate the social groups to which we and others belong. Social comparison usually takes place with groups that are similar to one's own group, and refers to dimensions that compose the group". Social comparison happens when your own self-concept, or the social concept of 'another person or persons' becomes closely interconnected with perceptions of group membership. Comparison and evaluation between groups is commonly rooted in the establishment and maintenance of in-group distinctiveness, in an inteplay of internal similarity and external difference (Jenkins,

2008). People of different groups differentiate themselves from, and discriminate against, other groups mainly because they want to promote their own positive social evaluation and collective self-esteem. Positively discrepant comparisons produce positive social identity, and negatively discrepant comparisons produce negative social identity (Trepte, 2006).

2.7.4 Strategies used by group members to achieve positive social identity

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that members of negatively distinctive in-groups achieve positive social identity by using three basic strategies. Firstly, individuals may attempt to leave or dissociate themselves from the in-group, referred to as *social mobility* strategies. Secondly, individuals may attempt to change the elements of the comparative situation so as to result in more favourable comparisons for the in-group, referred to as *social creativity* strategies. Thirdly, individuals may compete directly with the out-group to produce real changes in the relative status of the two groups, referred to as *social change* strategies (Trepte, 2006).

2.7.4.1 Social mobility

When a group's ability to make a positive contribution to its members' social identities is diminished, its capability is threatened. In such situations, one broad response is open to group members who are dissatisfied with their negative social identity and this is known as *social mobility*. Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) claim that the process of mobility can involve dissatisfaction with membership of the threatened group and resistance of the identification of self as an in-group member. As a result, individually mobile group members decline opportunities to improve the standing of their group or to help other group members while showing anticipatory identification with more attractive groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social mobility, therefore, leads to social change which will be discussed next-whereby individuals may compete directly with the out-group to produce real changes in the relative status of the two groups.

2.7.4.2 Social change

When social mobility is not permissible or desirable, the alternative response is *social change*, a proactive collective effort to improve the positive values and emotions associated within the in-group. This response is common within groups and organisations in which the disapproval of dissidents is high and from which defection is difficult. Tajfel and Turner (1986, p. 278) claim that "the belief system of 'social change' implies that the nature and structure of the

relations between social groups in the society is characterized by marked stratification, making it impossible or very difficult for individuals, as individuals, to divest themselves of an unsatisfactory, underprivileged, or stigmatized group membership". Furthermore, Ellemers et al. (2002) suggest that members of a particular group are likely to move from one group to the next if not satisfied; this might be accomplished in some instances by contrasting the in-group with the out-group. Social change can be brought about through social creativity and/or social competition, concepts that will be discussed next.

2.7.4.3 Social creativity

Social creativity is largely a matter of shaping group members with a new sense of their group's, and thereby their own, identity. All of this is done in order to protect and perhaps enhance group cohesion. Tajfel and Turner (1986, pp. 20-21) claim that "the group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation". Social creativity can be either a process of rationalising adverse reality or of sincere spiritual or ideological "enlightenment". Jenkins (2008) argues that social creativity can be understood as a mental and emotional mechanism that enables group members to hold on to their cause in the face of "objective" adversity. Tajfel and Turner (1986) claim that it may not be an individual but a group's effort to realise this by:

> a) comparing the in-group to the out-group on some new dimension; b) changing the values assigned to the attributes of the group, so that comparisons which were previously negative are now perceived as positive; c) changing the out-group (or selecting the out-group) with which the in-group is compared – in particular, ceasing or avoiding to use the high status out-group as a comparative frame of reference (p. 21).

In contrast, social competition refers to a subordinate group's effort to improve its actual social status in relation to the dominant group. This means intensifying the competitive relationship by engaging the out-group in direct conflict. Tajfel and Turner (1986, p. 21) argue that "the group members may seek positive distinctiveness through direct competition with the out-group. They may try to reverse the relative positions of the in-group and the out-group on salient dimension". Since each group's ability, or inability, to provide its members with positive value directly determines a group's cohesion and viability, individuals will struggle against negative comparisons in order to maintain membership and avoid disintegration.

Without members there is no group, and without a group there is no possibility of pursuing the group's moral goals.

In a study conducted by Ellemers et al. (2002) using social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), they focused on the different conditions under which issues of selfhood and identity are affected by the groups to which people belong. The study concluded that social identity theory aims to specify and predict the conditions under which individuals think of themselves as individuals or as group members. The study also investigated the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and group behaviour.

This study comprised of Grade 10 learners from four different secondary mainstream schools (two female learners and two male learners per school) as part of the population which participated and who were all adolescents at the time the study was conducted. In order to have a complete understanding of the participants (progressed learners) identity formation, I used Erik Erikson's psychosocial model of identity development which explains one's identity formation and my focus is on the adolescence stage and is discussed next.

2.8 Identity Formation in Adolescence

According to Para (2008), the first theorist to show interest in the study of identity formation in adolescence was Erik Homburger Erikson. Erikson introduced a psychosocial model of identity development drawing from disciplines such as anthropology and social ecology. Jacobs and Collair (2017) allude that Erikson was one of the academics to consider the development of personality as a lifelong process and identified eight developmental stages beginning at birth and extending throughout the life span. Each of the stages presents new tasks or conflicts which influence the ongoing process of identity development (Nelson, Englar-Carlson & Tierney, 2006; Para, 2008). Erikson's eight stages of identity formation are as follows: trust vs. mistrust (infancy), autonomy vs. shame and doubt (toddlerhood), initiative vs. guilt (early childhood), industry vs. inferiority (middle childhood), identity vs. role confusion (adolescence and emerging adulthood), intimacy vs. isolation (emerging adulthood and adulthood), generativity vs. stagnation (adulthood) and integrity vs. despair (old age).

According to Poole and Snarey (2011), Erikson takes identity in late adolescence and young adulthood as the backbone of its analysis, which is considered to be a period of "storm and stress" characterised by intergenerational conflicts, mood swings and an enthusiasm for risky behaviour, although theoretically not limited to that stage (Buckingham, 2008). He uses the

concept of identity in different contexts within his texts and acknowledges that the concept may appear to take different meanings depending on the context of its use across his writings. Erikson was the first to write about, and use the term, identity crisis (Poole & Snarey, 2011). The fifth stage which is identity vs. role confusion (adolescence and emerging adulthood) is of prime importance to me because this study focuses on the exploration of progressed learners' identities in mainstream secondary schools who happen to be in the same age cohort. According to Erikson's developmental model, identity vs. role confusion occurs between the ages of 12-20 and relates to the emergence and examination of self and personal identity in relation to experiences in the earlier stages. If negative outcomes occurred in previous stages 'identity' could be compromised (Nelson et al., 2006; Para, 2008; Poole & Snarey, 2011).

Jacobs and Collair (2017) suggest that identity formation as mentioned in Erikson's theory, requires three goals which are: (a) discovering and developing one's personal potential, (b) choosing one's purpose in life, and (c) to find opportunities to implement that potential and purpose. Personal potential refers to those things that the person can do better than other things. This requires exposure to a wide collection of activities, some of which we are able to do relatively well. This is recognised by the feedback we receive from others and our own positive feelings about those activities. These activities simply feel right to us, and these feelings are useful clues. We are intrinsically motivated to do these activities (Jacobs & Collair, 2017). The second step is choosing one's purpose in life. It is necessary to choose what we are seeking to accomplish in our lives. To achieve substantial success in fulfilling our purpose, the objectives must be compatible with our talent and skills (our authentic self). To choose a purpose not compatible with our capabilities is a recipe for frustration and failure (Jacobs & Collair, 2017).

The implementation of the progression policy (social promotion) in most township mainstream secondary schools has resulted in a new identity formation known as progressed learners. Learning, which is the acquisition of knowledge both in formal and informal situations, leads to the creation of one's new identity by discovering new information. Lave and Wenger (1991) cited in Coll and Falsafi (2010) claim that "learning and a sense of identity are inseparable, they are aspects of the same phenomenon". Learners shape their identities from what they learn both at home and in schools. Schools in particular play a major role towards the development of learners' identities. Jacobs and Collair (2017) suggest that schools are obligated to socialise adolescents and help them to develop social experiences. Schools are therefore agents of identity formation for adolescents mainly because they create spaces for interaction among

peers, learners and teachers. Furthermore, Penuel and Wertsch (1995) cited in Jacobs and Collair (2017, p. 3) suggest that "cultural-institutional settings such as schools should have a supportive role in the process of identity formation". The following section will discuss progressed learners' identities with reference to Hall (1995) (multiple identities) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) (STI).

2.9 Progressed Learners' Identities

Progressed learners like any other adolescent, spend most of their time with friends who in most instances use each other to define themselves. Schools have been identified as crucial spaces for adolescents like progressed learners to get together and socialise while receiving education. It appears that it is in schools where adolescents group themselves hierarchically (same as progressed learners) and everyone knows who belongs to which group and what individuals in those groups do with their time. Hierarchically in this context, refers to the classification of learners in schools according to their abilities. This is tantamount to social categorisation as mentioned by Tajfel and Turner (1979) in which individuals use to self-categorise themselves differently according to the contexts in which they find themselves and the contingencies with which they are faced, and this leads to social identification. It appears that progressed learners identify themselves differently from the rest mainly because of their inability to perform up to the expected academic standards.

In any situation, once there is competition social comparison is inevitable and this is characterised by prejudice which might ultimately result in discrimination of one by the others which is one of the practices experienced by progressed learners in schools. It appears that progressed learners are constantly subjected to unnecessary competition with their peers by the system of education itself. It appears that there is a power struggle experienced by progressed learners as they fight for social mobility. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that it is possible for any group member who is not satisfied by the achievement of their group to move from that particular status to the next hierarchical status and this leads to social change which most progressed learners aspire to attain. Social competition as discussed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) refers to a subordinate group's effort to improve its actual social status in relation to the dominant group. On the other hand, Hall (1995) discusses the different minority groups in society which include feminists, anti-racists and social movements which are constantly competing with dominant or powerful groups in society. Our society is characterised by power struggles and the desire for power originates from human actions. Consequently, power

struggles take place among people because of every single person has those desires. Likewise, progressed learners are faced with the struggle of overcoming their academic challenges which is tantamount to social creativity as suggested by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Social creativity is largely a matter of shaping group members with a new sense of their group's, and thereby their own, identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Belonging to a clique, which is a small, exclusive group of people within a larger group appears to be of great importance to adolescents as this serves several functions for them. It appears that progressed learners' sense of belonging to a clique offers them the need for closeness with others which results in the establishment of an identity. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), having a sense of belonging to a clique helps one to achieve self-confidence, develops a sense of independence from family, clarifies values and helps experiment with new roles. As observed by Hall (1995) from Foucauldian literature, schools are responsible for enacting certain behaviour in learners. In essence, schools enable learners to discipline themselves and behave in expected ways without being coerced. Nevertheless, academic interventions aimed at supporting progressed learners tend to affect them negatively as they constantly display undesired behaviour in schools due to their inability to cope with schoolwork.

Conformity is common amongst adolescents which appears to be an element that holds the peer clique together. Some key processes associated with important social identities include within-group assimilation (pressures to conform to the in-group's norms) and forms of intergroup bias (positively evaluating one's in-group relative to the out-group and possibly negatively evaluating the out-group). As mentioned by Hall (1995), when discussing post-modern subject, that no single person is inclined to a single identity, progressed learners as well do not possess one identity, rather they have multiple identities as they try to fit in amongst their peers, at home, in society and in schools. According to Hall (1995) identities are being decentred or dislocated causing a series of identity crises among young people as it is with progressed learners. Hall (1995) describes identity as a structured representation which only achieves its position through the narrow eye of the negative. This means that the self cannot be formed in isolation and only when it comes in contact with the other does it know itself. Progressed learners tend to identify themselves in that manner because they are aware of their plight of having learning difficulties which results in their social mobility seldom meeting the stipulated minimum requirement.

2.10 Conclusion

The major objective of this study was to explore the experiences of progressed learners in the South African context which makes it essential to know and understand who progressed learners are and how they are identified with regard to educational policies and legislations. Existing policies and legislations regulating progressed learners need to be understood holistically in the context of the broader educational policy and legislative settings in South Africa. Following the fact that this exploration also addresses the experiences of progressed learners regarding inclusive education, it makes it imperative, therefore, to understand clearly the fundamental principles of inclusive education and the degree to which the South African educational policy and legislative can be regarded as inclusive. Additionally, having an educational system that is entrenched on the values of inclusive education in South Africa, it would be misleading to conclude that they are being accomplished in the education fraternity. As a result, it makes it essential to explain how progressed learners' identities are interpreted in policy and legislation as well as in inclusive education.

In creating a clear understanding of progressed learners' experiences in schools, this chapter predominantly commenced by giving a clear understanding of what is meant by progressed learners and how they are identified in educational policies and legislation. I referred to the wider policy and legislative framework of education in South Africa in order to attain a clear distinctive elaboration of such official provisions for progressed learners. I went further to explain how the education policies and legislation in the South African context are well-versed to the broader international educational interventions including, but not limited to, the EFA, MDGs, SDGs and the Salamanca Declaration. I further outlined what is understood by inclusive education in general and how it is understood in South African policies and legislation and in its implementation. Lastly, in my discussion, I outlined the construction of the identities of progressed learners and specified how this construction of the progressed learners is what subjugates other identities learners have and is the basis of their experiences and relations with others in the school.

In this exploration, my key focus was on the identity and experiences of progressed learners in South Africa. I explained the identity of progressed learners as one that is constructed in educational policy and went further to explain such identities in relation to inclusive education. I clarified inclusive education in a broad sense as being more than specialised education or only about the education of people with disabilities. I made it clear in my discussion that progressed

learners are homogenised and only viewed as progressed learners and other aspects of their identities are not considered. By and large, I used Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory to show the experiences they may have in relation to others in their school environments. The subsequent chapter elucidates the research design of the study. It describes the sampling method and the research approach that I followed during the data generation process.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused mainly on the literature review, which is an account of what has been published on the research topic by other scholars and researchers, and the theoretical framework used in this study. This chapter gives a clear description on how the research process was carried out. In this chapter I adopt an interpretivist approach to research and provide further information regarding the method that was used in undertaking this research as well as justification for the use of this method. This chapter further describes the various stages of the research, which includes but are not limited to sampling, the selection of participants, the data generation process and the process of data analysis. Additionally, in this chapter I also discuss the role of the researcher in qualitative research in relation to reflexivity. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion on the validity and reliability in qualitative research and discusses the way in which these two requirements were met in the current study.

3.2 Interpretivism

This study was inspired by the interpretivist paradigm mainly because, as an educator in a mainstream secondary school, I have always wanted to have an in-depth understanding and interpretation of progressed learners' experiences pertaining to the implementation of the progression policy (social promotion).

The interpretivism research approach is viewed as an ideographic research, the exploration of individual cases or events and it has the ability to understand different people's voices, meanings and events (Rahman, 2017). According to Pham (2018) interpretivist researchers' objectives is not merely describing objects, humans or events, rather it goes further by understanding their social setting. Through the use of interviews as a data collection tool, interpretivist researchers are able to probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives which allows researchers to explore and prompt issues that are not observable (Pham, 2018). I realised that progressed learners have always been left out and their voices not heard on how they feel about being progressed. I used the

interpretivist paradigm because it enables researchers to interpret elements of a study and is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). The interviews that I conducted with principals, educators and progressed learners awarded me an opportunity to interpret the experiences of all the participants pertaining to progression. The aim was to understand progression as a phenomenon in mainstream secondary schools and how it impacts on the learners holistically. Creswell (2009, p. 68) argues that interpretive methods of research are "aimed at producing an understanding of the context of the information system, and the process whereby the information system influences and is influenced by the context" This approach does not have predefined dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Rahman, 2017).

3.2.1 Limitations of interpretivism

It is generally known that each paradigm has its own unique role contributing to providing researchers with a holistic framework and multiple views to address key social issues, specifically in the educational context, nonetheless, there are shortcomings that need to be addressed. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, (2011) cited in Pham (2018) argue that one of the limitations associated with interpretivism is that in as much as interpretivists strive towards gaining an in-depth understanding and information pertaining to a phenomenon within its complexity of the context, it becomes difficult to generalise the results to other people and other contexts. In most cases, there are gaps in verifying validity and usefulness of research outcomes when used in scientific procedures. Secondly, interpretivism's view of ontology tends to be subjective rather than objective which in many cases becomes bias (Pham, 2018). Thirdly, interpretivism lacks the ability to address political and ideological impacts on knowledge and social reality (Pham, 2018). Mack (2010) cited in Pham (2018) claim that interpretivism indirectly overlooks the issues of power and agency which are key elements of society.

3.3 Qualitative Research Methodology

When conducting research, researchers are likely to use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approaches. In this study I used a qualitative research methodology because I felt that it was appropriate as it is both process and explorative-oriented, focuses on understandings, is holistic in its approach and follows a rational and interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln,

2000). Furthermore, a qualitative research methodology is often found to be descriptive, in contrast to the rigorous approach which is often associated with quantitative studies (Creswell, 2009). I used a qualitative approach in this study because of the following motives:

- Rich, in-depth detail is possible (for instance, participants can elaborate on what they mean).
- Perceptions of participants themselves can be considered (the human factor).
- Appropriate for situations in which detailed understanding is required.
- Events can be seen in their proper context / more holistically.
- Qualitative research data is based on human experiences and observations.
- Gathered data has a predictive quality to it.
- Qualitative research is an open-ended process.
- Creativity becomes a desirable quality within qualitative research.
- Smaller sample sizes are used in qualitative research, which can save on costs (Creswell, 2009).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe qualitative research as a multifaceted research method involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to subject matter. The multifaceted nature of qualitative research enables researchers to develop a holistic picture of the phenomenon in question. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provide the following principles that underlie qualitative research:

- Qualitative research is holistic; it looks at the larger picture and begins with a search for understanding of the whole.
- Qualitative research looks at the relationships within a system.
- Qualitative research focuses on understanding a given social setting, not necessarily on making predictions about that setting.
- Qualitative research demands time-consuming analysis; it requires ongoing analysis of the data.
- Qualitative research design requires the researcher to become the research instrument. It also incorporates room for description of the researcher's own biases and ideological preferences.

- Qualitative research design incorporates informed consent decisions and is responsive to ethical concerns.
- Seeks to understand phenomena.
- Observations are determined by information richness of settings, and types of observations used are modified to enrich understanding.
- Data are presented in the form of words, quotes from documents and transcripts.
- Data are analysed by extracting themes.
- Qualitative researchers tend to use words as the basis for analysing rather than numerical data.

It is extremely key to observe the reality – in respect to subjective research techniques the reason for comprehension is not really to foresee what may happen, but instead to comprehend the inside and outside elements of the circumstance, the importance conveyed to them by the members, and what is transpiring at a specific point in time. Hancock (1998) demonstrates that qualitative studies try to answer the following questions:

- Why do individuals carry on the way they do?
- How are sentiments and states of mind shaped?
- How are individuals influenced by the occasions that go ahead around them?
- What are the contrasts between social gatherings? (Hancock, 1998, p. 2).

Since the proposed study in question was concerned about the identity formation of progressed learners, it was important, therefore, to explore how progressed learners perceived their school experiences as being similar to or different from the experiences of learners who meet pass requirements. The study sought to explore the attitude/s of progressed learners towards schooling after being progressed to the next class without meeting the pass requirements.

3.3.1 Limitations of qualitative research

Creswell (2014) forwarded the following limitations of qualitative research:

- Qualitative research is not easy to conduct.
- A long period, often years, is required to complete a study.
- Techniques used often differ from those of quantitative studies, and the researcher must be rigorous in utilizing qualitative research techniques.
- Data collection often involves large amounts of handwritten notes, which must be sorted and organized.
- To generate the findings, the researcher examines all the notes and tabulations and begins to organize them in some way that "makes sense".
- There are no fixed steps that should be followed and the study cannot be exactly replicated.

3.3.1.1 Research methods limitations with regards to implications for the study

The qualitative study was conducted at four South African secondary mainstream schools around Kwa-Thema in the East Rand Area of Gauteng where the progression policy is implemented. The findings in this study implied that educators are not knowledgeable about educational policies implemented in their schools. Findings from the semi-structured interviews of the participating principals indicated that principals were not familiar with both the implementation of the progression and inclusive policies. I realized that with the semi-structured interviews I left out valuable questions as I got carried away in conversation. While sticking to a script can ensure that you address all the issues pertaining the phenomenon of interest, a more free-flowing interview format like a semi-structured interview leaves a lot of room to go off the rail, waste time and miss important questions. The participating principals went further to discuss issues that were irrelevant from the phenomenon of interest and it included a lot of biases about both the progression and inclusive policies.

The outcome of the focus group interviews in this study implied that the participating educators were not knowledgeable about educational policies in their schools. I noticed that one specific hindrance of a focus group was the possibility that some of the participants could not express their honest and personal opinions about the phenomenon of interest. They were at times hesitant to express their thoughts, especially when their thoughts oppose the views of another

participant. Most of the participants blamed the Department of Basic Education for not providing workshops that would empower them in mastering the implementation of policies such as the progression and inclusive policies. None of the participating educators mentioned a desire for personal development possibly by enrolling at a tertiary institution in order to empower themselves, instead, they blamed the system of education for their ignorance. I realized that most of the participants were intimidated by my presence as a PhD student and this was evident when some of the participants reached certain assumptions or conclusions about the phenomenon of interests. Out of fear in going against my expectations and out of fear of disappointing me, some participants could not disclose their true and honest opinions.

3.4 Research Design: Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology is a qualitative research technique that is often used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004, p. 43). A phenomenological study attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings and responses to a particular situation (Creswell, 2005). According to Vandenberg (1997) cited in Groenewald (2004), Edmund Hurssel is regarded as the cornerstone of phenomenology in the twentieth century. Husserl overruled the conviction that items in the external world exist independently and that the information about items is reliable (Frost, McClelland, Clark, & Boylan, 2014). He claimed that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Rahman, 2017). In this particular study, the phenomenon explored was the identity formation of progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools. The major objective of qualitative phenomenological research in this study was to describe a "lived experience" of individuals (progressed learners). This was aimed at understanding the participants' perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation or phenomenon (Wilson, 2015). As mentioned by Groenewald (2004) participants (progressed learners) were encouraged to give a full description of their experiences, including their thoughts, feelings, sensations and memories (their stream of consciousness) regarding the progression policy.

According to Wilson (2015, p. 38) "in phenomenology, there is an overarching idea that meaning is embedded in human existence. In other words, people are naturally disposed to experience their world as meaningful". Since phenomenology is concerned about the individual experiences of people, therefore, it usually involves long, in-depth interviews with subjects, and sometimes researchers will interview the same subject several times to get a full picture of

their experience with the phenomenon (identity formation). In this study, progressed learners, principals and educators gave their interpretations of their experiences pertaining to the execution of the progression policy in mainstream secondary schools and how it impacted on their lives. The point was to discover basic topics or components that included progressed learners' identity formation and the opinions of both the principals and educators. Welman and Kruger (1999) cited in Groenewald (2004, p. 44), clearly indicate that "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved". It became crucial, therefore, to interpret the views of the participants in order to have a full understanding of their experiences in relation to progression.

3.4.1 Phenomenon of interest

In this study the phenomenon of interest was to explore the extent to which the progression policy impacts on Grade 10 learners in mainstream secondary schools.

3.4.2 Benefits of using phenomenological research

According to Frost et al. (2014) the following are benefits of using phenomenological research:

- Seeks to find the universal nature of an experience and can provide a deeper understanding.
- The themes and meanings of an experience emerge from the data. The qualitative nature of phenomenology allows the researcher to notice trends, similarities and differences and be able to look at the bigger picture. The data is not fit into a statistical test that confines or restricts the interpretation.
- Helps to understand a lived experience and brings meaning to it. This may contribute to the development of new theories, changes in policies or changes in responses.
- Results may help expose misconceptions about an experience. It may be a means to have the voices of the participants heard which may prompt action or at least challenge pre-conceived notions and complacency.
- Phenomenology aims to describe the exclusively singular aspects (identity/essence/otherness) of a phenomenon or event (Frost et al., 2014).

3.4.3 Limitations of phenomenological research

Phenomenology, like any other research methodology, has its shortcomings. The following shortcomings have been discussed by Giorgi (2012, p.7):

- The research participants must be able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about the experience being studied. It may be difficult for them to express themselves due to language barriers, age, cognition, embarrassment and other factors.

- Phenomenology requires researcher interpretation, making phenomenological reduction an important component to reduce biases, assumptions and pre-conceived ideas about an experience or phenomenon. Researcher bias is difficult to determine or detect.

- Results are not statistically reliable, even with a larger sample size. It does not produce generalizable data.

- It may be difficult to gain access to participants.

- Presentation of findings may be difficult. The subjectivity of the data may lead to difficulty in establishing reliability and validity.

- Policy makers may give less credibility to phenomenological study.

- Gathering data and data analysis may be time-consuming and laborious.

3.4.4 Proportions of phenomenology

To give a full detailed understanding of Husserlian phenomenology in this study, I used Spiegelberg's (1975) framework focusing on six dimensions which are as follows: (a) descriptive phenomenology, (b) essential phenomenology, (c) phenomenology of appearances, (d) constitutive phenomenology, (e) reductive phenomenology, and (f) hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.4.4.1 Descriptive phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that is mainly associated with exploration and description of the lived experiences of individuals in social science research (Groenewald, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In this study, my major focus was the exploration and description of the lived experiences of progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools. I was guided by the research question: How are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression? According to Groenewald (2004) the "descriptive approach" to research is used to illuminate poorly understood aspects of experiences. Initially, I had no idea how progressed learners' identities were influenced by the implementation of the progression policy. Nevertheless, after

interacting with them as participants of the study, together with their educators, I developed a clear picture of how they experienced grade progression and how the policy impacted on them holistically.

3.4.4.2 Phenomenology of essences

In phenomenological research, an essence can be understood as a structure of important meanings that clarifies a phenomenon of interest (Dahlberg, 2006). Phenomenology of essences, according to Dahlberg (2006), involves probing through the data to search for common themes or essences and establishing patterns of relationships shared by a particular phenomenon. In this study, I read all the data (questionnaires and transcribed interviews of the participants) and came up with themes which were relevant to the phenomenon of interest. Probing for essences provided me with a sense of what was essential and what was accidental in the phenomenological descriptions.

3.4.4.3 Constitutive phenomenology

Constitutive phenomenology refers to the process in which the phenomena takes shape in people's consciousness as they advance from first impressions to a full picture of their structure (Streubert & Carpenter 1999) When conducting this study, initially I had many biases, assumptions and presuppositions about the progression policy and how it impacted on learners, educators and principals. As the study unfolded, I developed comprehensive knowledge about the phenomenon of interest which I consider personal academic development.

3.4.4.4 Reductive phenomenology

Reductive phenomenology refers to the practice of maintaining objectivity and 'bracketing out' any forms of biases throughout a phenomenological investigation (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Groenewald, 2004). Bracketing or suspension of the natural world is implied in all stages of the phenomenological exploration. According to Spiegelberg (1975), it is likely that researchers might develop personal biases, assumptions and presuppositions during an exploration of a phenomenon, however, reductive phenomenology assists researchers to obtain the purest description of the phenomenon under exploration (Chan et al., 2013). Hamill and Sinclair (2010) cited in Chan et al. (2013, p. 2) suggest that "to achieve bracketing, the literature review be delayed until after data collection and analysis, so that the researchers do not phrase questions or analyse data for themes that they know exist in the literature". In essence, the

delayed literature review helped me to address the impact of my pre-understanding of the research question. I started by identifying presumptions or assumptions that I had about the impact of the progression policy on learners as an educator who was employed in a mainstream secondary school. I remained as neutral as possible during the investigation and I subjected myself to a critical self-examination of personal beliefs I held about the progression policy (social promotion) in order to be objective.

3.4.4.5 Phenomenology of appearance

Phenomenology of appearance involves paying attention to the ways that phenomena appear (Groenewald, 2004). This refers to the appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, consequently, the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology of appearances was not used in this study because I did not observe the phenomenon as it unfolded, but I managed to solicit the participants to describe their personal experiences of the phenomenon.

3.4.4.6 Hermeneutical phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that is interpretive in nature and it is mainly rooted in understanding human existence (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Van Manen (1997) cited in Sloan and Bowe (2014) suggests that when a researcher chooses to use this type of phenomenology as a research methodology, the researcher needs to develop a skill for reading texts which includes transcripts from the interviews which are the spoken accounts of personal experiences. Themes are further formulated and can be regarded as written interpretations of lived experiences. In this study, I used hermeneutic phenomenology to compare statements that individuals made during the interviews, some of which contained phenomenological themes and some that did not. As a requirement for hermeneutic phenomenology, I examined the transcripts to reflect on the content to discover something "telling", something "meaningful", something "thematic" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 3).

3.5 Unique Approaches Involved in Phenomenological Research

3.5.1 Intuiting

Intuiting refers to the process whereby the researcher is immersed in descriptions of lived experiences (Janesick, 2001). It is the act or faculty of knowing or sensing without the use of rational processes; the ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for

conscious reasoning. Through the intuitive process, I acquired an understanding of the phenomenon of progression in schools as described by principals, educators and learners who participated in the study. During the interviews, I encouraged knowledge generation by using facilitative techniques such as open-ended clarifying questions and refrained from leading questions. Intuition is about being able to understand how someone is feeling not only through their words but also their body language and energy. Having intuition also enables the researcher to know where to go with the discussion.

3.5.2 Bracketing

Bracketing is a method used in phenomenological qualitative research to alleviate any possibility of distorting the 'truth' that may taint the research process because of the researcher's preconceptions about the phenomena of interest (Tufford & Newman, 2010). It is a process of creating a distance from previously held theories and assumptions in order to become a non-participating observer of conscious experiences of the world. Chan et al. (2013) suggest that bracketing is a method used in phenomenological studies that requires researchers to put aside their pre-conceived beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation. Bracketing as a method is important throughout the process of an exploration, particularly with regard to data analysis. To achieve this process in this study, I remained neutral when dealing with the implementation of the progression policy in mainstream secondary schools. I identified any preconceived ideas about progression in schools such as assuming that progressed learners were happy about being progressed and educators were at peace in dealing with progressed learners. It emanated from the study that educators subjected progressed learners to academic injustices such as being labelled and discriminated based on their inability to demonstrate and meet the required academic standards. Prior to the exploration I thought that it was easy for progressed learner to mingle and socialise with their peers at school, unfortunately, the findings of the study revealed that progressed learners experienced marginalisation and exclusion at school mostly from their peers who managed to meet the stipulated academic standards. I then suspended any prior knowledge I had about progression in order to achieve a genuine description of the phenomenon of interest. I constantly kept notes during data collection and data analysis and this enabled me to examine and reflect on my engagement with the data. I further conducted interviews with outside sources (colleagues from other schools) to allow myself to uncover and bring to awareness any biases or pre-conceived assumptions about the

phenomenon of interest. I also kept a reflexive journal which started before the actual data collection process began in order to refrain from any biases.

3.5.3 Analysing

After I had finished with the process of bracketing, I then moved to the following stage which was phenomenological analysis which is based on discussions and reflections of direct sense perception and experiences of the researched phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). According to Dahlberg (2006) this strategy involves identifying the essence of the phenomenon under exploration based on the data obtained and how data are presented. In this study I listened, compared and contrasted descriptions of the phenomenon of interest from the data gathered from all the participants (trends, similarities and differences, see Chapter Five). For instance, I read all the data that I generated from the participants and I transcribed all the data verbatim and that gave me a full sense of understanding the phenomenon of interest. I eliminated all factors which I felt might disturb my perceptions or which I considered as outside factors which were not part of the phenomenon under study. Through phenomenological analysis, I managed to identify repetitive themes and interrelationships.

3.5.4 Describing

According to Groenewald (2004), describing is the final step involved in phenomenological research. This process includes verbal and written descriptions and communication of critical elements of the phenomenon thereby communicating to others what the researcher has found (Groenewald, 2004). It is crucial that the researcher should avoid attempting to describe the phenomenon prematurely. Premature description is a common methodological fault associated with this type of research. In this study I went through the phenomenological description by classifying all critical elements or essences common to the lived experience of being a progressed learner and describing these essences in detail.

3.6 Sampling and Selection of Participants

This study used purposive sampling in which I solicited individuals with specific characteristics to participate in the research study. Palys (2008) argues that installed in this is the likelihood that who a person is and where that individual is situated inside a group is critical. People of the same group might not experience a phenomenon in the same way. From this

perspective, research participants were viewed as different individuals even if they had experienced the same phenomenon.

Firstly, participants in this study were selected using a group of four progressed learners from four township mainstream secondary schools around Kwa-Thema in the East Rand area of Gauteng which totaled to sixteen participants doing Grade 10 and they consisted of eight males and eight females. The rationale behind the selection of four mainstream secondary schools in Kwa-Thema was mainly because I was employed as an educator in that vicinity. The reason for selecting four Grade 10 learners from each institution was to make sure that enough data was generated from a reasonable number of participants who have experienced grade progression continuously. Gender was considered, mostly because a phenomenon affects people of different genders differently and this would assist in getting more views and different experiences.

Secondly, participants of this study were selected to include principals of the four different mainstream secondary schools who gave their accounts on how the policy on progression benefits or disadvantages learners in the schooling environment; and, thirdly, participants of the study were selected to include five educators form each institution who taught Grade 10 who were also given a platform to share their views on the progression policy and this amount to twenty educator participants.

3.6.1 The research sites

This study was conducted in four secondary mainstream schools. These previously disadvantaged township schools are located in Kwa-Thema in the Ekurhuleni metropolitan (the former East Rand) area of the Gauteng Province of South Africa.

3.6.1.1 School 1

At the time of the research, the school, which was established in 1980, had 1 367 learners, 44 educators, 11 school management team members, two deputies, one principal, three administrators, six interns and three general workers. The National Senior Certificate pass rate of the school was as follows: 87% (2015), 84% (2016) and 64.7 % (2017). All the learners attending this school were Africans whose native languages were, for example, isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Setswana and these were the languages offered as Home Languages. However, the medium of instruction in the school was English. At the time of the research, the school

offered the following subjects: Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, Maths Literacy, History, Geography, Tourism, Physical Sciences, Life Orientation and Life Sciences. The school covers Grade 8 to 12 and it falls under section 21 (no fee paying institution) being a quintile three institution. The research was conducted at this institution for reasons of convenience as previously mentioned.

3.6.1.2 School 2

At the time of the research, the school, which was established in 1969, had 1 192 learners, 38 educators, seven school management team members, one deputy, one principal and eight supporting staff. The National Senior Certificate pass rate of the school was as follows: 83% (2015), 87% (2016) and 83% (2017). All the learners attending this school were Africans whose native languages were, for example, isiZulu, isiPedi and Sesotho and these were the languages offered as Home Languages. However, the medium of instruction in the school was English. At the time of the research, the school offered the following subjects: Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, Maths Literacy, History, Geography, Tourism, Physical Sciences, Life Orientation and Life Sciences. The school covers Grade 8 to 12 and it falls under section 21 (no fee paying institution) being a quintile three institution. The research was conducted at this institution for reasons of convenience as previously mentioned.

3.6.1.3 School 3

At the time of the research, the school, which was established in 1945, had 1 110 learners, 35 educators, nine school management team members, two deputies, one principal, six supporting staff. The National Senior Certificate pass rate of the school was as follows: 61% (2016), 57% (2017) and 77 % (2018). All the learners attending this school were Africans whose native languages were, for example, isiZulu, and isiXhosa and these were the languages offered as Home Languages. However, the medium of instruction in the school was English. At the time of the research, the school offered the following subjects: Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, Maths Literacy, History, Geography, Tourism, Physical Sciences, Life Orientation, Consumer Studies and Life Sciences. The school covers Grade 8 to 12 and it falls under section 21 (no fee paying institution) being a quintile three institution. The research was conducted at this institution for reasons of convenience as previously mentioned.

3.6.1.4 School 4

At the time of the research, the school, which was established in 1981, had 1 265 learners, 41 educators, nine school management team members, two deputies, one principal and nine supporting staff. The National Senior Certificate pass rate of the school was as follows: 73% (2015), 77% (2016), 72 % (2017) and 87% (2018). All the learners attending this school were Africans whose native languages were, for example, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and Xitsonga, all of which were languages offered as Home Languages. However, the medium of instruction in the school was English. At the time of the research, the school offered the following subjects: Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Mathematics, Maths Literacy, History, Geography, Tourism, Physical Sciences, Life Orientation, Consumer Studies, Life Sciences and Computer Application Technology. The school covers Grade 8 to 12 and it falls under section 21 (no fee paying institution) being a quintile four institution. The research was conducted at this institution for reasons of convenience as previously mentioned.

3.7 Data-generation Process

The empirical inquiry was conducted in three phases. Phase one took place in the middle of the second term of schooling where participants (learners) were offered a questionnaire in which they were asked to respond to questions regarding their experiences on the progression policy (see Appendix 6). Participants were given 10 days to return the questionnaires. Phase two of the study consisted of interviews which were conducted with all participants (learners, principals and educators) and this took place towards the end of the third term of schooling. I conducted 30-minute semi-structured interviews with learners (see Appendix 7) and principals (see Appendix 9) individually. Furthermore, I then conducted 60-minute focus group interviews with educators (see Appendix 8). Group interviews informed me about the progression policy and gave a more in-depth understanding of how opinions and knowledge were formed by the selected participants in these schooling contexts. Initially, I offered all the participating learners research diaries where they were expected to record their day-to-day experiences pertaining to the phenomenon of interest; unfortunately, only four out of 16 participants returned their diaries. The data was vague, and I could not use it as it was not sufficient.

3.8 Data Instruments and Production Process

3.8.1 Questionnaire

The first data generation technique that I decided to use was the questionnaire. This method was fully justified within the context of the current study since it afforded me the opportunity to gather information from the series of questions that were posed to the participants. Abawi (2013, p. 2) defines a questionnaire as "a data collection instrument consistent of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents". A questionnaire is habitually one of the devices that researchers consider when engaged in a research project. It has been noted that it is quite challenging to design one as well as time-consuming and the quality of the data collected is determined by the quality of the questionnaire used. Bulmer (2004) cited in Bird (2009, p. 1309), claims that "the questionnaire is a well-established tool within social science research for acquiring information on participant social characteristics, present and past behaviour, standards of behaviour or attitudes and their beliefs and reasons for action with respect to the topic under investigation". This study used the questionnaire as a way of gathering data from progressed learners to find out their perceptions regarding the implementation of the grade progression policy. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Section A; required personal details of the participants, Section B; required personal opinions and allowed participants to give as much information as they could, Section C; required participants to circle the best answer from the four options, Section D; required a Yes or No response from the participants (see Appendix 6). The response rate was extremely good as all participants returned the questionnaires, fully completed. In addition, I used questionnaires for the following reasons:

1. I managed to generate a relatively large amount of information from a large number (16) of progressed learners in a short period of time and in a relatively cost-effective manner.
2. I offered the participants adequate time (10 days) to respond to the questionnaires. In that way, there was less pressure on the participants to respond immediately. Participants responded to the questionnaires at leisure whereas interviews demanded a specific fixation of time and situation.
3. I managed to quantify the results of the questionnaires quickly and easily without using a software package.
4. The questionnaires were analysed more scientifically and objectively than the other data generation tools which I used in the study, for instance, the interviews.

5. After quantifying the data, I used it to compare and contrast with data generated from the interviews.

In this study I went to the four different schools where I offered all the participating progressed learners questionnaires and explained that they were to respond to the questions in a space of 10 days. I started by explaining the ethical measures associated with the study and further stated that their participation was voluntarily. Some participants were not at ease as they associated the questionnaires with their schoolwork. I explained to them that the questionnaires had nothing to do with their school but were to find out their experiences pertaining to progression. I managed to obtain a 100% response rate as all participants returned the questionnaires on the stipulated date.

3.8.2 Semi-structured Individual interviews

The second data generation tool that I decided to use was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to interview each participant (learners) from the four secondary mainstream schools for 30 minutes per participant (see Appendix 7). Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews were used to interview the principals from the four different schools and the projected duration was 30 minutes individually (see Appendix 9). A semi-structured interview is a method of inquiry used by qualitative researchers that combines a pre-determined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussion) with the opportunity for the researcher to explore particular themes or responses further (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

According to Harrell and Bradley (2009) the outlook of a semi-structured interview is typically organized around an aide memoire or interview guide. This contains topics, themes, or areas to be covered during the course of the interview, rather than a sequenced script of standardized questions. The aim is usually to ensure flexibility in how and what sequence questions are asked, and whether and how particular areas might be followed up and developed with different interviewees (Creswell, 2009). This is so that the interview can be shaped by the interviewee's own understandings and the researcher's interests, as well as attending to unexpected issues that may arise (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). During the semi-structured interviews, the respondents were given a fair amount of latitude to provide detailed responses and the environment was made comfortable and conducive and this assisted the researcher towards maintaining confidentiality and anonymity as opposed to focus group interviews. In addition, semi-structured interviews were used because of the following reasons:

- Encourages two-way communication.
- Provides an opportunity so that interviewers can learn answers to questions and the reasons behind the answers.
- Allows respondents time to open up about sensitive issues.
- Provides qualitative data to compare to previous and future data.
- Questions can be prepared ahead of time.
- Semi-structured interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data (Creswell, 2009, p. 242).

When conducting my semi-structured interviews, I opened my interview sessions by explaining the ethical measures to the participants which brought relief and ease to all of them. In this study, when conducting semi-structured interviews in each school I was offered a quiet private room where I sat with each learner and asked questions as per the question guide, and recorded the interviews using my laptop. I was able to ask more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format. This exercise was fruitful as I was able to ask further prompting questions in a private and secure environment. For the principals, I used their offices which were private enough to conduct the interviews. Likewise, I also recorded the principals' interviews using my laptop.

3.8.3 Focus groups interviews

The third data generation tool that I decided to use was focus group interviews. Focus group interviews were conducted with educators from the four selected mainstream secondary schools to determine their perspectives on the implementation of the grade progression policy (see Appendix 8). The focus group interviews' durations were 60 minutes per group. A focus group interview is defined by Babbie (2004) as a gathering of 12 to 15 people brought together to shed light on a guided discussion. The group should be as homogeneous as possible. Focus group interviews were used in this study to explore the opinions, perceptions and views of the participants without putting any pressure on them. Focus groups were used in this study because they are known to stimulate high levels of involvement among participants, when there is a need to generate ideas from the individuals in a collective (Babbie, 2004).

In this study, I used the focus groups to generate data from focus groups made up of five Grade 10 educators from the four institutions which totalled to twenty participants by sitting them

down in a quiet room where they were given a chance to voice their views. The focus groups interviews were conducted at the four different institutions where each educator got an opportunity to tell their experience of the phenomenon of interest. The primary reason to use focus group interviews was that they enabled me to uncover personal attitudes and beliefs that other research methods could not produce and in turn this resulted to more insightful results. Additionally, because of the constant interaction and rapport between participants, focus groups also encouraged better group discussions and increased interaction. Not only did this keep the participants interested and engaged, but it also enabled them to really talk and debate, unlocking new insights that would otherwise remain undiscovered. In some instances, some educators tried to dominate, but I made it a point to ensure that everyone got a chance to say something. I started each session by explaining the ethical measures to all the participants which made them relax and listen attentively to the questions. In this manner, I was able to generate a rich understanding of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of interest.

In this study, I used the focus groups to generate data from Grade 10 educators by sitting them down in a quiet room where they were given a chance to voice their views. Each educator got an opportunity to tell their experience of the phenomenon of interest. In some instances, some educators tried to dominate, but I made it a point to ensure that everyone got a chance to say something. I started each session by explaining the ethical measures to all the participants which made them relax and listen attentively to the questions. In this manner, I was able to generate a rich understanding of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of interest.

3.8.3.1 Disadvantage of focus group interviews

According to Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, and Mukherjee (2017), focus group interviews are constantly used as a qualitative strategy to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. Focus group interviews are aimed at obtaining data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population. The following points have been suggested by Nyumba et al. (2017, pp. 22-23) as shortcomings aligned to focus group interviews:

- Individuals in a focus group have less speaking time than individual interviews;
- Some focus group members can dominate the conversation;
- The cost of a focus group can be prohibitive;

- Confidentiality and anonymity concerns can alter the quality of the data collected;
- Some people struggle to stay engaged in focus groups;
- There is no guarantee that people will participate in a focus group;
- It can be challenging to prevent bias from the researcher.

Regardless of the challenges discussed above by Nyumba et al. (2017), I managed to conduct focus group interviews successfully through appropriate and adequate planning.

The following are steps that I followed to make sure that both semi-structured individual and focus group interviews were successfully conducted, as adapted from DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019):

Step 1: determining the purpose and scope of the study

This step was essential mainly because the purpose and scope of a study helps in explaining the magnitude and direction in which the study will take and specifies the necessary participants and institutions for the study to be conducted. This step involved explaining and defining all the logistics, including the gap or problem that I had to address. In the first chapter of the study, I clearly indicated how the study was going to unfold, guided by the research questions which were made succinct and aligned to qualitative research.

Step 2: identifying participants

The second step that I used was the identification of relevant participants for the study whom I felt were suitable to best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study. Since the study explored the experiences of progressed learners in four township mainstream schools, it was relevant, therefore, to include progressed learners, educators and principals who were in the identified research sites. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), relevant and appropriate interviewees are those who are available, willing to be interviewed and have lived experiences and knowledge about the phenomenon. All the participants in this study had experiences indicated in the research question and the purpose of the study.

Step 3: considering ethical issues

In order to abide by the research ethics, I applied for Research Ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) at the University of Witwatersrand to conduct the study. The study did not continue until I received the Research Ethics clearance from the University. To gain access to the four township schools, I furthermore applied for permission to conduct the study from the Gauteng Department of Education's head office in Johannesburg, where access to the secondary schools was granted. Moreover, to gain access to the four different secondary schools, letters asking for access from the schools were sent to all the principals of the different institutions. I then supplied all the participants with consent letters which indicated that their participation was voluntary, and should they decide to cease their participation no penalty was to be instituted. Furthermore, anonymity and confidentiality were indicated to the participants.

Step 4: planning logistical aspects

Proper planning around conducting the interviews was of great importance for the study to be successful. I contacted all the participants and made appointments which was a bit challenging as some participants would cancel their appointments due to other commitments. I also explained to the participants the length of the interviews and what they should expect during the interviews.

Step 5: developing the interview guide

All the interviews that I conducted with the participants consisted of an interview guide which was supplemented by follow-up and probing questions that depended on the interviewees' responses. When creating the interview guide, I wrote questions ranging from basic demographic information to specifics about the phenomenon. The wording of the interview questions was of great importance in order to develop questions that were open ended and not leading. I did not use suggestive language because I wanted the participants to be able to share their experiences with me freely. I designed succinct questions which were based on the phenomenon of interest, straightforward and free of jargon. I made the questions easy for the participant to understand so that they felt comfortable throughout the interview process. In all the schools, I was offered an office where I conducted the semi-structured interviews with the learners. I interviewed the principals in their offices and the educators in their staffrooms where I fully explained the purpose of the interviews and stated confidentiality and anonymity. I

indicated to all the participants the length of the interviews and told them how to get in touch with me later if they wanted to.

Step 6: establishing trust and rapport

It was essential for me to develop a close and harmonious relationship with the participants, especially the educators and principals, as the study explored their knowledge of some of the policies used in their institutions. Initially, some educators felt awkward about their participation as they cited that this might jeopardise their jobs. I explained that no information from the interviews would be disseminated to anybody other than to my university supervisor and for the purpose of writing my thesis. Knowing that I worked as an educator in the same vicinity, the participating educators and principals were very open with me about many issues being asked about. They were not hesitant to talk about issues which I did not ask about, as many of them appeared to feel that I could help make their voices heard by senior authorities at the district offices and the National Department of Basic Education at large. I then explained my standpoint with the participating progressed learners as they associated me with authority (district official). At first they were not at ease, so I had to explain to them the entire purpose of the study.

Step 7: conducting the interview (location and set-up)

I scheduled all the interviews at convenient times with all the participants. The location of all the interviews was private. I used lunch breaks with educators (focus groups) where participants brought their meals and participated freely. Doors were closed making the scene more private. I provided enough space between myself and the participants and I put my recording device at a convenient distance that enabled me to capture everything undisrupted.

Step 8: reflection

For every interview that I conducted, I reflected on both the process and the content of the interview. I avoided taking notes during the interviews as I felt that might disrupt the process. Instead, I listened attentively and relied on my recording device. I then played the recorded content as I transcribed the interviews verbatim. It was during the reflection moments where I planned and improved my interview skills.

3.8.4 Research diaries

A research diary is defined as a document created by an individual who has maintained a regular, personal and concurrent record (Alaszewski, 2006). A diary is therefore regarded as an up-to-date, personal and a contemporary record. Bartlett (2012) further claims that it is likely that diary entries of different people might be accurate and relevant and when people record their experiences in diaries they have enough time to think about what they want to express and how they want to express it. While the diary was used to record several things, for the purposes of this study, the intention of equipping participating progressed learners with diaries was to enable them to record their experiences and observations pertaining to progression for a period of three months. Unfortunately, only four participants out of the 16 participants recorded their vague experiences in the diaries provided. As a result, I felt that this information was not sufficient, hence, I omitted this data in my data analysis chapter.

3.9 Data Analysis

This study used an inductive data-analysis technique which is a strategy based on inductive coding mainly attained through the identification of data into different themes. As indicated by Dawson (2006) information broken down by topics is called thematic analysis. I then distinguished content sections that contained meaning units and I made a name for another classification to which the content fragment would be classified. This nature of the investigation, as per Dawson (2006) is said to be greatly inductive as the topics arise from the information and are not forced upon it by the researcher. In support of what has been said above, Henning (2004, p. 106) claims that "once all the sets of data have been coded and categorised the researcher is left with the all-important task of seeing the whole". The questions asked at this point were:

- What were the relationships in meaning between all these categories?

Once the data was coded, I broke it into categories and assigned a word, phrase, number or symbol to each coding category. I then went through all the textual data (questionnaires, interview transcripts and direct notes) in a systematic way. The ideas, concepts and themes were coded to fit the categories. In case there were too many codes, I broke the code down into sub-codes in order to better organise the data.

- What do they say together?

From the interview transcript, I read the entire interview from start to finish without coding. On the second read, I jotted down all codes and remarks on a hardcopy as I read it. The codes were derived from both those created prior to data collection (pre-set codes) as well as those that were created as data were collected and transcripts were reviewed (referred to as emergent codes). It was from this angle that I got to know what they say together.

- What do they say about each other?

At a later point, I then collapsed the codes into a larger theme and discussed various aspects of identity formation, I then compared different ideas based on the entire data. Moreover, I then compared participants' views in order to show the complexity of the analysis. The coding process thus enabled the researcher to show the richness, complexities and contradictions, which is the basis of qualitative methods.

- What is missing?

To find out what was missing, I identified the patterns that I used when coding and identified reasons for missing data. Once I was sure of the missing data I then recoded correctly. I then worked on the distribution of missing data. To avoid missing data, I decided on the best method of analysis.

- How do they address the research question (s)?

Because the primary source of data is the lived world of the individual being studied, in-depth interviews were the most common means of data collection. Furthermore, emerging themes were validated with participants because their meanings of that lived experience were central in the phenomenological study. I used direct quotes from participants that provided rich illustrations of the study themes to make sure the research questions were answered.

- How do these categories (together) link with what I already know about the topic?

To make sure that the categories link with what I already knew, I used multiple methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In this way, I tested the trustworthiness through the convergence of information from different

sources. The validity of the data was also tested and ensured by the triangulation that was made possible by exploring learners', educators' and principals' views.

3.10 My role as a researcher

As an outsider in all the institutions where I conducted my study, I became an ordinary researcher who, at times, provided guidance and direction to the participants. As I indicated earlier in my argument that I used bracketing, which assisted me in remaining neutral when dealing with the implementation of the progression policy in mainstream secondary schools. I identified any preconceived ideas about progression in schools to avoid biases. Prior to the exploration I had mixed feelings about progressed learners such as assuming that they were all happy about being progressed. I never realised that progressed learners experienced academic injustices both at the hands of their educators and their schooling peers. Educators constantly vilified progressed learners by categorising and giving them shameful names that made them to feel unwelcome at school. Schooling peers, on the other hand, also contributed to the humiliation of progressed learners by creating and maintaining unnecessary social distance which as a result made progressed learners to feel rejected and excluded in the schooling and such practice hampered heavily on their self-esteems. Hellawell (2006) suggests that being an outsider is an advantage in research as it enables one to be more objective and critical within the situation. As an outsider in this study – I was able to examine, through the complexity of group dynamics, and scrutinise through any false beliefs or biases the different participants had about the phenomenon under study as suggested by Dwyer and Buckle (2009). As an outsider, I did not face a lot of challenges in accessing learner participants. I had little access to some of the participating educators as sometimes they would be in their classes more especially educators from school 4. It was easy though to speak with the principals except for principal 4 of school 4 who was constantly out of the office. I did not reveal any data or information to anyone during the various stages of data collection, except to my university supervisor who had access to the captured data in the questionnaires, recorded interviews and the transcribed interviews. All the ethical principles relevant to the research were strictly observed.

3.11 Ethical considerations

In any type of research, the perception and regard of research ethics is of chief significance (Yin, 2011). In this study, I ensured that confidentiality and anonymity of the members was well secured. Confidentiality means not disclosing any information gained from an

interviewee, deliberately or accidentally, in ways that might identify an individual. Creswell (2005, p. 39) claims that "in a research context, confidentiality means not discussing information provided by an individual with others and presenting findings in ways that ensure individuals cannot be identified (chiefly through anonymisation)". Through anonymisation, researchers seek to protect research participants from the accidental breaking of confidentiality.

Mason (2002, p. 80) alludes that "many of the ethical guidelines published by professional academic associations emphasize the importance of gaining the informed consent of all participants in research". Prior to every interview conducted, as part of the study, every participant was given a full clarification of his or her rights (for instance, concerning confidentiality and anonymity). In this study, I gave consent letters to the parents or guardians of the learners via the learners who then signed the consent forms on behalf of their children (see Appendix 2 and 3). Parents and guardians were enlightened about the voluntary co-operation of their children. The participating educators (see Appendix 4) and principals (see Appendix 5) all signed a form of consent, which informed them that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, even after signing the consent form. Educators signed a group agreement consent form to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. According to Dawson (2006), it is essential for a researcher to be open and honest with the participants, and to provide them with a Code of Ethics before the commencement of the study. The purpose of the study was well explained as well as my position of being a student researcher at the University of Witwatersrand.

I then applied for Research Ethics clearance from the University Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) at the University of Witwatersrand to conduct the study (see Appendix 10). The study did not continue until I received the Research Ethics clearance from the University. To gain access from the four township schools, I, furthermore, applied for permission to conduct the study from the Gauteng Department of Education head office in Johannesburg where access to the secondary schools was granted (see Appendix 11). Moreover, to gain access to the four different secondary schools, letters asking for access to the schools were sent to all the principals of the different institutions (see Appendix 1).

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of the research methodology of the study, with specific reference to the research paradigm, qualitative approach, and qualitative data-collection

instruments. The chapter furthermore discussed the sampling method, the procedures governing the purposive selection of participants, the research site, and the data-collection process. The chapter paid special attention to data analysis, focused on the trustworthiness of the research, and the role of the researcher. In conclusion, the chapter elucidated the ethical considerations that safeguarded the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The subsequent chapter discusses the findings of the study with relevance to the themes that emerged after an inductive analysis of the data collected during the three months' data collection period.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a clear inductive analysis of the data collected during the three months' data collection period is well presented. I analysed all the sets of data in order to determine what the empirical study had or had not achieved in relation to the policy on progression and how it impacts on the identity formation of Grade 10 progressed learners from four township secondary mainstream schools. In the analysis, triangulations were privileged because the outcome of the analysis depended on how different sets of data supported or refuted the theoretical arguments. The sets of data that were analysed included the questionnaires (16 learners), semi-structured interviews (four principals and 16 learners), and focus group interviews (Grade 10 educators from four participating secondary mainstream schools).

The first section reports on the analysis of the data to show how principals from the schools that participated in the study operationalised the notion of inclusive education together with the implementation of the progression policy in their teaching methodologies.

It is standard procedure in research for the name of the research sites and the participants to be kept confidential for the purposes of research ethics. Firstly, I visited the institutions that I had identified as suitable for the study. I made appointments with the principals and I was offered dates when we could meet and discuss the objectives of the study. It was during these meetings where I invited the Principals to be part of the study (see Appendix 5). Secondly, I then focused on the importance of the ethical aspect, whereby I presented the ethical consent form and the written permission received from the Department of Education (see Appendix 11). The principals were offered reasonable timeframe to read the two documents and then sign the consent form. I made it clear from the onset that participation was entirely voluntary and that all information collected during the study would be kept confidential. I also explained that if at any stage any of the participants felt the need to withdraw, they were free to do so.

The study was conducted in four different mainstream secondary schools in Kwa-Thema (Springs) in the Ekurhuleni metropolitan (the former East Rand) area of the Gauteng Province of South Africa, where four principals were interviewed using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 9). The principals who participated in the study were of African origin who were

cooperative except for principal 4 of school 4 who was constantly out of the office. I made several attempts to meet with him but all in vain. It was only on the last day of my data collection process that I managed to meet and interview him. Generally, I received a 100% response rate from the principals. The principals who participated in the study were aged between 50 and 58 – this information is to make the reader aware of the fact that the principals' previous experience was important as it determined their views on inclusion because of the varied teacher training they had received.

The questions that were posed to the principals (See Appendix 9) aimed to probe their understanding of inclusive education together with the implementation of the progression policy in the South African context. It emanated from their responses that they had little training on how to promote inclusive pedagogies in their institutions. The principals divulged their frustrations in having to deal with progressed learners who have not met pass requirements but are moved to the next grades. The data discussed are preceded by quotation – that is, extract from statement made by the participants.

The following table summarises the themes that emanated from the sets of data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the principals.

Table 4.1: Themes derived from the principals' semi-structured interviews

Themes	Principal 1	Principal 2	Principal 3	Principal 4
Principals' knowledge of inclusive education	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little Awareness
Principals' knowledge of inclusive practices in a classroom	Little Awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little Awareness
Principals' knowledge of the progression policy	Little knowledge	Little knowledge	Little knowledge	Little Knowledge
Progression policy: Inclusive or exclusive	Inclusive and exclusive	Inclusive	Inclusive and exclusive	Inclusive

Principals' views of educators' attitude towards the policy	Negative	Positive	Negative	Negative
Behaviour demonstrated by progressed learners in schools	Undesired behaviour	Undesired behaviour	Undesired behaviour	Undesired behaviour
Grade retention or progression	Progression policy	Progression policy	Progression policy	Progression policy
Support offered by the Department of Basic Education	None	None	None	None

4.2 Themes Derived from Answers from Principals' Semi-Structured Interviews

4.2.1 Principals' knowledge of inclusive education

This theme explored the principals' understanding of the concept of inclusive education and the specific factors influencing their understanding. The analysis also took cognisance of my presentation on the reviewed literature. The conceptualisations of *inclusive education* by the principals seemed to have much in common with the views expressed in the literature.

On completion of the study, all the principals who participated in the study revealed their limited knowledge of inclusive education stating that it is when all learners, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes. It emanated from the semi-structured interviews that they were never offered any formal training pertaining to inclusion.

In support of the above claim, this is what the principals who participated in the study had to say:

> ***Principal 1****: Then basically inclusive education is the type of education that incorporates all the learner needs it's when we've got a group of learners and you say you look at all the learners in terms of their diversity then you adapt your teaching style … your teaching methodology according to the needs of those learners even*

> *learners with barriers, learning barriers they are also included in that so basically when you say it is inclusive education it is taking into consideration all the different needs of the different learners in your institution including learners with learning barriers and also having programmes to say how are you going to support the learners who have got learning barriers through the processes of remediation and other schools based programmes that's basically what inclusive education is about. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

In light of the above interview of the principal of school 1, it emanated that his understanding of inclusive education is rooted in the incorporation of all learners' educational needs by having a teaching methodology that 'includes' every learner. A methodology refers to a system of practices and procedures that a teacher uses to teach. The principal of school 1 emphasised the need for educators to understand learning barriers that might hinder effective learning and teaching, together with the need for educators to implement remedial support.

> ***Principal 2****: my understanding of inclusive education is that in terms of your mainstream education, you have also to improve learners with learning difficulties. That's what I understand. Rather than creating a lot of special schools for learners with learning difficulties. That's all that I understand. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Principal of school 2 had a different view from the preceding principal as his understanding of inclusive education dwelled on mainstreaming of learners. Mainstreaming refers to the process of accommodating and educating learners with special needs in regular classes during specific time periods based on their skills. This is an effort to make learners 'fit in' or be brought into the ordinary classroom with ordinary learners.

> ***Principal 3****: Inclusive means learners who are experiencing various means probably not gifted and average and so kind of learners but also learners that are physically challenged that would mean inclusive … in general terms so it will be learners that are not as gifted in terms of capabilities and those that are physically challenged. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Principal of school 3 differed from principal 1 and 2 in the sense that his understanding of inclusive education is rooted in the aspect of physically challenged learners. Learners with physical disabilities may have challenges such as having difficulties with actually receiving information by hearing or sight, while others can see or hear, but cannot process the information they receive. Some may have mobility problems. This can cause difficulties with reading and writing, such as locating the correct place on the page, or moving from left to right when reading and writing.

> ***Principal 4****: To get to the issue of inclusive education I strongly believe-inclusive education is you know it creates the belief that all learners are teachable … all learners can be taught irrespective of whatever challenges they might have. (Principal, School 4, 2018)*

The principal of school 4 had a different opinion from the other principals as he stated that inclusive education means that all learners are teachable in schools. In reality this means that all learners can be taught in schools regardless of any challenges they might be experiencing as long as they are given fair and just opportunities.

4.2.2 Principals' knowledge of inclusive practices in the classroom

This theme explored the principals' knowledge of inclusive practices in the classroom. One of the many tasks an educator is expected to perform is to promote a safe and welcoming classroom and school community where individual differences are valued, embraced and evident. Constructing an inclusive classroom community means implementing practices where all learners, regardless of cognitive or academic level, have opportunities to be included in the general education classroom participating in a standards-based curriculum. On completion of the study, the principals who participated validated knowledge of inclusive practices in the classroom even though they stated that they never received any formal education on inclusion. From the semi-structured interviews with the principals, this is what they had to say:

> ***Principal 1:*** *I would say I do have certain knowledge to a certain extent although I am not an expert in remedial education and … inclusivity education; however I do have an understanding from a management point of to view to say if I am leading an institution, an institution is characterised by learners who are different, learners who are diverse and learners who experience different learning difficulties and they have got different behaviours; so based on that and my experience as a teacher for the past 20 years, so I would say I am able to sit with my learners.(Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 1 indicated that he has got little knowledge of inclusive practices in the classroom, nonetheless, his understanding of inclusive practices is rooted on respecting diversity of learners in the classroom. He further mentioned that learners who are experiencing learning barriers and those who display different behaviours need to be prioritised in order to achieve inclusive practices in the classroom.

> ***Principal 2:*** *My success, I would say is just average. Because I think we have struggled with some learners but with some we are eventually successful. And I think there are quite a lot of factors that actually add to that especially in the environment*

> *of mainstream … such that certain learners might not actually want to come out that they have learning barriers or learning difficulties … some would want to compete and behave as if they don't have barriers. So I'd take it to be average, we've succeeded with some, we have not succeeded with some. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

The extent to which the principal of school 2 understands inclusive practices in the classroom differed slightly from the preceding principal in the sense that he indicated that he has average knowledge of inclusive practices in the classroom. His concern is that often he encounters leaners who deny having difficulties in their studies, yet their academic performance evidently reveals academic gaps.

> ***Principal 3****: I studied long time ago but what I know is that I am able to practice inclusive education in my classes … what I do is that I mix up my learners … the stronger ones with the weaker ones … the naughty ones with the obedient ones … that's how I do it. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

The extent to which the principal of school 3 is knowledgeable of inclusive practices in the classroom seemed much better than both the preceding principals. This principal submitted that for him, seating arrangements are very important for one to realise inclusive practices in the classroom. For him, mixing learners with higher abilities with those learners with lower abilities helps him to realise inclusion. Furthermore, the principal achieves inclusion in his classes by bringing together learners who are 'troublesome' with those who pay attention to his lessons.

> ***Principal 4****: You see the problem with me is that I have never bothered myself to learn more about this inclusive education … what I know is just general knowledge … I don't know more about inclusive practices … at first I just thought it is for handicapped people … that's it. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 4 stated that he does not have any knowledge of creating inclusive practices in the classroom. The principal alluded to the fact that he has associated inclusion with handicapped people rather than respecting the diverse educational needs of learners in the classroom.

4.2.3 Principals' knowledge of the progression policy

This theme probed the principals' knowledge of the progression policy which was implemented by the South African National Department of Education in 2015. The progression policy is the practice of passing learners in secondary mainstream schools from grade to grade with their peers even if they have not satisfied academic requirements or met performance standards of

key grades. During the study, the principals who participated in the study alluded that they are quite aware and clear about the policy. They further stated that they understand the conditions of the policy and to support their knowledge of the policy this is what they had to say:

> ***Principal 1****: Number 1, basically progression it's national policy of the department of basic education, you've got your circular E22, your circular E35 of 2016 and 2015 which talks about progression so it's a national policy whereby the learners, based on a particular criteria are moved from one grade to another even if they don't meet the pass requirements that is the first part; so in other word, progression involves taking the learner to the next grade even if they don't meet the pass requirements as long as they fall within the criteria as stipulated in your circular E22 and your circular E35 of 2016, that is the national circular on progression according to the department of basic education; that's what it's all about. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 1 demonstrated little knowledge of the progression policy even though he managed to mention some circulars that address progression, such as circular E35 of 2016. He further mentioned that progression is about moving learners from one grade to the next even they have failed to meet the stipulated pass requirements.

> ***Principal 2****: Progression … I think it is an intervention that is being done by the institution to allow learners in terms of their cohorts if they remain behind they fail a lot to allow those learners to progress or to be pushed if we use the common term, to be pushed to the next grade, but having been given the necessary support. So that's what I understand, rather than actually allow a learner to … repeat three times, four times, repeating a grade until such that the learner will lose confidence and drop out of school. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 2 differed from the principal of school 1 as he mentioned that progression is nothing but an intervention that is aimed at supporting learners who are academically struggling. For this principal, retaining leaners for a prolonged period results in learners dropping out of school. The principal did not mention any official document that addresses progression in schools.

> ***Principal 3:*** *Progression is when a learner doesn't meet the pass requirements, minimum pass requirements and is moved from one grade to a higher grade that is progression. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 3 gave a brief understanding of the progression policy by stating that progression is all about moving learners from one grade to the next even if they have not met the stipulated pass requirements. The principal did not mention any official document that addresses progression in schools.

> ***Principal 4:*** *I think progression is a question of those borderline cases, learners are … being progressed you know learners are … being given a chance to move on to the next grade even without really meeting the requirements, the pass requirements of the previous grade; but even the performance, it is assumed it's not that bad and even when the learner is moved to the next grade the learner still has a chance of making up that's my understanding. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

The Principal of school 4 differed from the other principals by stating that the progression policy applies to leaners who are borderline failing. He further mentioned that the progression policy gives learners a second chance to make it up in the next grade. The principal did not mention any official document that addresses the progression policy in schools.

4.2.4 Progression policy: Inclusive or exclusive

This theme explored whether the principals' understanding of the progression policy is inclusive or exclusive. The progression policy was initially introduced by the South African Department of Basic Education mainly to include all learners within the schooling system rather than having learners dropping out of school due to prolonged retention. It is seen as inclusive. During the study, the different principals who participated in the study had mixed views towards the policy being inclusive or exclusive and this is what they had to say:

> ***Principal 1:*** *Well I would say it's inclusive in the sense that it takes into consideration to say maybe this learner in the previous grade had learning difficulties let us not keep the learner for a long time in the system; why don't we give the learner an opportunity to try in the next grade so it becomes inclusive in that sense, to say this learner attended school on a regular basis but out of the assessment and feedback and the support then we see that this learner was really trying but there is something there where he or she cannot meet the standard; rather than keeping him or her into the system why don't we take him to the next grade … I mean yes, in that sense I would say it is inclusive because it looks at all the learners, because most of the learners that we progress are the learner that have got difficulties with learning so I would say it is very much, it's an inclusive process … although it has got its own advantages and disadvantages, it takes into consideration the diverse learners that we have in the school and tries to address all the needs of the learners in the school in different ways. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 1 stated that the progression policy is inclusive as it enables learners to move from one grade to the next rather than keeping learners in the schooling system for a long time. For him, learners who are faced with learning difficulties deserve to be given leeway by moving to the next grade, even if they do not meet the required pass requirements. The principal stated that the progression policy is inclusive as it considers the diverse academic needs of learners.

> ***Principal 2****: I am considering it as inclusive … inclusive in the sense that we are able to engage progressed learners, so basically rather than leaving them behind we are taking them on board, so that's why I am saying I consider it to be inclusive. Rather than leaving them behind … and allowing them to fail … each grade twice and so on, I think … we are taking them along that's inclusivity … that's inclusivity. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 2 also felt that the progression policy is inclusive mainly because it keeps every learner on board rather than retaining learners in the same grade for a prolonged period.

> ***Principal 3:*** *There is a little bit of both - the challenge that I have with it is that there are learners that fail to submit and for the reason that they failing for the first time they stay in a grade; there are learners that fail also but because they are failing for the second time, they are being progressed to the next grade. Now it's not fair on my side for those who have failed two subjects to be retained for that year when people who have actually been given two chances to pass the same grade are moved with failing seven subjects … that's not fair. I believe those who have been retained twice in a grade stand a chance of moving up more than those who are first time repeaters so yes, it looks even in a sense that it allows learners to move out of the system. Exclusively it doesn't cater for those who have that ability to do better given their pass averages … because the requirements require that a learner fails two subjects and for me if it was meant to me that you pass five subjects you pass then I don't see the logic in failing, in passing five subjects and failing two as the same because you might not be good in this other two but good in the rest of the other subjects which to me this learners deserve two so yah inclusive yes, exclusive yes as well in those categories. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 3 had different views from the principals of school 1 and 2. He felt that the progression policy is both inclusive and exclusive. The principal stated that some learners do not do their schoolwork knowing that ultimately, they will be moved from one grade to the next. He also stated that the progression policy should not apply to learners who have failed for the first time and rather apply to those who have been retained the previous year. For him, it is not fair to progress learners who have not repeated a grade, the policy becomes exclusive in that sense. His focus was on the number of subjects that learners need to pass in order to be granted progression.

> ***Principal 4:*** *By the look of it I think it is intended to include them, we are intending to accommodate these learners. You know even when they are experiencing a frustration down there you know the previous grade, the intention of moving them to the next grade I think it's to try and include them so that they … also feel good about themselves; for starters, moving them from one grade to another even though they did not meet the requirements, it's also intended to make them feel good about themselves but as a way of trying to say to them you still can make it even though you did not*

> *make it previously, but you still can make it. But as we know, everything depends on the effort that you put into whatever that you want to achieve, but I think it is intended to include them. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 4 felt that the progression policy is inclusive as it helps learners with learning barriers to boost their self-esteem. The principal stated that keeping learners for a prolonged period in the same grade frustrates them, but if you move them to next grade you give them a chance and they also feel good about themselves.

4.2.5 Principals' views of educators' attitudes towards the progression policy

This theme explored the principals' understanding of the educators' attitudes towards the progression policy. The research findings (based on the semi-structured interviews with the principals) indicated that some educators within the system feel that the progression policy damages learners, while others felt that the policy enables learners to realise their potential provided they are given appropriate support. The principals stated that some educators feel that learners who understand that they will be passed without meeting the stipulated pass requirements have no incentive beyond reaching those minimum levels of achievement, never really fulfilling their true potential. Learning to set the bar low often means learners will set the bar low for themselves later on in life. In support of this claim, this is what the principals had to say:

> ***Principal 1****: Yes, some of them they do, some of the educators they keep on reminding the learners that you, so and so, are doing this and you forget that we have progressed you and from an academic point of view I disagree with that because that is discouraging the learner, it's demotivating the learner. I always believe that it doesn't matter how the learner has reached a particular grade but as educators we need to constantly motivate the learners to work hard in the particular grade so that they achieve good results but educators they have these tendencies when learners annoy them or when learners misbehave they keep on reminding them that they have been progressed and that is demoralising the learners instead of saying now you're in Grade 10 or Grade 11 it doesn't matter how you arrive here, you're in Grade 11 you need to work hard to reach Grade 12. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 1 alluded to the fact that some educators have the tendency of demotivating, demoralising and discouraging learners by constantly reminding them that they were progressed from the previous grade to the current grade. He revealed that such conduct is morally and ethically wrong as it damages the confidence of the learners. The principal felt that educators simply need to support the learners gradually to the next grade.

> ***Principal 2:*** *I think it has taken us quite a lot of explanation and quite a lot of debate with educators, showing them the importance of actually supporting the progressed learners. It's a lot of work for them specially to monitor them separately and to make sure, to make sure that they also engage them in terms of the afternoon classes; make sure that they follow up whilst they actually include all of them in one class, they now check their participation and so on so… I think we have the positive attitude from them. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 2 had a different view from the preceding principal of school 1 as he stated that as a school manager he works tirelessly to make sure that his colleagues (educators) adhere to the institutional intervention strategies that are intended to support progressed learners. This includes engaging in afternoon classes as a catch-up plan for the progressed learners. His observation is that educators are cooperative and collaborative in assisting progressed learners.

> ***Principal 3****: There are a lot of frustrations around that … in some instances_… educators feel that certain learners cannot be assisted because I mean on the part of learners they need to be willing to learn … you know with the weaknesses that they brought to the grade, it becomes a burden on the side of learners knowing that they did not pass. It works on their physiologies and they are not ready to put effort in whatever is actually been given to them and take into account that the grade they're progressed to is a higher grade that requires a lot of demand in terms of skills and abilities; so like I said before, there is a mixed reaction. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 3 differed from the principal of school 2 as he submitted that educators are challenged by not knowing how to respond appropriately to progressed learners. The principal is convinced that some learners are defiant in not wanting to work together with the educators. Learners seem to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of work given to them, and in the process, some learners end up failing to meet deadlines which ultimately leads the educators to develop negative attitudes towards them.

> ***Principal 4****: You go to class as an educator and all you have to say is learners per class, not learners who have passed the previous grade and learners who have been progressed, that's what you should see as an educator. So I go into class and all that I see is learners in my class and they are all the same; yes, they have different challenges that I know as an adult, as an educator they've got different challenges and obviously those that I know to have been progressed, inwardly I know they are more, they are more challenged than those who were able to make it to the next grade all by themselves. But it's a question of developing strategies of how to handle all these learners as they are accommodated in one class when I develop questions obviously I must come up with questions that will, you know, try and accommodate everyone. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 4 differed from the other principals as he mentioned that educators should not develop a different attitude towards any learner, including progressed learners. Educators ought to remain neutral and steadfast at all times when executing their duties. Educators should rather develop strategies that would assist learners faced with learning barriers, than marginalising progressed learners who also need to be accommodated in the schooling system.

4.2.6 Behaviour demonstrated by progressed learners in schools

This theme explored the principals' knowledge of any undesired behaviour demonstrated by progressed learners in schools. On completion of the study, it emanated from the semi-structured interviews with the different principals that some of the progressed learners demonstrate desired behaviour, while some display undesired behaviour. The undesired behaviour ranges from ill-discipline, bunking of classes, not being able to meet deadlines, disrespecting educators, among others. Some of the principals revealed that progressed learners display behaviour that interferes with teaching and learning and behaviour that infringes on the rights of other learners to learn. In support of this claim, this is what some of the participants had to say:

> ***Principal 1:*** *As I've indicated some of them are very positive some of them are very negative … out of the policy there are certain things that are positive that come out, there are things that are negative that also come out but the beauty is … or what gives me fulfilment is to see that there are certain progressed learners who are able to change and who are able to pass on their own which means really … by progressing them we have given them a new lease of life, a new opportunity to improve. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 1 is convinced that progressed learners are able and capable of producing positive results only when they are given appropriate support. He concluded that some progressed learners demonstrate positive behaviour mainly by regarding their progression from one grade to the next as a second chance in life.

> ***Principal 2:*** *I think most of them they displayed a positive attitude because we do monitor SSIP … during Saturdays, they do attend but the problem is that if they are slow, they struggle in terms of coping up with the others but … what I like about them coming back on the Monday, they are able to engage the educators where they did not understand in class in terms of SSIP. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 2's views are in support of the preceding principal in the sense that he also felt that some progressed learners are able to display desired behaviours. An example of this claim is the constant compliance shown by progressed learners towards the institutional academic interventions which are intended to help progressed learners, such as weekend extra classes.

> ***Principal 3:*** *Well it depends where they come from; local learners don't show any, much difference with our own learners, but learners that are coming from the town schools … One … they feel out of place because the culture is different … many are expelled because they are using substances, drugs for instance and then those are our kind of learners; locally, it's the same thing where schools could not deal with behavioural problems and they opt for expulsion but we might say that there are other elements that maybe changes learners' behaviour. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 3 had a different view from the principals of school 1 and 2. He is of the view that progressed learners, more especially those who have been expelled from former Model C schools, have the tendency of being disobedient as they often engage in drug related activities while in school.

> ***Principal 4:*** *Yes, the frustration, but sometimes they tend to club together you know, sometimes they tend to club together; I am not sure whether it comes from the perception that they have … that they are being considered maybe as, I don't know which word to use, rejects or what, I don't know. But there is this common, there is this element that is pulling them together; sometimes, not always but sometimes you find them clubbing together … bunking of classes I think it goes with the realisation that a person is not coping. One of the problems that might be a contributory factor to bunking you know, a person is not coping and sometimes bunking is caused by the language that is being used in class and the educator that is why I am saying we always reprimand one another not to go into that direction of labelling our learners. Let's treat them the same you know in class … the bunking of classes will come as a result of maybe negative language against such learners in class but on the other hand, you know, the issues of these learners not being able to cope sometimes. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 4 is in line with principal 3 as he agreed that progressed learners are mainly frustrated due to the magnitude of schoolwork that they are faced with, hence they display undesired behaviour. Ultimately, they end up bunking classes not merely because they want to, but because of the pressure they are faced with. In addition, the principal cited that the constant labelling of progressed learners by educators contributes vastly to their undesired behaviour.

4.2.7 Grade retention or progression

This theme explored the principals' understanding of the implementation of grade retention or the progression policy. The aim was to find out from the principals which policy is more inclusive that the other. In the school context, retention is when learners repeat a grade and this is the opposite of progression (social promotion). One major setback of retention is that if learners are retained, they might have lower self-esteem which in turn might lead to depression, a poor work ethic and continued failure. On the other hand, progression helps to increase self-esteem because it allows a learner to continue progressing despite sometimes difficult circumstances. In principle, it allows a child to feel good about themselves because they see themselves as being competitive with their peers. To validate the above claim, this is what the participants had to say:

> ***Principal 1****: Each and every case I believe should be treated on its own because there are learners who have shown a lot of commitment in terms of attending school on a regular basis … Punctuality … doing school work … and all the things that are required but only to find that they've got learning difficulties. Based on that, to say that this learner has attended on a regular basis and has done the SBAs, it's just that this learner has learning barriers or learning difficulties, let us take that learner to the next grade and in the next grade open avenues and platforms where the learner will be supported accordingly in terms of the difficulties that he or she was experiencing the previous year. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

In light of the above interview, the principal of school 1 is in support of the progression policy rather than retention. His view is that learners who have shown interest and commitment towards their schoolwork should be awarded an opportunity of advancing to the next grade without meeting pass requirements. Factors such as regular attendance, punctuality and completion of school-based assessments (SBA) should be considered. When learners are progressed to the next grade, the principal felt that intensive support must be given to the learners so that they can cope with the workload in the next grade.

> ***Principal 2****: I think we started very well in terms of attaching this question of progression or learners with challenges. We are attaching it to the question of dropping out, to the question of increasing the unemployment rate, the question of increasing crime in our society, alright. So basically, we would not prefer retention, we would prefer progression but progression therefore would mean that we must be ready to support. Retention is the one that leads learners to do wrong, it would be dropping out, it would be smoking of dagga, and it would be smoking of nyaope and all those things; so I think we would prefer progression rather than retention. (Principal, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 2 concurs with the preceding principal by submitting that the progression policy seems to be a solution compared to retention. The principal mentioned that progressing learners to the next class without meeting pass requirements helps in curbing issues such as the dropping out of learners from school, escalating unemployment rates and crime. The principal felt that retaining learners contributes vastly towards learners' substance abuse such as of dagga and the deadly nyaope.

> ***Principal 3****: Well … personally, I agree with progression … I am not sure what's my position … the outcome of the education process should assist learners or its citizens with skills, knowledge and values that will sustain them outside an education system. Now when we move from one grade to the other we are setting … there are certain basic skills … and knowledge and values that a particular learner has attained so he's ready to acquire more knowledge in the next grade. When we retain that learner we are saying there are certain gaps that still need to be filled. Now the challenge is when we retain learners for a longer time because that learner lady or boy is not getting younger and there is a decision that must be made do we keep him and for how long without him getting the skills. Now, either way, retaining a learner is not helping, it is not helping progressing learners who are not acquiring the necessary skills … it helps to progress learners that will eventually acquire the skills and exit with the skills and knowledge necessary to sustain that particular learning outside the secondary schools so either way, I have reservations in terms of whether proper retention or progression is proper or incorrect. (Principal, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 3 differed a bit from both the principals of school 1 and 2 in the sense that while he supports the progression policy, he simultaneously felt that learners who have not acquired the necessary and adequate skills, knowledge and values that would enable them to cope with the academic demands of the world, should not be offered the chance of progressing to the next grade. The principal felt that such learners should be retained until they attain the required skills, however, they should not be retained for a prolonged period. For this principal, it would be a fallacious activity to progress learners to the next grade without them having obtained the necessary skills, knowledge, and values.

> ***Principal 4****: I believe people need to work hard and it is out of failure that you tend to learn more about your mistakes; it is out of failure that you tend to wise up and then you start to see things differently, your perception of things changes. It is out of failure that you also grow up in mind … and the way we are doing things, we are also not teaching these learners; these learners they need to be taught these lessons and they are not getting those lessons because for them, everything is just running smoothly; we make, we create a situation or we create circumstances that give the impression that everything is okay for these learners and there is nothing that is putting any pressure on them to want, to really want to work hard, to push hard so that they can get whatever they want in life. A child has failed, he knows he has failed but for some reason he sees himself in the next grade that is not, in my view, that is*

not helping this learner to grow up for starters … progression does not give them all of that so I really don't support progression from where I stand I don't. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)

The principal of school 4 took a different stand from the rest of the principals as he stated that progressing a learner from one grade to the next without meeting pass requirements is tantamount to rewarding a learner who has failed. The principal felt that learners who have not met pass requirements must be retained in that particular grade until they are ready to start all over again. In essence, the principal felt that the progression policy deprives learners of the opportunity to be responsible for their actions and accountable for the repercussions of their actions.

4.2.8 Support offered by Department of Basic Education

This theme explored the principals' knowledge of any support offered by the South African Department of Basic Education in promoting inclusive education in schools. On completion of the study, the principals who participated in the study revealed that they receive little or no support from the Department of Basic Education and ultimately, this hinders the smooth running of their institutions. In essence, education districts hire staff that fit the needs of school's strategic plans, assist principals to remove ineffective educators and, either through central-office staff or consultants, provide technical expertise to schools in implementing their own strategic improvement plans. Nevertheless, the participants through semi-structured interviews showed dissatisfaction and this is what they had to say:

***Principal 1**: The department although it is assisting … personally I don't think the department is doing much in terms of that, in terms of offering courses on how remedial education should be done; although the department is doing something, but it's not doing much … that's why to a certain extent I get a feeling to say that if you're a school and you don't initiate programmes at the level of the school and you wait for the department, you are not going to get things happening at the level of the school. Your learners are not going to be assisted and supported accordingly because they don't have much programmes in terms of remedial courses whereby educators are to say let us train you accordingly how to conduct remedial classes, how remedial classes should look like and what is it that you should look at achieving when you conduct remedial classes. So most of the programmes are initiated at the level of the school, but the department here and there they do offer support but I feel that the support is not adequate. (Principal, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 1 submitted that the Department of Education is offering little or no support at all to them in order to achieve the implementation of remedial education in schools.

Such conduct by the department is detrimental to their endeavours in assisting learners who are faced with learning barriers at that particular moment. The principal felt that it becomes crucial for a school to initiate its own intervention programmes aimed at assisting learners faced with learning barriers; should they wait and look to the department, nothing would materialise.

> ***Principal 2****: As far as I recall … there's nothing that we get from the district or department … no support at all … when they come here they are much concerned about syllabus completion than anything else … the fact that we have overcrowded classes … progressed learners they don't care … what they want is results. (Principal, School 2, interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 2 is very much in line with the preceding principal as he also confirmed that they do not receive any tangible help from the department. He felt that the presence of district officials in schools is associated with accountability, whereby educators are made to account for being behind regarding syllabus completion, ignoring contextual factors such as overcrowded classes and the issue of progressed learners.

> ***Principal 3****: I have never in my life attended a workshop that is aimed at helping us deal with behavioural issues from learners … the district does not offer any kind of that nature … even workshops that deal with inclusive education … ever since I was a principal I have never. (Principal 3, School 3, interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 3 concurred with the principals of both schools 1 and 2 that the Department of Basic Education does not offer them any support in dealing with learners who are faced with behavioural issues. He submitted that since he was a principal, the department has never afforded them a chance to be empowered by learning about inclusive education.

> ***Principal 4****: Ah … not so much I would say, not so much in my experience … and to think that this is one particular area which I think is very important and it needs to be given more attention from the side of the district. You see I am one person who believes by now we should be having a special unit that is focusing primarily on the implementation of inclusive education, yes. (Principal, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

The principal of school 4 also alluded to the fact that the Department of Basic Education has never offered them any workshops or courses that would enhance their knowledge regarding inclusive education. The principal felt that this is one of the faculties in education that requires special attention, but the department is doing nothing.

In essence, the principals demonstrated little knowledge of inclusive education practices as they gave different views of what they thought, rather than what the literature or policy was

referring to. This could be a result of their lack of training in the subject because inclusive education became a focal issue shortly after the Salamanca conference which coincided with the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994. Prior to this period, educators worked in apartheid establishments which divided educational facilities based mainly on race and (dis) ability. The principals' responses such as *incorporation of all the learner needs, mainstreaming, and physically challenged* indicated that most of their knowledge about inclusion emanates from their previous training which centred on identifying learners' shortcomings. The interpretation of the data referred to above suggests that the principals knew what inclusive education meant, although their understanding seemed varied; realised that their knowledge compared well with some of the theoretical conceptualisations in the literature; had little knowledge of White Paper 6 which, as pointed out previously, is the legislative framework conceptualising inclusion within the South African context; and recognised that their understanding was informed by their knowledge of special education.

The interviewees, when asked about any support provided by the Department of Basic Education in promotion of inclusive practices, indicated that little or nothing is done by the department. This was seen to be a huge problem in the schools as the principals struggled in developing inclusive classrooms that would cater for all learners. In the process, progressed learners became victims of the schooling system managed by incompetent personnel.

4.3 Themes Derived from Answers from Educators' Focus Groups Interviews

The next section reports on the analysis of the data to show how Grade 10 educators from the different schools that participated in the study operationalised the notion of inclusive education together with the implementation of the progression policy in their teaching methodologies.

The process of meeting with the Grade 10 educators from the four mainstream secondary schools was almost the same with the principals. I visited the schools and made appointments with all educators who taught Grade 10. During these meetings with all the Grade 10 educators, I made it clear that I was looking forward to working with at least five educators from each school. I explained to all the educators who then agreed to be part of the study the objectives and benefits of the study to the education fraternity. In making sure that the ethics of research were observed, I offered all the educators an information sheet (See Appendix 4) and a consent form to sign, accepting and indicating their voluntary participation in the study. Focus group interviews were conducted with all educators from the selected schools to determine their

perspectives on inclusive practices and their understanding of the implementation of the progression policy (See Appendix 8).

The educators who participated in the study were all of African origin and they were quite cooperative during the study. Their ages varied from 25 to 58. I encountered challenges with educators from school 4. I organised a leader to lead and organise meetings with the focus group, unfortunately, he was mostly absent from his workplace. Another issue detrimental to the study was that this focus group was made up of junior educators who had just graduated from tertiary institutions who did not value the element of educational research. Nonetheless, I received a 100% response rate from all the focus groups.

While the educators claimed to have been inclusive in their approach, it is not clear from their statements how this is being done in an actual pedagogical situation. It also seemed as though inclusion means having diverse learners in the class, and that there is no explicit indication as to how pedagogy is designed to be inclusive. It emanated from these interviews that the emphasis is more on accommodating others than on what constitutes pedagogic practice.

As educators gave their different understandings of the progression policy it is evident that they do not consider the policy as inclusive but "a top-down" instruction from the Department of Basic Education aimed at hindering their teaching and learning activities, rather than benefiting the learners. Some participants further revealed their frustrations and the difficulties they encounter in dealing with progressed learners in institutions where little or no support is received from the department. Little or no parental involvement towards the realisation of inclusion in schools was another disadvantage that the focus groups raised during the sessions.

The following table summarises the themes that emanated from the sets of data obtained from the focus group interviews with the educators from the four mainstream secondary schools.

Table 4.2: Themes derived from answers from the focus groups interviews

Focus groups (Grade 10 Educators)

Themes	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4
Inclusive practices	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness
Including all learners, particularly progressed learners	Little knowledge	Little knowledge	Little knowledge	Little knowledge
Knowledge of Progression policy (Social promotion)	Little knowledge	Little knowledge	Little knowledge	Little knowledge
Inaccessible curricula	Inaccessible	Inaccessible	Inaccessible	Inaccessible
Support from the Department of Basic education	None	None	None	None
Behaviour demonstrated by progressed learners	Undesirable behaviour	Undesirable behaviour	Undesirable behaviour	Undesirable behaviour
How inclusive is the culture in the classroom	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness
Valuing the achievements of all learners	None	None	None	None

Criteria used when progressing learners	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness
Family engagement	No parental support.	No parental support.	No parental support.	No parental support.
Is the progression policy inclusive or exclusive?	Both inclusive and exclusive	Both inclusive and exclusive	Exclusive	Both inclusive and exclusive
School Based Support Teams (SBST)	Available on site	Available on site	Available on site	Not mentioned

4.3.1 Inclusive practices

This theme probed the educators' knowledge of inclusive practices in a classroom. The educators appeared to be familiar with the main principles underlying the definitions of Inclusion as advocated in the literature. Inclusive practice is an approach to teaching that recognises the diversity of learners, enabling all learners to access course content, fully participate in learning activities and demonstrate their knowledge and strengths at assessment. Data analysis of focus group interviews revealed that educators from the different schools have little knowledge regarding inclusive enrolment practices which are rooted on equity and equality of opportunities and an inclusive framework that carries through all policies and actions. In a school where inclusive practices are observed, everybody's voice is heard, encouraged, and valued. To substantiate the above claim this is what some of the educators from the different focus groups had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: I think inclusive education … maybe for example in a classroom when you teach, you must take into consideration that there are different learners in the classroom, these learners come from different backgrounds, in terms of what you need or you want from them. Say now you'd be teaching English and want learners to look for certain concepts in the dictionary, you must take into consideration that there might be learners who come from poor backgrounds, they don't have such resources … it's basically teaching … taking in consideration that there are different learners*

> *who learn differently who have different resources who come from different backgrounds. (Educator 4, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

In light of the above interview, the educator who formed part of the focus group from school 2 understands inclusive enrolment practices by considering the different backgrounds of the different learners, more especially socio-economic backgrounds. For this educator, it is important to understand that it is not every learner who can afford academic resources.

> ***Focus group 2****: Inclusive education practices … I think is a system whereby you include learner's backgrounds social backgrounds, races, disabilities. You make sure that they all get equal education regardless of where they're coming from, it's what I can say. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 3 who formed part of focus group 2 differed a bit from the preceding educator as she stated that inclusive enrolment practices take into consideration the awareness of social backgrounds, races and disabilities that the learners might have. For this educator, all learners have a right to equal education regardless of the above-mentioned situations.

> ***Focus group 3****: My understanding here inclusive … it has to do with including all learners … their different levels of … physically … mentally … abilities like those who are handicapped, also they must be included … like if a school like this one has stairs they must have ramps where they are able to be accommodated in classes and also mentally those we know they are not all the same, they are different, so we also have to include all of them differently. (Educator 2, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

For educator 2 from school 1 inclusive enrolment practices are rooted in the respect of learners, more especially those who are both physically and mentally handicapped in mainstream schools. The educator submitted that institutions of learning must consider putting in ramps that would allow easy mobility for learners who are physically challenged. Mentally handicapped learners must also be accommodated regardless of their differences from the rest of the learners.

> ***Focus group 4:*** *Inclusive education … inclusive education is all about accommodating all learners' different learning intelligences … by trying to accommodate. As teacher 1 has said, trying to accommodate and adapt to different styles of teaching and learning; so obviously that has to do with how learners learn and how they would actually love to learn so inclusive education is trying to reach the needs of learners in how they would actually want to learn something; not from a biased or subjective perspective from the teachers' side but also trying to accommodate the interest and ideals of the learners. (Educator 2, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school 4 felt that inclusive enrolment practices are mainly embedded in understanding learners' different learning intelligences. For this educator, it is important for educators to develop various teaching methods that would accommodate all learners and stimulate them to learn; in that way, inclusion would be achieved.

From the above quotations, it was clear that what educators said initially is based on what they themselves regard as inclusive practices, rather than what the literature or policy is referring to. It could be that their knowledge was derived from the public discourse on the subject since the notion of inclusion has been highly prioritised in the public domain and non-governmental forums in South Africa.

4.3.2 Including all learners, particularly progressed learners

This theme probed the educators' abilities in including all learners, particularly progressed learners at a classroom level. In an inclusive classroom, educators work together to meet the needs of learners while at the same time giving 'struggling' learners the support they need and allowing them to stay in the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, all learners are likely to benefit from the additional resources and supportive techniques used in an inclusive classroom. Educators who participated in the focus groups had different opinions about the inclusion of all learners during teaching and learning in their different schools. This is what some of the educators had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: Well … personally, I think I am able to deal with that, taking into consideration that learners don't have the same potential, they don't have the same capabilities. So due to that I'd then structure my activities in such a way that it caters for… different … capabilities. (Educator 1, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 2 felt that it becomes easy to include all learners in a classroom by clearly understanding that learners do not have the same potential and the same capabilities. For this educator, understanding different capabilities of different learners maximises the participation of all learners and appreciates that a broad range of learning needs exist among the learner population at any point in time.

> ***Focus group 2****: I think dealing with learners … it gives you an opportunity to develop skills in identifying challenges and difficulties that accompany them as my colleague has said. We did psychology at school so we also try to apply it in terms of different changes between the learners to see who's battling in class and who are doing well in class and as my other colleague has also mentioned that we are social workers, psychologists, we are also teachers. Now because of that, we can't expect all learners*

> *to be the same because I think that goes back to the question that you asked earlier on about inclusivity so we need to accommodate them as such … some challenges will be that learners don't write homework, they can't do work on their own; so as a teacher you are able to identify that if you create or you develop a close relationship between yourself and the learners so I think I can say for now I am knowledgeable in terms of dealing with learners that have difficulties. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

For educator 1 from school 3 it is important to consider yourself as a mother to the learners in order to include them. Tertiary training (educational psychology) has enabled this educator to understand the social challenges that the learners are faced with and solutions to those challenges. Educational psychology has enabled this educator to know how learning takes place. It enabled this educator to understand how learning processes should be initiated and how to motivate learners as well as how to guide the learners in the right direction in order to channel learner's abilities.

> ***Focus group 3**: In successfully including learners who have difficulties … on this part of me knowing how knowledgeable I am, I don't think I am that much knowledgeable … maybe I can include them but the part of successfully including them, I don't think I can achieve that 100% because I don't think that teachers at high school level, especially in township schools, are not that qualified to deal with learners who have learning difficulties because here it talks about learning and the behaviour so there are many factors which are leading to behavioural problems which a teacher is not qualified for. (Educator 3, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 1 had a different understanding pertaining to the inclusion of learners in a classroom as she cited little educational on the subject. This educator felt that educators from the township lack adequate skills in handling learners with learning barriers and behavioural challenges such as progressed learners. Being an educator means possessing the power to shape minds as they are growing and cultivating their pathways to learning and success for the rest of their lives. It becomes detrimental when an educator does not possess such skills.

> ***Focus group 4**: I would say of course I am knowledgeable due to the fact that I am qualified in this profession, but as my colleagues have alluded that the problem is implementation but in my case … in most cases I am able to implement this … inclusive learning by attending to … learners' individual needs; that's the first thing and to attend to them individually not as part of a class. I always try to eliminate this thing of undermining learners in terms of maybe facial appearance or physical appearance in terms of the behaviour; so I try by all means to make the learners feel they are welcomed, they are safe … and they are learning so that is why I am saying I think I am knowledgeable so I can implement those. (Educator 4, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 4 clearly understands including learners in a classroom as she stated that working with learners at an individual level helps her to include every learner. She submitted that accepting learners for who they are is essential rather than judging learners using facial or physical appearance. This educator felt that teaching is touching the lives of your learners, making connections that will last a lifetime and providing them with inspiration that will empower them in their lives. When you are passionate and compassionate for something that you love, it will shine through.

The educators' understandings of what constitutes the inclusion of all learners, particularly progressed learners, are very clear from their answers. Nevertheless, what is lacking in the conceptualisation of including all learners is how the processes of inclusion are actually operationalised in the classroom. While some of the educators claimed to have been inclusive in their approach, it is not clear from their statements how this is being done in an actual pedagogical situation.

4.3.3 Knowledge of progression policy (social promotion)

This theme probed the educators' knowledge of the progression policy that was introduced by the South African National Department of Education in 2015. The progression policy (social promotion) is rooted on the practice of passing learners from grade to grade with their peers even if the learners have not satisfied academic requirements or met performance standards key grades. Data analysis of focus group interviews revealed that educators had little knowledge about the policy and to substantiate the claim this is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: I do understand it; I think it's fair that learners who are unable to meet the pass requirements are progressed to avoid a situation whereby learners just drop out from school. I think for me it works cause some of the learners that are progressed they do well in other grades once we give them that opportunity to realise how, I mean the potential that they have so for me it works, I think I understand the concept of progression (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 3 confirmed complete understanding of the progression policy as she submitted that the policy is applicable to learners who have failed to meet pass requirements of a particular grade. The educator stated that this is done to curb the escalating rate of 'drop-outs' in schools and for her, this is a good initiative by the department.

> ***Focus group 2****: Progression is about progressing, moving learners from one grade to another grade. It might happen because of their age; they are not supposed to be*

> *in that grade at a particular age so they are progressed. It might also happen that they have been in that grade for quite long maybe they are repeating the grade so they must be moved to the next grade. (Educator 3, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 3 understands the progression policy as moving a learner from one grade to the next mainly because of age. This educator submitted that a learner must not be retained in a grade for a long time.

> ***Focus group 3****: My understanding is that progression is the promotion of a learner to the next grade even if the learner doesn't qualify but the progression is based on the fact that the learner has spent more than two years in a grade and also there is the age cohort. (Educator 1, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 2 felt that the progression policy is based on moving a learner from one grade to the next even though the learner has failed to meet the stipulated pass requirements. The learner must not spend more than two years in a grade. The educator also mentioned age as a benchmark to be considered when progressing learners.

> ***Focus group 4****: Progression okay I think it is when the learner is struggling to meet the pass requirements of a certain grade and then the learner is moved on to the next grad. I think they push the learner into the next grade. (Educator 1, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 4 felt that the progression policy is all about pushing learners from one grade to the next. This educator did not give any criteria that is associated with the implementation of the policy. In essence, all the educators showed knowledge of the progression policy and voiced out when and how is it implemented.

The educators seemed knowledgeable about the implementation of the progression policy in their different institutions. Their responses centred on the moving of a learner from one grade to the next even if that learner has failed to meet the stipulated pass requirements. However, none of them referred to the official policy regulating the implementation of progression in schools.

4.3.4 Criteria used when progressing learners

This theme probed the educators' knowledge of the criteria that is used when progressing learners from one grade to the next. Progression (social promotion) is the act of promoting a learner from one grade to the next in spite of the evidence that the learner has not mastered all of the requirements from the previous grade. There are a number of reasons for this; quite often,

the age of the learner and the number of years spent in a phase become the cornerstones to consider when progressing a learner. Focus group data analysis exposed different views from educators pertaining to factors to consider when progressing a learner from one grade to the next as stipulated by the policy. Some educators showed some understanding while others were not sure of the exact criteria. This is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1:*** *Yes, the criteria … we are having four criteria that we using at our school … the first one we are looking at … the time spent in a phase … a learner must not spend more than two years in a phase … fail twice. Once that happens the learner must be progressed … secondly, we look at the number of days absenteeism … it must not be more than 20 days … then the third one is … meeting the passing criteria … not failing more than two subjects and that's the last one. (Educator 2, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school 2 pointed out some of the principles that they adhere to when implementing the progression policy. Firstly, the educator indicated that the number of years spent in a phase by a learner is important to consider when progressing a learner. Secondly, the learner must not be absent from school for more than 20 days. The educator further stated that the learner must not fail more than two subjects.

> ***Focus group 2:*** *Okay point number one, we look at the number of years in the phase and number two … for that learner to be progressed we also need to check the age … the other format is … we also check if the learner that year has written all the SBA's … what else, remind me … yes, the number of days being absent from school. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 3 showed some understanding of the criteria used when progressing learners. Firstly, the educator mentioned that the number of years spent in a phase is vital to be considered. Secondly, the age of the learner needs to be considered. Thirdly, the learners to be progressed must have attempted all school-based assessments (SBA). Lastly, the educator highlighted the number of days as another measure to be looked at in order for a learner to be progressed to the next grade.

> ***Focus group 3:*** *They are progressed due to age cohorts; some they are progressed due to the number of years in a grade … also those who have maybe failed two subjects but have potential, so that is the criteria that we are using to progress learners … that maybe they should have completed their SBA … that's what we were told that there mustn't be SBA activity that they have not done … for progression and we are also told that they must not have been absent more than 20 days. (Educator 5, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 5 from school 1 stated that for their institution to progress a learner from one grade to the next they focus on age cohorts. Secondly, the number of years that the learner has spent in a particular grade also need to be considered. Thirdly, the educator revealed that for learners to be progressed they must not fail more than two subjects and they must display some potential of making it in the next grade. Fourthly, for the learners to be progressed they have to complete all their school-based assessments (SBA). Lastly, the educator mentioned that learners must not be absent from school for more than 20 days.

> ***Focus group 4:*** *I think they look at the number of years the learner has been in the phase, also the number of years the learner has been in the grade and they also look at the number of … school going years … for a grade 12 learner you need to be 18… if 18, and the learner is still in the lower grades they try to push that child towards the higher grades so that he doesn't spend more years than they are supposed to. (Educator 3, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 4 submitted that the progression policy could only be implemented when a learner has spent an exceeding number of years in a phase as stipulated by the department. Secondly, the number of years that the learner has spent in a grade should also be considered. Thirdly, the educator also mentioned that the age of the learners to be progressed must be place into consideration.

The educators demonstrated some knowledge of the criteria used when progressing learners from one grade to the next. Most of their responses put more emphasis on the age of the learner and the number of years spent in a phase.

4.3.5 Inaccessible curricula

This theme probed the educators' understanding of what constitutes a fair, just and accessible curriculum in schools. Learning experiences that do not foster engagement are inaccessible. Data analysis of focus group interviews revealed that curricular materials do not typically offer the kinds of options, flexibility and choice that would be required to recruit the interest of diverse learners. To justify this claim, this is what educators who formed the focus groups had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: With the curriculum I think it excludes some of the learners … I feel like the people who create the curriculum … I don't know which criteria they use to create it but … looking at the township school, I think they are mostly excluded … she mentioned … language barrier … language barrier is a serious problem … because you can see that maybe in primary school … our township schools' learners learn in*

> *their own language and when they get to high school they tend to do their tests, exams and everything in English not considering the fact that their basics … the foundation that they got was not in English so the curriculum itself, it actually excludes the learners. (Educator 4, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 2 submitted that the curriculum is faced with a lot of challenges including but not limited to language. This educator felt that the transition made by learners from primary schools being taught in their mother tongue and suddenly being faced in secondary schools with an 'alien' language creates learning barriers. This educator felt that English as a language poses a threat to township learners since many of them do not have a firm background of English as a language and ultimately, teaching and learning is compromised.

> ***Focus group 2****: The maths … is not difficult but the understanding and the presentation of the maths, maybe that's where we have challenges … it's not supposed to be difficult … and I am not sure why we find it very difficult … so I think it's a case of assessment one and then secondly the syllabus is too large for you to cater for all variations … it's too large and we don't have enough time to basically ensure that learners understand the trading between comprehension, understanding and application so the transition from understanding to application that's where we are … so the language also comes in and makes it difficult for us to uncap that … but we are trying our level best to attain that but the English part, I can tell you learners start to understand now after a long period because there is a level of maturity and they start to understand the language better and then the teaching becomes easier now that they can follow what you're saying' but the language is very, very problematic area for us who are using first additional languages. (Educator 2, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

The first concern of educator 2 from school 3 is that learners are failing to pass mathematics. The educator cited that the main reason learners are failing mathematics is because there is too much content to be mastered in the mathematics curriculum. The educator submitted that poor mathematical competencies result in difficulties in many common day-to-day activities. The educator further stated that English as a medium of instruction in schools, more especially for those who use English as a second language, has presented itself as a major stumbling block for learners to cope with their lessons.

> ***Focus group 3****: I am not very confident … I am saying this through experience that we get in the classes. In one of the classes that I teach … I've got learners that cannot read … I've got learners that cannot write and if you check the way they do things, you can actually see that they did not get the basic skills now that creates a gap of about three to four years. (Educator 1, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 4 brought a different experience as she submitted that most of the learners have challenges with reading and writing. This seemed to be the most frustrating experience of having Grade 10 learners who cannot read nor write properly in English.

> ***Focus group 4****: No, I wouldn't say it is friendly … personally I wouldn't say it's friendly, why? Because for instance the language barrier is a problem in the sense that the time that's allocated to deal with certain topics … I find it to be very little … you know you end up rushing the ATP because you want to keep up with the CMM… you want to keep up with the ATP and then you find that now the type of learners that I have … have a language barrier and that deters even the completion of the syllabus. (Educator 1, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 1 also brought the element of English language being a barrier to teaching and learning. This educator also felt that there is little time allocated for each subject in schools, hence making it difficult for learners to cope. As teacher struggles to align themselves with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP), the educator revealed that they are also expected to submit the Curriculum Management Model (CMM) where an educator reports about curriculum coverage. The educator felt that this does not allow educators enough time to teach as more time is compromised on other activities.

Almost all the educators who formed part of the educator focus group interviews divulged that the curriculum used in the different schools is not at all accessible to the learners. Educators cited challenges posed by the usage of the English language which in most cases is a second language to township school learners. The second factor that posed as a challenge according to the educators is mathematics.

4.3.6 Support from the Department of Basic Education

This theme probed the educators' understanding of the magnitude of support that the Department of Basic Education is offering schools. One of the major roles of the education districts is to provide high quality professional development programmes that are intensive, ongoing, focused on classroom practice and include on-site coaching. Districts focus their support on professional development based on the teaching and learning needs of the school. Educators are developed and supported to build teacher knowledge and skills and to change instruction across the system. On completion of the study, it emanated from the focus group interviews that the Department of Basic Education is offering little or no support in order for the institutions to realise their goals and objectives and this is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: We have already mentioned that we are not given workshops on how to handle situation like this one. So sometimes we are just rushing to complete the ATP's … so we leave some of the learners behind. You find that the teacher is ahead whereas learners are not coping … are not well. (Educator 4, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 2 highlighted that the Department of Basic Education does not offer educators any workshops aimed at helping them to deal with the progression policy or even the progressed learners. As they struggle to meet deadlines, the educator felt that some learners are left out. The educator exposed that the report from the annual teaching plan (ATP) will reveal that there is a synergy with what the educator has taught in class only to find that the learners have not understood anything.

> ***Focus group 2****: Yes … we've never been trained on that … I think the department's only concern is with the curriculum, to push the curriculum, but what is happening in schools, we haven't received any training on that we just use our experiences.*
>
> *Maybe if you have been teaching for a long time you just know when something like this is happening what is it that you should do. (Educator 3, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 shared the same sentiments with the preceding educator as she stated that the department has never offered any formal training on remedial education instead the department is only concerned about curriculum coverage. As educators, they use their own discretion and experience in dealing with the plight of the progression policy.

> ***Focus group 3****: For me, I've never been to a workshop to deal with remedial education … the only workshops we go to are relevant to the content of the learning area … not with behaviour issues of the child. (Educator 3, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 1 also shared the experience with the two preceding educators of not have received any formal workshop from the department pertaining to remedial education. The educator submitted that any occasional workshops are content related; in essence, training relevant to behavioural challenges has never been offered by the department.

> ***Focus group 4****: Me I'll say … I was teaching for almost five years… I've never come across a workshop until I went back to university where I enrolled for my PGCE. It is then that I came to hear about inclusive education. I did not know inclusive education. I have never attended a workshop on inclusive education. (Educator 4, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 4 also lamented about not receiving any support from the Department of Basic Education pertaining to inclusion. The educator disclosed that in the past five years he had been employed as an underqualified educator and it was only when he went back to university that he orientated himself with inclusive education.

The data from the educator - focus - group presented a vivid picture with regards to the little or no support that educators are receiving from the Department of Basic Education pertaining to remedial education. Although literature (see Chapter One, Section 3.2.3) ascertains that educators need to be able to screen, identify, assess and support learners inclusively, it is detrimental for educators to execute their duties with little or no knowledge on the subject.

4.3.7 Behaviour demonstrated by progressed learners

This theme probed the educators' understanding of any undesired behaviour demonstrated by progressed. Learners who have not met pass requirements in certain subjects, but advanced anyway, may feel like they have mastered a core subject when they really have not learned anything at all. When this outcome is finally discovered, and it will be at some point in time, it creates frustration for everyone involved. Educators feel helpless and resentful in dealing with learners who are academically struggling. Learners feel frustrated because they feel betrayed by the schooling system. The educator focus - group interview analysis showed that progressed learners displayed a variety of undesired behaviour and this is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: With bullying yes … I've experienced bullying in some of the classes … progressed learners they tend to feel like they are … especially those who are progressed due to their age, they are older than the others so now they are bosses in the class they cannot be told what to do, they actually bully the teachers as well. (Educator 4, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 2 disclosed that some of the progressed learners more specifically those who have been progressed because of their age, have a habit of dominating and manipulating not only younger classmates but also vulnerable educators. Since such learners are frustrated by the magnitude of the schoolwork, they tend to bully not only the learners but educators as well.

> ***Focus group 2****: Female teachers will always have problems especially with boys students or learners, especially the progressed ones or the ones that don't write homework or the ones that are using substances they will always encounter such problems; but when it comes to us males yes we do encounter problems or challenges with them but it doesn't happen quite often and the most unique problems that we get*

> *is learners who won't write homework they will chat back … they won't want to follow the rules … class rules that we set for them so those are the challenges we encounter on a daily basis. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 3 highlighted that quite often progressed learners do not write their homework and some of them engaged in substance abuse. In defence of their misconduct, the educator revealed these progressed learners have a tendency of bullying female educators whom they know are defenceless. The educator submitted that such progressed learners openly defy classroom rules that every learner is expected to observe and respect.

> ***Focus group 3****: Number one they become frustrated and then they resort to bunking class, there's also abuse of drugs, whenever they come to class … they are not in a state so you find yourself having to teach learners that are … learners that cannot concentrate, learners that are disturbing most of the time, learners that are talkative, learners that are somehow hyperactive, those are the challenges that I've seen up to this far and they don't want to write at all. When it comes to expressing themselves properly during the period when we do orals, it becomes a mountain that is in unsurmountable. (Educator 1, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

In light of the above interview, educator 1 from school 1 admitted that most progressed learners are frustrated due to the magnitude of the schoolwork, consequently, they end up bunking classes. The educator revealed that some of the progressed learners engage in drug related activities. As a result, they cannot fully concentrate in class, instead they disturb the entire lesson. The educator further highlighted that some of the progressed learners become reluctant to any academic work such as writing schoolwork and learner presentations.

> ***Focus group 4****: They are using illegal substances in the school … bunking classes … language … the language that they use with you and among each other and the manner in which they carry themselves like you will not reprimand a learner without him or her retaliating … they know that I won't do anything … they are not punishable so if ever Ma'am says one, I can always back chat and there's nothing they are going to do to me, tomorrow I'll be back here, it's fine. (Educator 3, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 4 shared the same sentiments as the preceding educator by mentioning the constant bunking of classes. This educator felt that some of the progressed learners are frustrated and angry, such that they do not have respect for the educators. If an educator calls them to order they will fight back using strong undesired language. For this educator, progressed learners come to school not to learn but to cause havoc.

The data from the educator focus group presented a different picture with regards to how progressed learners behave themselves while at school. Almost all the educator participants discredited progressed learners by stating that they are the worst learners to work with. The educators cited issues such as drug and substance abuse, absenteeism and bunking of classes.

4.3.8 How inclusive is the culture in the classroom?

This theme probed the educators' understanding of creating an inclusive culture in the classroom. Educators are duty bound to design and deliver teaching, learning and assessment methods that allow all learners to engage meaningfully with the curriculum and achieve their full potential in order to realise a culture that is inclusive in the classrooms. Learners should feel that they are valued, equal and able to participate and contribute fully to the social, cultural and academic life. However, lack of appropriate and adequate training from educators heavily hampers the creation and realisation of an inclusive culture in the classroom. Data analysis of the focus group interviews exposed that educators are not well trained in creating inclusive culture in the classroom. This is what the participants had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: As teachers I think we do try to include all the learners but the truth is we cannot include everything in everything that we do. So maybe for example we have learners that learn differently, others are audio learners others they learn by hearing … others learn by seeing writing etc … so during that particular period of time I cannot … do everything to include each and every single learner so at the end of the day there will be a learner that will be disadvantaged because I will be rushing off looking at what the curriculum has prescribed for the relation of the time. (Educator 4, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 2 felt that it is possible to include all learners in a classroom even though there are a lot of challenges. Educator 4 submitted that some learners have a challenge with audio while others are visually challenged. For educator 4 it becomes difficult to create an inclusive culture in the classroom as you are expected to consider a multitude of aspects.

> ***Focus group 2****: I cannot say I am knowledgeable but learn each and every day when I encounter some challenges that the learners are having or experiencing in classes … as my other colleagues have highlighted we learn each and every day. (Educator 5, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 5 from school 3 submitted that he is not knowledgeable in creating an inclusive culture in the classroom merely because teachers are faced with a lot of challenges. Some

challenges emanate from the learners. Educator 5 stated that this is an endless effort, so they keep on trying every day.

> ***Focus group 3****: In successfully including learners who have difficulties … on this part of me knowing how knowledgeable I am, I don't think I am that much knowledgeable, I am not … and maybe I can include them but the part of successfully including them I don't think I can achieve that 100% because I don't think that teachers at high school level, especially in township schools, are that qualified to deal with learners who have learning difficulties because here it talks about learning and the behaviour so there are many factors which are leading to behavioural problems which a teacher is not qualified for. (Educator 3, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 1 also shared the same sentiments as the preceding educator as she stated that she is not at all knowledgeable in creating an inclusive culture in the classroom. For this educator, creating an inclusive culture is not 100% possible mainly because she has not received adequate training on the subject, which is typical of township educators.

> ***Focus group 4****: To be frank meneer I would really say I am actually having a challenge … I am not saying that I am not knowledgeable enough but my varsity experience was more theoretical and when I came into the field it was more practical and I couldn't find equilibrium where I could apply my theory cause the theory that they actually taught us was from ex model-c or white … what can I call it sir but it's more on the more developed schools and we when we come to the township schools we actually find different scenarios and circumstances of which we cannot relate that to our case. So, me, truly speaking … I am knowledgeable enough but to deal with these kids I am actually having a lot of challenges because whatever I have learnt I find it hard to practically apply it in this township school. (Educator 2, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school openly divulged that he is challenged when it comes to creating an inclusive culture in the classroom. The educator stated that his tertiary training was more theoretical yet when he started teaching the classroom it became a different scenario. The educator claimed to have all the knowledge, but implementation is a challenge as he deals with learners from diverse backgrounds.

4.3.9 Valuing the achievements of all learners

This theme explored the educators' understanding of valuing the achievements of all learners in a classroom. Countless hard work is needed to ensure that all learners, particularly progressed learners (in this context), can gain full access to a quality education. All learners must achieve key competences to enable them to remain engaged in education and support them. This could be realised when every learners' achievements are valued by educators. On

completion of the study, the focus group interviews exposed that some educators work tirelessly in making sure that every learner feels valued and important. In support of the above claim, this is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: But having said that I just want to bring to the table this thing that watching … when the results were being released early this year by the minister you know, I was shocked to realise that most of the progressed learners were able to get bachelors and … then you know the question I asked myself was that as teachers, maybe did we misdiagnose them because I thought we have something to do with those learners if suddenly from being progressed then a child gets a bachelor … yes I understand that hard work, yes there was a little bit of hard work on the learners side but to me, it also says… that maybe misdiagnosis was done somewhere somehow. (Educator 1, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 2 revealed that he was extremely content to hear from the minister's speech that some progressed learners have achieved bachelor passes from the National Senior Certificate (Matric). The educator was pleased with the achievements of the progressed learners and he further questioned the authenticity of the implementation of the progression policy in schools. The educator raised concerns whether the learners are declared progressed learners appropriately or not.

> ***Focus group 2****: I am very confident in dealing with learners with different difficulties, I always tell my colleagues that I don't like teaching the A class learners, you know I prefer this slow, battling, struggling learners I don't know I have this way of dealing with them, I bring myself to their level in most cases, I build this unique relationship with them and I know in most cases when it comes to female teachers they will always have problems … encounter problems with those kind of learners… I have never encountered problems with those kind of learners encouraging them you know boosting their morale making sure that you are always there for them, it goes a long way … I think we need to open up when dealing with such learners and make sure we accommodate them at all times so that they can be able to see themselves also as capable learners; yes, they may not be the same as other learners who are excelling academically but we also need to give them that courage you know make sure that they believe in themselves so that they can excel. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 3 submitted that it gives him pleasure to work with learners who are said to be academically weak as he has different positive ways of dealing with them. One of the ways in which the educator values progressed learners is to build unique relationships with them rooted in love and trust. The educator acknowledged that such learners need to be accepted for who they are. The educator felt that such a practice motivates learners and it makes them feel accepted and welcome.

4.3.10 Family engagement

This theme probed the educators' knowledge about the importance of family engagement towards the attainment of inclusion. Family engagement in education has been acknowledged as one of the fundamental factors that result in learners' excellent academic performance in schools. When families are fully engaged in their children's education, they tend to grow assurance and confidence in the school, as a result, educators also develop great trust in the families as they are capable of working hand in hand with the schools. On completion of the study, the focus group interviews revealed that lack of family engagement hampers educators' efforts in trying to support the progressed learners. This is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: I could say they are not working on my side they are not working, because as you call a large number of parents and we address these issues but the following day … same learners they come back with the same problem of not submitting … of being absent … so you can see that the parents they only come and just listen and when they go home they do nothing because there's no change in the learners. (Educator 3, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 4 felt that the involvement of parents in her school is not benefiting them in any way. The educator submitted that parents are invited to the school to attend meetings where they are instructed to discuss and correct certain issues with their children. To the educator's amazement, they see no changes from the learners which means that the parents hardly discuss those issues with their children.

> ***Focus group 2****: The same problems but I would like to add something that even parents of those progressed learners, they are not involved because normally we call them at the beginning of the year … these learners are progressed so as parents you need to support but they don't do that … they promise that they will support us but they don't even come to the meetings. (Educator 2, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school 3 felt that parents are not helping them as a school in supporting progressed learners. The educator felt that inviting parents to a meeting becomes a fallacious endeavour as little or none turn up.

> ***Focus group 3****: We cannot do anything without the consent of the parent … so as I said before … whatever the child is being taught the parent needs to be aware and acknowledge the content of the curriculum that will be taught to his child … but the parents we are having don't care … don't support our efforts. (Educator 3, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 1 also shared the same sentiments as the preceding educators. The educator felt that parents need to be aware of everything that their children are taught in schools, but most parents are reluctant to engage with curriculum issues.

> ***Focus group 4****: Things become hard without the support of the parents … township parents don't support their children … I am sorry to generalise but it's a common sickness … they don't come to school when we want to discuss serious issues especially the fate of progressed learners. (Educator 2, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school 2 submitted that little or no family engagement disrupts their efforts in making sure that leaners are well supported in schools. The educator expressed his concerns mainly about township schools where he felt that the non-involvement of parents is prolific. The educator felt that it is necessary to have family support in order to make sure the progressed learners receive the necessary support that will benefit them.

4.3.11 Is the progression policy inclusive or exclusive?

This theme probed the educators' knowledge whether the progression policy is inclusive or exclusive. Educators who made up the different focus groups had different views towards the progression policy. Some felt that it is completely inclusive, some concluded that it is exclusive while others felt that it is both. On completion of the study some educators felt that the progression policy is good because it allows learners to move to the next grade rather than repeating a grade, while others felt that it creates false confidence in those learners who actually feel they are prepared for higher education. This is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1:*** *I think it is inclusive, because it includes even those that are … that are not making it so it gives them a second chance. (Educator 2, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school 2 felt that the progression policy is inclusive as it gives academically struggling learners a second chance. Instead of having learners out of the system, the progression policy helps them to remain at school.

> ***Focus group 2:*** *I think it's both, it is inclusive in a sense that we do accommodate progressed learners, we make sure that they [have] access to equal education and everything but as I've mentioned earlier on that we sometimes tend to exclude learners by calling them names having a different class for the progressed learners only, yes it works somehow but I feel that they feel excluded when you do that you know they feel that they are being discriminated against why should they be isolated from other learners since they can learn from those learners as well, so why do we exclude them*

from that. So I feel it's both, I feel its inclusive and also exclusive. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)

Educator 1 from school 3 submitted that the progression policy is indeed inclusive mainly because it offers learners equal access to education. The educator further stated that the progression policy is made exclusive by educators themselves with their actions of marginalising progressed learners such as labelling them. The educator felt that it is a bad practice to divide learners based on their capabilities. Having progressed learners in one class and those who have met pass requirements in another is a discriminatory practice which the educator felt is something to be dealt away with.

Focus group 3: *They don't go anywhere … so for me it is totally not inclusive they might have kept them at school for that period, but they do go to the streets after matric so they did not solve the problem. (Educator 3, school 1, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 1 submitted that the progression policy is not at all inclusive as some of the progressed learners do not achieve much in life. The educator felt that keeping progressed learners within the schooling system is a good practice, but it is fallacious as the learners ultimately end up roaming the streets with no skills to show for their education.

Focus group 4: *You know I'd say I think this policy is inclusive in a sense that the progressed learners they don't feel left behind by those they were studying with the previous year, cause they are all together even though they know very well that they are not doing well in their studies but they feel included if they move to the next level with all the other learners then in terms of their learning capabilities I'll say it's exclusive cause all these learning styles your multiple intelligence and teaching styles they recommend that you mustn't exclude … you must not exit during a classroom setup … you must not exclude learners so you must just apply these different learning styles maybe the ones who have been progressed they can improve from you applying those different teaching styles. (Educator 4, school 4, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 4 from school 4 agreed with the conviction that the progression policy is inclusive mainly because it keeps every learner at school. Even though some of the progressed learners are faced with challenges of grasping the content in the next grade, the educator felt that they are all catered for. Nonetheless, the educator felt that the policy is at the same time exclusive, as it does not consider the learning capabilities of all the learners in the same classroom. The policy assumes that 'one-size-fits-all', yet educators must develop different teaching styles that would accommodate every leaner in the classroom which is a cornerstone of inclusion.

4.3.12 School Based Support Team (SBST)

This theme explored the educators' understanding of the role played by the School Based Support Team (SBST) in schools regarding the promotion of inclusive education. One of the roles played by the SBST is to help educators and parents to make decisions about assessments that children may need and also the type of help they require. This is an on-going collaborative problem-solving unit of school personnel. It meets regularly to assist classroom and/or subject teachers to develop and implement instructional strategies that support both educators and learners. On completion of the study it emanated from the focus group interviews that educators solely rely on the expertise of the SBST when it comes to remedial intervention. This is what they had to say:

> ***Focus group 1****: School Based Support Team … so it works hand in hand with the department, we have … educational psychologist, normally whenever we encounter any problems before we can conclude because we are not trained psychologist we consult with the department and they will send a professional so that we can assist those learners and try to intervene and we also go externally and involve social workers so that they can assist those learners with whatever challenge that they have. (Educator 1, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 1 from school 3 submitted that the SBST is very helpful in liaising with the District Based Support Team (DBST) in making sure that they receive psychological help at assisting learners faced with challenges hindering their learning. The educator further mentioned that if necessary, social workers are also invited to be part of the solution making team.

> ***Focus group 2:*** *The only time we get help is when we teachers talk to the SBST … they help us in referring learners to the district … that is the only time. (Educator 2, school 2, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 2 from school 2 divulged that the SBST plays an important role in referring learners with learning barriers to the district office. The educator viewed the SBST as a vibrant body that deals with learners faced with learning barriers.

> ***Focus group 3****: I feel the same way as my colleague … they are also not trained enough so the only time where it was effective, it was the time when there were social workers who are based here at school but apparently, unfortunately they did not stay long so maybe if they were the subcommittee working under those social workers it could be more effective; but they themselves they cannot deal with issues that my colleague has raised properly because they are not qualified to do that. (Educator 3, school 3, Focus group interview, 2018)*

Educator 3 from school 3 submitted with dissatisfaction that the SBST is not well trained enough to deal with issues affecting learners faced with barriers. The educator felt that the only time they received assistance was when they had social workers on the school premises.

The educators who formed the focus groups felt despondent towards their own lack of training in terms of the theory of inclusive education as well as the skills required to become an effective educator when dealing with barriers to learning. It emanated from the interviews that educators lacked enough skills to include all learners in their teaching pedagogies more especially progressed learners. This is a result of poor training they received from their tertiary institutions and the lack of support from the Department of Basic Education. There was an outcry for support mainly on the understanding of remedial education.

At first, the educators expressed their concern for including all learners in their classrooms, however, when asked about the progression policy itself, there was a huge contradiction as some criticised the policy claiming that it is exclusive and it contributes to learner laziness. Educators' failure towards developing inclusive pedagogies has led to an outcry of an inaccessible curricula. All most every educator participant felt that the curriculum is not at all inclusive, more especially because of the usage of English as a medium of instruction. Some of the educators believed that, thematically, an inclusive class could be said to be one that nurtures and supports. Nevertheless, this contradicted with their responses when they were asked to describe part of the behaviour demonstrated by progressed learners.

4.4 Themes Derived from Answers from the Learners' Semi-Structured Interviews

The next section reports on the analysis of the data to show how learners from the schools that participated in the study contextualised the notion of inclusive education together with the implementation of the progression policy in their different institutions. The study was mainly concerned about the "voices" of progressed learners; therefore, it was vital to understand inclusion and exclusion from the perspective of those who are devalued and rendered marginal.

Getting all learners together who participated in the study from the four mainstream secondary schools was a bit challenging, probably because it was the first time they had participated in a research study. I visited the schools and had discussions with both the principals and Grade 10 educators and explained that it was also a priority to work with progressed learners who were currently doing Grade 10 at the time. A meeting with a maximum of 10 progressed learners from each school was organised by the Grade 10 heads (educators).

I explained my position to the learners that I was only looking for four participants (two males and two females). It was in school 1 where at first my request was met with resistance from the learners until the principal explained to them that this was a research aimed at finding out their "voices".

I did not encounter any challenges with the other learners from the other schools except for some participants that felt they were not in a good position to be interviewed in English. I explained to the participants that the language was not an issue but their views on the topic were of prime importance. I then asked the participants to take home an information sheet together with a consent form (see Appendix 2) to be signed by the parents granting permission for their minors to take part in the study. I tried to explain the content of both documents to the participating learners. I explained to the participants that data were to be obtained using three instruments: a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and research diaries (see Appendix 3). I then invited the participants to be part of the study by reading and signing the learner information sheet together with the consent form (see Appendix 3). I made it clear to the participants that their participation was voluntary and whoever felt like withdrawing from the study was free to do so without any prejudice and penalty.

As a point of departure, I offered the participants a questionnaire (see Appendix 6) and explained to them that they needed to return the questionnaire in a space of 10 days. After 10 days elapsed, I went to collect the questionnaires with a 100% response rate from the participants. On the same day I arranged interview appointments with the participants and offered them research diaries where I explained to them how to utilise the diaries. Nevertheless, only four participants out of the 16 returned their diaries with vague entries which I could not use as part of the findings because I felt that the information was not sufficient enough. Semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Appendix 7) 10 days after the questionnaires were collected from the participants with yet another 100% response rate from the learners. I then explained to the learners that questions would be asked and that they had to share their honest opinions. There were concerns about the confidentiality of the information provided; therefore, I assured them that the information provided would not be disclosed to anyone.

The following table summarises the themes that emanated from the sets of data obtained from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with the learners from the four mainstream secondary schools. The questionnaires' findings are presented in graphs in support of the themes that emanated from the learners' semi-structured interviews.

Table 4.3: Themes derived from learners' semi-structured interviews: Learners 1-4

Themes	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4
Schooling experience	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Knowledge of progression policy	Little awareness	Little Awareness	Little awareness	Little awareness
How accessible is the curriculum	Inaccessible (Mathematics)	Inaccessible (Mathematics)	Inaccessible (Mathematics)	Inaccessible (Technology and social sciences).
Self-esteem as a progressed learner	A low self-esteem	A low self-esteem	A low self-esteem	A low self-esteem
Psychological repercussions of progression policy	Being marginalised by educators	Being marginalised by educators	Being marginalised by educators	Being marginalised by educators
Academic repercussions of progression policy	Due to progression I have managed to put more effort	Progression affects me because I don't study anymore hoping that I will be progressed again	I still have challenges with my schoolwork. In this grade I feel like the work is too much for me	I feel like I am weaker than the other learners and I feel I have a smaller brain than the others
Impact of progression policy on social life	Nothing has changed, I still hang out with the same friends but most of them were also progressed	My friends are now ahead of me, they say I cannot hang out with them anymore because I have failed, it makes life difficult. I only socialise with progressed learners	I feel like I have made more friends even though I have been progressed. I have friends both progressed and promoted	Most of those who have managed to meet pass requirements have left me. I am only left with those whom we share the same sentiments
Behavioural difficulties of progressed learners	I have never done anything unlawful at school or at	I have bullied one learner who happened to be	I have never bullied anybody and I was never bullied because	I was never bullied and I

	home because of progression	one of the smartest in class	of my progression	haven't bullied anyone.
Benefits of the progression policy	It helps one to be in the next class	None, instead educators swear at you	One gets motivated and to put more effort in your studies	It's good to be progressed because you move along with learners who are gifted than to be retained you can finally kill yourself
Detriments of the progression policy	One becomes a target from educators instead of being supported	I am now rejected by my parents even my educators are swearing at me	When progressed, educators and classmates constantly label you	I've been discriminated by my classmates on several occasions
Progression or promotion	I would like to be promoted than to be progressed	I would choose to be promoted	I would work hard and pass on my own than to be progressed	I would like to pass on my own and be promoted than to be progressed
Educators' attitude towards progressed learners	Maths educator is not at all friendly to progressed learners	Educators have an attitude they even swear at us	Educators show little concern about progressed learners	Educators shout at us progressed learners

Table 4.4: Themes derived from learners' semi-structured interviews: Learners 5-8

Themes	Learner 5	Learner 6	Learner 7	Learner 8
Schooling experience	I like coming to school to hang out with my peers. I don't like my English teacher because she once said I am demon possessed	I enjoy coming to school more especial Life Sciences and Physical Science classes. I hate corporal punishment	Schooling is a wonderful experience even though sometimes I am not content about the treatment that we receive from our maths teacher	Schooling is great however educators don't treat us appropriately. Educators constantly remind us about failing and call us names with is absolutely inhumane
Knowledge of progression policy	Full understanding of the progression policy	Full understanding of the progression policy	Full understanding of the progression policy	Full understanding between progression and promotion
How accessible is the curriculum?	CAT seems to be a great challenge	Mathematics is giving me problems even though I put a lot of effort	Mathematics and life sciences resulted to my progression; these are the most difficult subjects	Mathematics seem to be a greatest challenge. The educator fails to teach us
Self-esteem as a progressed learner	Low self-esteem because of progression	A damaged self-esteem and I'm no longer confident over myself	After being progressed I had a low self-esteem but now I am fine	Low self-esteem. My self-confidence has been affected
Psychological repercussions of progression policy	Progression has disturbed me psychologically; I have been told by my educators that I can't do anything	When I am alone, I think deeply about being progressed and it makes me feel stupid and I feel angry	I am made to believe that I cannot meet pass requirements by my classmates who constantly discriminate me because of my progression	I have learnt to be strong and study hard
Academic repercussions of	Progression has affected my academic	I have learnt to put more effort in my studies. I	Instead of thinking that I am weak, I have	It doesn't affect my academic activities I told

progression policy	endeavours because teachers no longer believe in me	don't want to be progressed again So this has helped me	learnt to put extra effort in order to pass my subjects	myself I will work harder
Impact of progression policy on social life	When progressed you start looking down upon yourself. Now I no longer hang out with 'clever' learners instead I surround myself with progressed learners or those who are repeating	Low self-esteem, you become withdrawn from other people. I was once bullied and my bully took my money and said I don't deserve the money because I am a progressed learner	I have been accused by some of my classmates for bribing educators to 'fix' my report in order to be progressed to the next grade. Some of my friends have dumped me and some don't talk to me anymore	Being a progressed learner, some people feel that you don't have a right to be at school. I no longer hang out with my old friends. We keep on fighting with one another. Girls never associate themselves with me because they think I'm a fool
Behavioural difficulties of progressed learners	I started smoking dagga and now I smoke cigarettes during school hours. I have bullied a lot of learners in this school. I once assaulted my teacher for calling me names	I have not engaged myself in any unlawful act since I was progressed	I haven't done anything unlawful at school since I was progressed	I have never done anything wrong at school instead I was bullied by another learner who was finally expelled from school
Benefits of progression	No benefits of being progressed	It gives one a chance of doing the previous grade work while you concentrate on the new grade	The more you accept that you have been progressed you end up sharing ideas with gifted learners, you don't have to stress	I have learnt to work hard. The fact that I was progressed has made me to look at my studies differently and I have a changed attitude
Detriments of progression	When you are progressed you don't think positively instead you think	Being called names and having a low self esteem	Being constantly reminded by educators that you were progressed. To be	Since I have been progressed and repeated several times the same grade, I am falsely accused of stealing at school,

	negatively towards school		discriminated by some classmates	my mother say I am stupid
Progression or promotion	I would like to pass on my own and be promoted	Being a progressed learner is fine with me	I would still remain a progressed learner because that has motivated me to work even harder than before	I would work hard towards meeting pass requirements
Educators' attitude towards progressed learners	Educators constantly swear at us	Educators use corporal punishment on us	Maths educator is too harsh towards us progressed learners	Educators don't treat us well

Table 4.5: Themes derived from learners' semi-structured interviews: Learners 9-12

Themes	Learner 9	Learner 10	Learner 11	Learner 12
Schooling experience	I enjoy being at school and I like playing rugby. The only thing I don't enjoy is when my maths teacher is absent	I enjoy schooling more especially extra mural activities such as netball, soccer and debate. I don't like to be punished by educators	I enjoy coming to school. I like attending history and tourism classes	Schooling is a great experience however educators come to class angry and then they would swear and shout at us reminding us about our progression
Knowledge of progression policy	Demonstrated full understanding of the progression policy	Demonstrated full understanding of the progression policy	Shows understanding of both promotion and progression policy	Full understanding of the progression policy
How accessible is the curriculum	Mathematics is the most challenging subject at school	I don't have any problem with any subject	I have challenges with English as a language. I am able to understand but it is difficult for me to speak the language	

Self-esteem as a progressed learner	Progression resulted in my low self-esteem I didn't expect to be progressed	Low self-esteem because of being progressed	Low self-esteem because of being progressed	Low self-esteem because of progression
Psychological repercussions of progression policy	I have developed some mood swings and I feel that my friends are distancing themselves from me	Some people think that I am not clever enough and that has affected my thinking	I feel like I am a failure	Progression makes one to feel stupid. Progression makes me to feel inferior compared to other learners
Academic repercussions of progression policy	Progression helped me to improve my studies. I realized that I had to put more effort in order to meet the pass requirements	Progression has not affected me in any way, instead I have learnt to study hard to improve my marks	I no longer get good results or marks because of being progressed	
Impact of progression policy on social life	I lost some friends because of progression. It is not easy for a progressed learner to be accepted by others	I feel ashamed of myself that I was progressed. I face difficulties in socializing with learners who academically gifted	I still keep the same friends that I had before I was progressed	Sometimes you are constantly reminded by some learners that you were progressed
Behavioural difficulties of progressed learners	No behavioural challenges because of progression	I have not engaged myself into any unlawful act	I don't have behavioural problems at school because of progression	I was never engaged in any unlawful act at school, instead I have been bullied several times
Benefits of progression	I changed my attitude towards my schoolwork after being progressed	Progression has helped me to work hard towards improving my studies	Progression has no benefit	No benefits of progression

Detriments of progression	Being rejected by educators is the key disadvantage	Progression promotes laziness as learners sit back and relax knowing that they will be pushed to the next grade	Educators say bad things about being a progressed learner	I have been bullied because of being a progressed learner. I have been treated unfairly by both teachers and learners
Progression or promotion	Promotion	I would choose to be progressed because I have learnt to put more effort	To pass on your own not to be 'pushed'	I would choose not to be a progressed learner
Educators' attitude towards progressed learners	Educators don't like progressed learners	Educators constantly punish progressed learners	Educators are not friendly towards us progressed learners	Some educators are good some they treat us badly

Table 4.6: Themes derived from learners' semi-structured interviews: Learners 13-16

Themes	Learner 13	Learner 14	Learner 15	Learner 16
Schooling experience	Schooling is a good thing for me. I enjoy coming to school but I don't like to see some learners smoking on the premises	I enjoy coming to school to learn new things more especially tourism, business, isiZulu and English	Coming to school is a great experience but the only thing that disturbs me is the negative attitude that we receive from some of the educators who also swear at us.	I enjoy schooling but the major setback is when educators call us names that we don't like
Knowledge of progression policy	Demonstrate full understanding of the progression policy	Demonstrate full understanding of the progression policy	Shows an understanding of the progression policy. Feels that this is a way of destroying learners	There's full understanding of the progression policy. Why and how it is implemented

How accessible is the curriculum	Mathematics and EMS are the most challenging subjects for me	Mathematics, natural science and history are difficult subjects for me to understand	There are a lot of challenges because I am repeating grade 10 for the second time now	I have a challenge with English as a language
Self-esteem as a progressed learner	My self-esteem is not at all dented because of being a progressed learner	A low self-esteem because of the progression policy	A low self-esteem and I am naturally shy	I have a low self-esteem and I always look down upon myself
Psychological repercussions of progression policy	After being progressed I felt like a complete failure	Progression has made to believe that I am not intelligent. It has also made me to be lazy, not to do my work knowing that they will progress me.	Since I was progressed, I have the feeling that I am stupid, I cannot do things on my own	The vilifying names that I receive from both my educators and fellow learners brings pain and sorrow
Academic repercussions of progression policy	Progression has helped me to work hard in my studies and to put more effort in improving my results	Progression has made me not to care about my schoolwork, even if I fail, I know they will take me to the next grade. I don't care about home-works any more	Progression has made me to ignore my books knowing that I am going to move from one grade to the next	Progression has helped me to realize the need of working hard towards improving my marks
Impact of progression policy on social life	Both my family and classmates view me as a failure; however I have managed to associate myself with some learners who are willing to assist me with my studies	I still have the same friends at school most of whom we share the experience of being progressed learners. I manage to make more friends whom we study together to improve our results	I had friends and they managed to pass to the next grade, they cannot associate with me anymore because they feel I am not at their level of intelligence. My only friends now are progressed learners	I have lost friends because of being a progressed learner. My old friends have changed towards me and they have actually dumped me

Behavioural difficulties of progressed learners	I don't have any behavioural difficulties.	I don't have any behavioural difficulties, instead educators are the ones who swear at us.	I have bullied few learners and threatened them as well. I also have anger issues.	I don't have any behavioural problems at school
Benefits of progression	There are no benefits of progression	I don't see anything good about being a progressed learner, instead I view myself as a loser	No benefits of being a progressed learner	There are no benefits of being a progressed learner, instead you feel down and struggle with the work.
Detriments of progression	There are no disadvantages of progression	To be labelled by educators and knowing that you will never get a university entry	You are constantly judged by fellow learners and educators	I constantly look down upon myself and feel like there's nothing I can do on my own
Progression or promotion	I would like to be able to meet pass requirements	I would choose to be promoted so that one day I go to the university	I would choose to pass on my own rather than being progressed	I would choose to be a promoted learner than to be a progressed learner
Educators' attitude towards progressed learners	Educators view me as a failure	Educators use derogatory words when addressing us	Some educators treat us badly when we are at school	Educators are calling us names that we don't like

4.4.1 Schooling experience

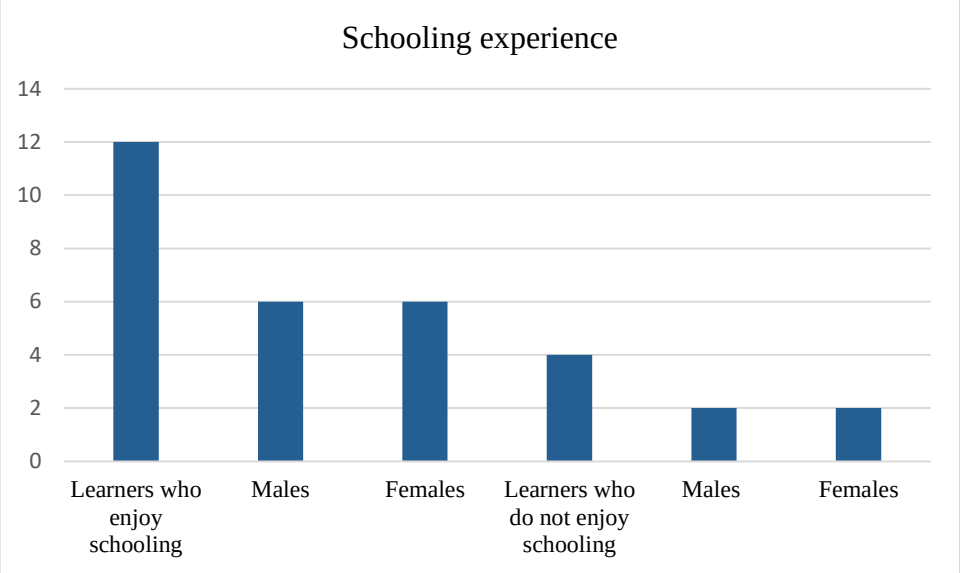


Figure 4.1: Schooling experience

The graph above shows the questionnaire analysis of the progressed learners who participated in the study and their responses regarding schooling experiences. Out of all the participants, 87.5% of the participants indicated their love for attending school on a daily basis and 12.5% indicated that they do not enjoy going to school.

It is learners alone who can accurately determine what helps them to learn and what does not. It is only through listening to learners' voices that one can find out the most beneficial and enjoyable teaching and learning strategies. At the completion of the study, learners who participated in the study had different opinions about their schooling experiences, more especially their interaction with their educators. To justify the above claim, this is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 1**: Okay I'll describe it I like to be at school right and … there are subjects that I enjoy to learn and there are those that I don't that's what I describe. Like I don't actually to be honest … I don't like maths lit class, the teacher there … is not treating us well, he allows talking about this progression thing … which makes me lose interest in the class so when it comes to businesses yes I do enjoy and very much yes. (Learner 1, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 1 from school 2 submitted that she enjoys going to school to learn. She cited that the only subject that she does not enjoy attending is mathematical literacy because of the educator who does not treat them well. The educator is constantly naming and shaming them based on their progression. Learner 1 felt comfortable when learning business studies.

> ***Learner 5****: About school me? Basically being with other people communicating with other people learning new things from other people, that's what I like the most that's why I come here every day. I try to be on time but sometimes nginokubambeka kuthola ukuthi ngivuke late [Translated to English: I wake up late sometimes] (Learner 5, School, 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 5 from school 4 felt that going to school is a great experience for him as he finds enough time to communicate with other learners. One challenge that he is faced with is late coming to school.

> ***Learner 6****: I enjoy coming to school because I get to see my friends and teachers although not all of them because not everybody is the same. (Learner 6, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 6 from school 2 felt that going to school is quite a fantastic experience as he gets enough time to interact with both his friends and educators. Learner 6 made mention that not everybody brings joy to him as people are not the same.

> ***Learner 7****: I feel wake up at school and I don't feel any pressure because of my failings or something, but there is sometimes when it comes to maybe if attending maths or something, like in my class … we scared to go there because of the teacher like so strict (Learner 7, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 7 from school 1 submitted that when she is at school, she always relaxes regardless of the high expectations from her educators, more especially her maths teacher. She submitted that the maths teacher is very strict so sometimes they do not feel comfortable in the maths class.

> ***Learner 13****: Okay there are some learners that are smoking at corners and I don't like it and there are some kids around school asking me to smoke … like I am stupid, I don't smoke and I don't do bad stuff like I am a good person … I think of myself and I think that I love people but then most of the time in the school they don't treat me well because they think I am… (Learner 13, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 13 from school 3 revealed that seeing other learners displaying undesirable behaviour such as smoking makes him feel uncomfortable. Some of the learners have attempted to draw

him into smoking but he refuses. Learner 13 revealed that in as much as he loves going to school, he does not like people who do not have respect for him.

4.4.2 Knowledge of progression policy

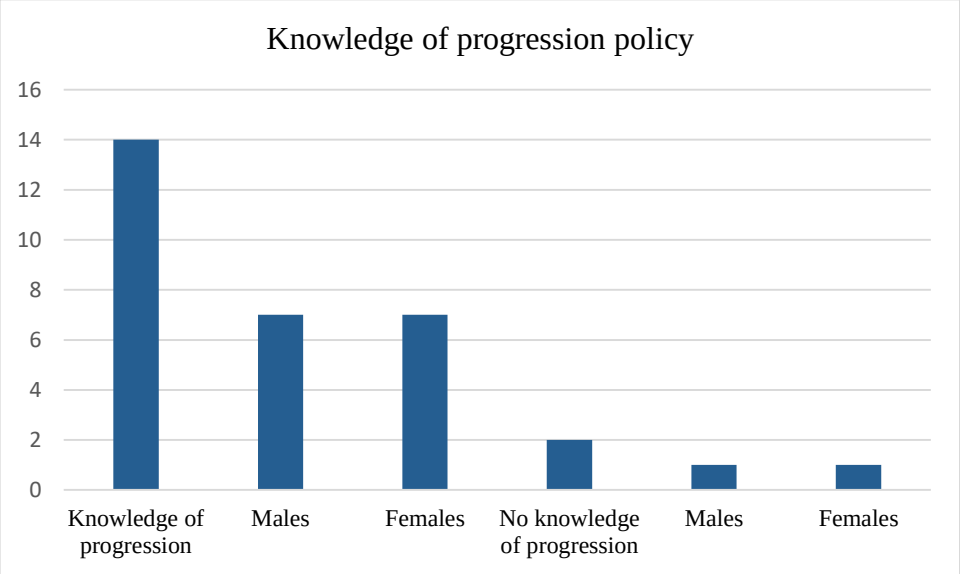


Figure 4.2: Knowledge of progression policy

The graph above shows the responses of the participants from the questionnaire data with regard to their knowledge of the progression policy. The majority of the participants indicated that they are familiar with the progression policy. 87.5% of the participants indicated clear knowledge of the policy while 12.5% are not sure of the progression policy. This was supported by the semi-structured interviews with the participants where some demonstrated knowledge of the policy.

In essence, the progression policy is embedded in the practice of promoting a learner from one grade level to the next on the basis of age rather than academic achievement. This is done mainly to curb dropout rates in schools and to deal with retention. From the semi-structured interviews conducted with the progressed learners who participated in the study, it emanated that the participants had little understanding of the terms and conditions of the progression policy. To substantiate this claim, this is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 8****: According to my understanding, practice of progression are those learners who have been pushed to the next grade. (Learner 8, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 8 from school 4 divulged that the progression policy is aimed at pushing learners who have failed to meet pass requirements from one grade to the next.

> ***Learner 14****: A learner who is being progressed, it is a learner that is like umfundi bekade azamile ngoba ba bona khona la anga yenza ncono khona babona kuthi baya mu phusha [Translated to English: A leaner who has the potential of doing better hence they are pushed to the next grade] then a promoted learner it is a learner that works on his own or her own]. (Learner 14, School 3, Interview, 2018).*

Learner 14 from school 3 revealed that the progression policy states that learners who have the potential of doing better in the next grade deserve to be pushed to the next grade even if they have failed to meet pass requirements. On the other hand, a promoted learner is a learner who has managed to meet the pass requirements.

> ***Learner 16****: Progression … is to be pushed as a learner … maybe, I think they still believe in you or … maybe you can make it or maybe it's the age. (Learner 16, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 16 from school 1 had the same understanding of the progression policy as the preceding participants as he stated that the policy allows the pushing of learners from one grade to the next. This comes as a result of educators believing in that particular learner or by considering the age of that particular learner.

> ***Learner 3:*** *What I understand about progression is to be pushed to another class according to your attendance of the school and how do you do your schoolwork. What I know about promotion is the marks that you get after a test if you have passed subject or grade. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school 1 maintained that his understanding of the progression policy is based on the pushing of learners from one grade to the next, whereby educators consider a learner's school attendance and the amount of schoolwork completed by that particular learner. In contrast, learner 3 stated that promotion refers to the marks that a learner obtains through hard work which enables them to proceed to the next grade.

> ***Learner 12****: But I think a progressed learner is a learner who is helped by the teachers, yes to go to the other grade and the promoted is the learner who works hard for their marks. (Learner 12, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 12 from school 4 submitted that the progression policy refers to the process whereby educators assist learners to proceed to the next grade even if they have failed to meet pass

requirements. Learner 12 also gave her understanding of promotion when she stated that it is where a learner works hard to obtain marks that would enable them to the next grade.

4.4.3 How accessible is the curriculum?

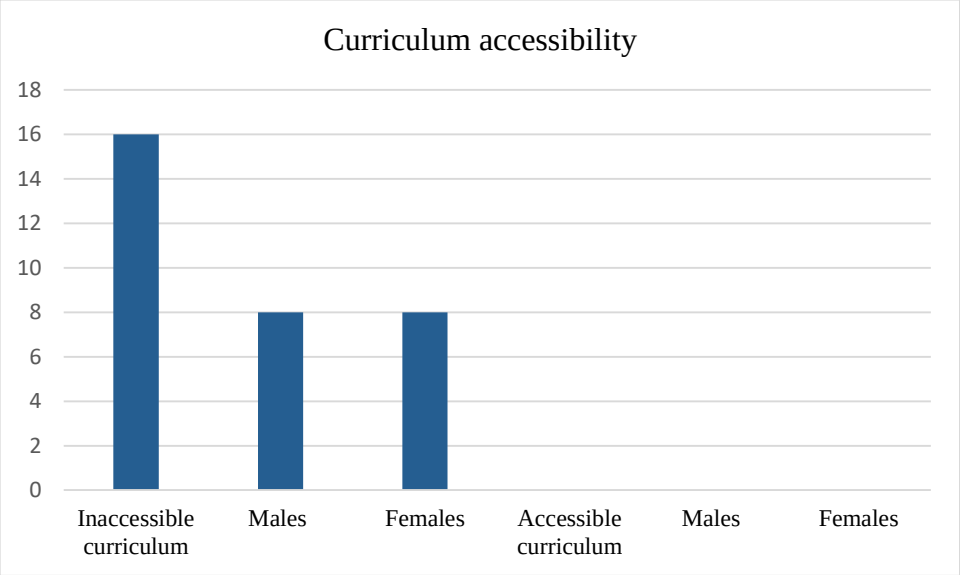


Figure 4.3: Curriculum accessibility

Many learners in our institutions of learning struggle with the formal learning process due to insufficient academic support, large classes and the inability to deal with the demands of formal education. Figure 4.3 above shows the questionnaire responses of the participants regarding the accessibility of the curriculum in their schools. All the participants (100%) claimed that the curriculum is not learner friendly at all.

Curricular provision should be as ready as possible for diverse learners and the notion of "diverse learners" should be informed by knowledge of the generality of all learners' educational needs. Progressed learners have challenges with the curriculum and may require extra attention in education. Data analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that progressed learners are faced with a curriculum that is not 'learner friendly', more especially mathematics and the language of learning and teaching which is English. This is what some of the participants had to say:

> ***Learner 1****: To be honest again like I said … maths lit class … I don't enjoy to be there … most of the days when he is at class he's always talking about this that thing …about progression of the learners … always talking about it … I don't know hey … I think maybe it's because of I failed mathematics only … I don't know … I am not sure actually. (Learner 1, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 1 from school 2 divulged that mathematical literacy is a stumbling block in her academic endeavours. It becomes more difficult for her because the educator comes to class and calls them names instead of giving them the appropriate support as progressed learners.

> ***Learner 3****: Sometimes … when you don't understand some teachers they don't care about your concern … what you want to say or what you want … as long as others understand they don't care about others … I feel very bad because we are not the same to understand some schoolwork because every time when she enters the class she will be concerned to those who think they are genius. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school 1 felt that educators play a key role towards an inaccessible curriculum as they fail to accommodate diverse learners in the classroom. Learners 3 revealed that some educators do not care about the slow-paced learners instead, they put more attention on the gifted learners, and in that way, learner 3 felt that the curriculum becomes inaccessible.

> ***Learner 14****: In Grade 8 it was natural science and mathematics and in Grade 9 it was still natural science, mathematics and history and here in Grade 10 first term I failed business, mathematics and history and this term, I also failed the same subjects history, mathematics and business. (Learner 14, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 14 from school 3 stated his history of academic challenges. He stated that since he started with secondary schooling mathematics and natural sciences have been a challenge for him. He mentioned that he is also struggling with subjects such as history and business studies.

> ***Learner 10****: The mathematics … the current mathematics teacher has to get help because she doesn't explain clearly on other topics and she explains clearly on other topics … yes… I failed … I failed only one subject which is mathematics and that's why I am here. (Learner 10, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 10 from school 1 shared the same sentiments with the other participants as she lamented about the poor performance displayed by her mathematics educator. The participant felt that the mathematics educator is in dire need of academic development as she is struggling with some of the mathematical topics.

> ***Learner 5****: Okay … then Grade 9 I was progressed I think I lacked in maths … cause back then maths was the crucial subject. (Learner 5, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 5 from school 4 also expressed the same feelings as the other participants. The participant felt that mathematics is the key threat to his academic endeavours.

4.4.4 Self-esteem as a progressed learner

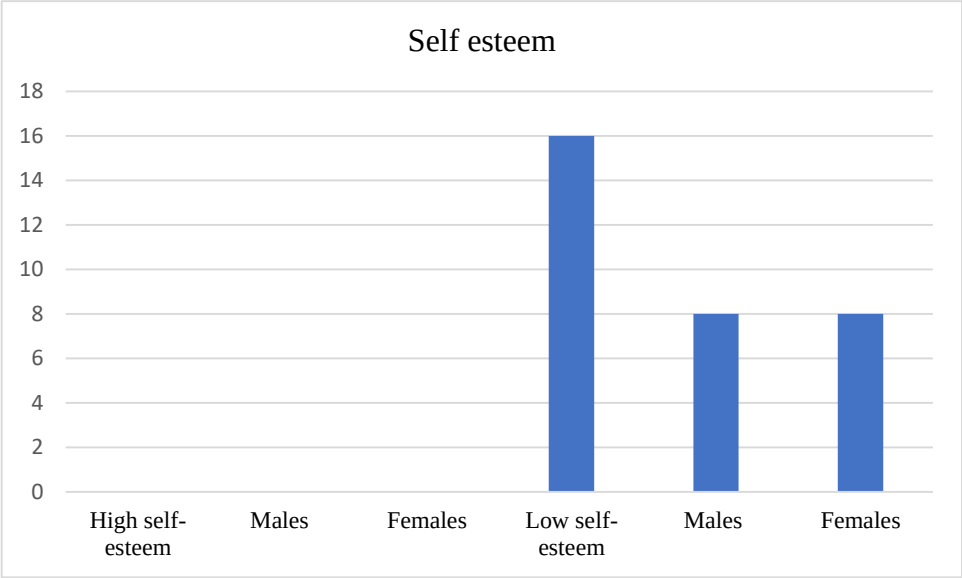


Figure 4.4: Self-esteem

Questionnaire analysis in Figure 4.4 demonstrated that all the progressed learners (100%) have a low self-esteem which highly contributes to their poor performance at school. The responses from the questionnaires were in line with the literature reviewed in this study and the semi-structured interviews as the participants revealed their dented self-esteems due to the implementation of the progression policy.

Learner self-esteem is an important factor in academic success. When learners' self-esteem suffers, it is likely that they may give up on their hopes, dreams and plans. They may feel they are worthless of obtaining their goals or think it is impossible to achieve them. Constructing confidence in learners can help prevent learner dropout rates, ensure learners maintain their love for learning and help them achieve their dreams and goals by staying in school. Data analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that progressed learners have a low self-esteem and this hampers their academic endeavours. To justify the above claim, this is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 9**: I had a low self-esteem like I was very disappointed like I didn't expect that report I didn't expect that I would be progressed … like a learner like me would be progressed one-day because I've always been in grades passing very good. (Learner 9, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 9 from school 3 disclosed that after receiving her end of the year academic report she was saddened to learn that she was progressed. In essence, the progression lowered her self-esteem. Learner 9 claimed that she never expected to be progressed as she had been meeting the pass requirements from one grade to the next.

> ***Learner 5****: Yes, a lot, cause now my self-esteem dropped last year when I was doing Grade 10. I kept on picturing myself with the other learners some of them are not my age group … we are separated by three or four years nami azingiphathi kahle cause nami ngivele ngithi why ngiseza esikoleni but ngadesada ukuthi imphilo iyaqubeka makungabe kumele ngipasse ngizo passa ngizogcine ngiphumile ekenneth Masekela [Translated to English: it doesn't sit well with me because I keep on asking myself why should I come to school, I decided that life goes on when it's time for me to pass then I will]. (Learner 5, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 5 from school 4 has been in grade 10 for the past three years, having to be in the same class with learners who are much younger than him has dented his self-esteem to the extent that he has given up on everything in life. Learner 5 felt that coming to school was no longer his priority.

> ***Learner 6:*** *You'll have low self-esteem … you won't like talking in public. (Learner 6, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 6 from school 2 submitted that being a progressed learner has brought down his self-esteem, such that he does not feel comfortable to talk in public.

> ***Learner 10****: My self-esteem went low … because I wasn't expecting like my results to be the way they were. (Learner 10, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 10 from school 1 shared the same sentiments with the other participants as she mentioned that soon after receiving her academic report for that particular year her self-esteem went down. Learner 10 did not expect to be a progressed learner as she considered herself an outstanding learner.

> ***Learner 3****: I feel bad … I feel like something went wrong or they rob you in the subject … you need to check the script … you'll be not nice when you see people happy sometimes you can feel like you can kill yourself. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school disclosed that having to learn that you are a progressed learner tampers with one's happiness. Learner 3 felt that as a progressed learner you can become suicidal mainly by seeing your classmates celebrating their results.

4.4.5 Psychological repercussions of progression policy

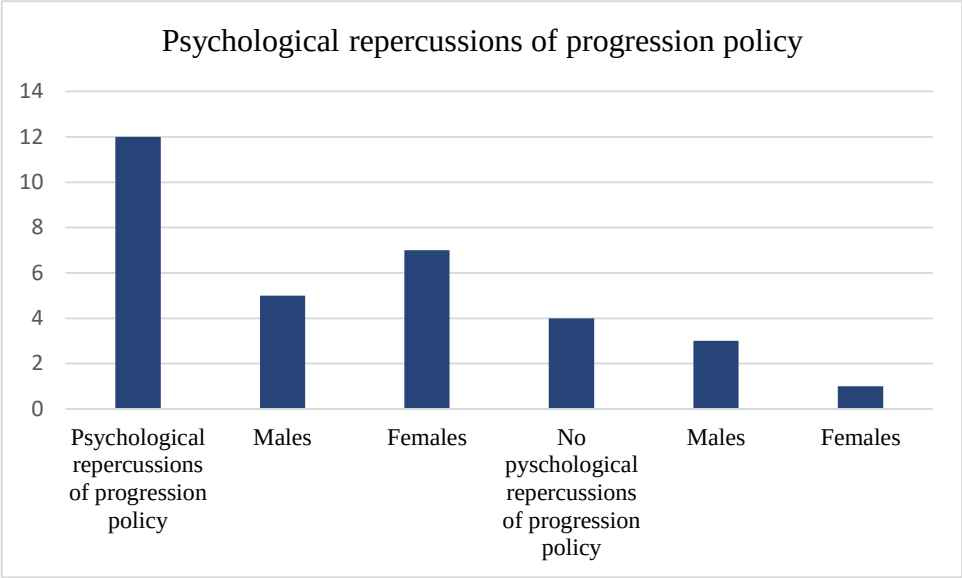


Figure 4.5: Psychological repercussions of the progression policy

The graph on Figure 4.5 illustrates the questionnaire responses of the participants regarding the psychological effects due to the progression policy. Most of the participants (75%) felt that when one is progressed from one grade to the next without meeting pass requirements, there are psychological effects that impact hugely on one's personality.

Having a high level of self-esteem is critical to identity development for youngsters. When learners feel good about themselves, they develop a positive identity. Those who do not possess a pleasant self-image tend to struggle with their identity and can acquire maladaptive or dysfunctional behaviours. At the completion of the study, some of the progressed learners revealed that in as much as the progression policy allows them to move from one grade to the next, it leaves them with psychological scars. This is what the participants had to say:

> ***Learner 5****: Ngiba sad ngoba sengicabanga ukuthi ekenneth bangi bisele emuva cause kube ngihamba phambili manje kube kunezinto engizaziyo ukundlula lezi engizazi manje kube ngikwazi ukurelata to ilife more [Translated to English: I feel very sad and disturbed … I even conclude that here in my school they suppress me … I could have been far in life and could have achieved a lot of things … I am stagnant in life … I have been deprived a right of relating positively to other things in life]. (Learner 5, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 5 from school 4 stated clearly that the progression policy has brought psychological torment as he felt that the educators in his school are there to discredit his efforts of making

ends meet. He felt that educators have made him remain at one point and this is mainly because he was progressed and then retained in the same grade at least for three academic years.

> ***Learner 15****: Yes, I was going to see myself differently because I was not going to think the way I think now because now I think that I am … progressed, so I think down of myself but if like I wasn't progressed, maybe I was going to improve more. (Learner 15, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 15 from school 2 shared the same sentiments with the preceding participants as she claimed that since she was progressed her mind-set changed for the worst. She disclosed that if she were not a progressed learner, she would have been more positive towards life.

> ***Learner 3****: Even though I get the report at the end of the day that says I am progressed I feel bad because it wasn't my intention to fail or be progressed I was planning to get good marks. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school 1 felt that being progressed was not his intention at all and that made him feel bad; his intention was to pass to the next grade.

> ***Learner 10****: It doesn't feel okay because you always tell yourself that you are going to school to pass and do well in your studies and on the same school you have friends so when they go to another grade and then you find out that you are not going to another grade so it feels a bit hurting. (Learner 10, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 10 from school 4 submitted that seeing your peers moving to the next grade and leaving you behind does not make one feel comfortable. Everyone comes to school with the aim of passing to the next grade, so when you are progressed and then retained it leaves you psychologically damaged.

> ***Learner 4****: Like ufila yazi kabu hlungu cause abanye yabo bona ba jabulele ukuthi bazi phasele and then wena uphase ngama like uphase kancane … ngama marks aphansi, ufila ngathi like nawe unga yenza kakhulu … usebenze kakhulu. [Translated to English: indeed, you feel disturbed mainly when you see other learners celebrating their hard work whilst you know that you have not made it … yes it makes you to want to put extra effort so that you can make it]. (Learner 4, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 4 from school 3 felt that it is very disturbing for one not to be able to meet the pass requirements while other learners make it to the next grade without any difficulties. Learner 4 suggested that in as much as it is a hurtful experience it helps one to put more effort in than before.

4.4.6 Academic repercussions of progression policy

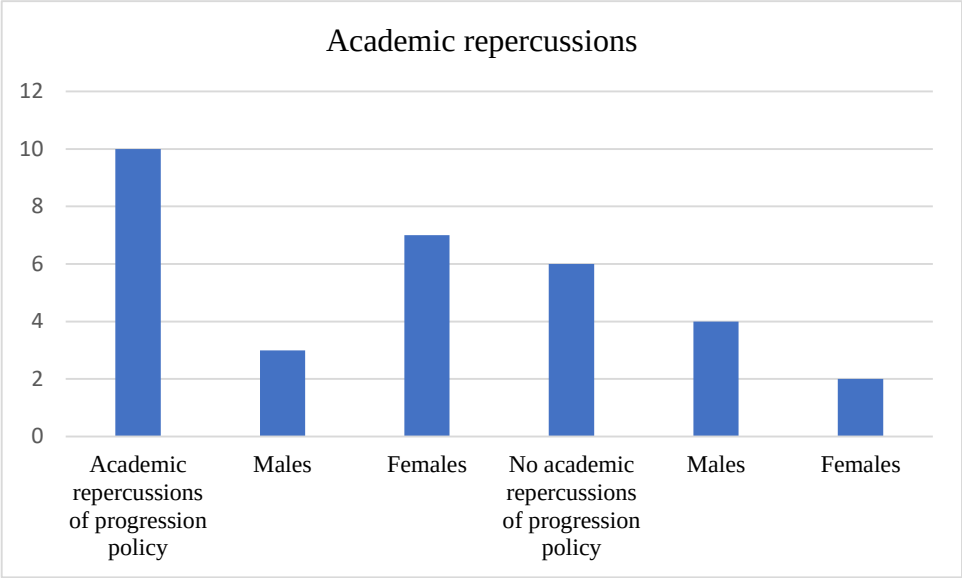


Figure 4.6: Academic repercussions of the progression policy

Figure 4.6 is an illustration of the questionnaire responses regarding academic repercussions brought forth by the implementation of the progression policy. Progressed learners made it clear in their responses that most often, they felt left out in their studies due to the magnitude of schoolwork when they are pushed to the next grade without meeting pass requirements of the previous grade. Actually, 62.5% of the participants felt that indeed the policy impacts heavily on their studies while 37.5% submitted that there were little or no academic repercussions.

Learners who are progressed from one grade to the next for which they are not prepared are likely to experience learning difficulties. When learners lack a good framework, they are more likely to struggle. This, of course, can lead to low grades, which can contribute to academic frustration and falling further behind. At the completion of the study, learner participants had different views about academic implications experienced by progressed learners. This is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 14****: Sometimes angibi nendaba [Translated to English: I don't care] … I just don't care and tell myself the teachers will progress me and I don't care at least I am in another grade but sometimes I feel like I am useless … I don't know anything but sometimes I tell myself that I am intelligent the problem is I am just lazy. (Learner 14, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 14 from school 3 submitted that the progression policy has made him relax in his schoolwork knowing that even if he does not meet the required pass requirements educators will progress him to the next grade. The learner mentioned that he has developed the "I don't care attitude" towards his schoolwork. For this learner, progression has contributed to his laziness in dealing with his school-work.

> ***Learner 15****: It affected my academic studies because like as I am here now in Grade 10 I think like … because of I am progressed I will never pass this grade but I study now so that I can achieve very well. (Learner 15, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 15 from school 3 submitted that the progression policy is affecting her academic endeavours and she felt that it going to be difficult for her to pass mainly because of the overwhelming magnitude of schoolwork.

> ***Learner 8****: It doesn't affect my studies at all, what I told myself is that I will keep on studying very hard. (Learner 8, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 8 from school 4 is one the learners who had a different view regarding challenges associated with being a progressed learner academically. The learner divulged that the progression policy does not have any impact at all on his studies, instead, he is willing to put more effort in, order to make it to the next grade.

> ***Learner 7****: No it doesn't it doesn't affect my progression … my academic … because I am performing so well and I don't think of it anymore. (Learner 7, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 7 from school 1 shared the same sentiments with the preceding learner 8 as she mentioned that the progression policy has nothing to do with her academic activities. The learner revealed that she is performing absolutely well in her studies regardless of her progression.

> ***Learner 12****: Okay progression makes me to study hard and work on myself like so that I can be able to pass with my own marks. (Learner 12, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 12 from school 4 disclosed that being a progressed learner has helped her in realising and unleashing her full potential in her studies. Learner 12 mentioned that she is looking forward in obtaining positive results that would see her moving to the next class without being progressed.

4.4.7 Impact of progression policy on social life

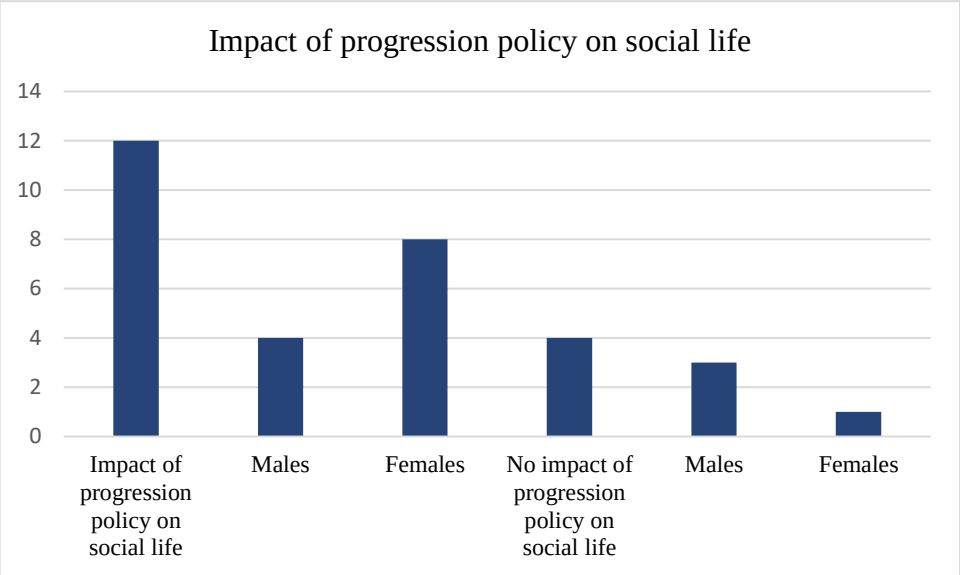


Figure 4.7: Impact of progression policy on social life

Figure 4.7 shows the questionnaire responses of the learner participants regarding the impact of the progression policy on social life. Most of the participants (75%) revealed in their responses that because of being progressed they find it difficult to make friends as progressed learners. Some of the participants indicated that they have lost friends whom they used to socialise with because of being progressed learners. In contrast, some participants (25%) maintained that they still have their old friends regardless of their progression.

Friends are an important part of everyday life; they make you feel wanted and loved. It would be cruel to wrench a young child away from their friends by holding them back a year so they can meet the necessary outcomes for their grade. The progression policy is a remedy in keeping young peers together in the same classroom until they finish school. Data analysis of semi-structured interviews of learner participants exposed that learners who have been held back by not meeting pass requirements experience severe pain at being away from their friends. To justify the above claim this is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 2****: Cause khona manje abangani bami bafundile baphasile bayofunda kwelinye grade so like bavele bacabange ukuthi angikhoni ukuyenza lento and nami like angisa fili comfortable around them kuvele kubenzima ukuthi ngicele usizo kubo like yho abekho loyal esikhathini esiningi [Translated to English: because presently all my friends have met the pass requirements and managed to move to another grade and they presume I cannot pass on my own and I don't feel comfortable around them*

thus it becomes challenging to ask for help and they aren't faithful most of the time]. (Learner 2, School 4, Interview, 2018)

Learner 2 from school 4 suggested that since it was difficult for her to meet pass requirements her former classmates started marginalising her by declaring that she is a failure. Learner 2 felt that she is no longer comfortable around her peers because they constantly judge her based on the progression policy.

***Learner 1**: No we are still friends because both of us were progressed but we are in different classes … Yes, because we were in the same situation … And we are still in the same situation because both of us were progressed and we are trying yes we are trying. (Learner 1, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 1 from school 2 submitted that the only friend he surrounds himself with is another learner who was also progressed the previous academic years. It is hard for him to make more friends except for the one who shares the same experience with him.

***Learner 8**: Emotionally the things that they say … like when you are being progressed people start to think that you don't deserve to be at school you have to leave school … let me say the friends that I had on 2016 are no longer my friends now. (Learner 8, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 8 from school 4 maintained that he has suffered a lot of verbal abuse from some of the school mates who constantly claim that progressed learners should refrain from coming to school. The learner revealed that the friends he had a couple of years ago are no longer his friends.

***Learner 15**: Yes, the progression affects the kind of friends that I have because of I was having like good friends, some of them were loving me; before, they think like I am a conqueror but now because of I am progressed they take me as nothing … some of them they don't even come to me, they just mind their own things. (Learner 15, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 15 from school 4 shared the same sentiments with the preceding participants as he divulged that most of his former friends adored him but soon after they knew about his failure to meet pass requirements, they then changed their attitude towards him. In short, he lost a couple of friends because of being a progressed learner.

***Learner 12**: No… it has limited friends cause since I am a progressed learner I have my friends with me but I can't make friends again because I am scared of their judgment because children like to judge you too much and they will say like no … I*

have that thing that if I tell them they'll be you can't be our friend because you're a progressed learner. (Learner 12, School 4, Interview, 2018)

Learner 12 from school 4 revealed that being a progressed learner has limited his ability of making friends within the institution. The learner stated that she is scared of hooking up with other learners mainly because they are quick in making unreasonable judgements based on progression.

4.4.8 Behavioural difficulties of progressed learners

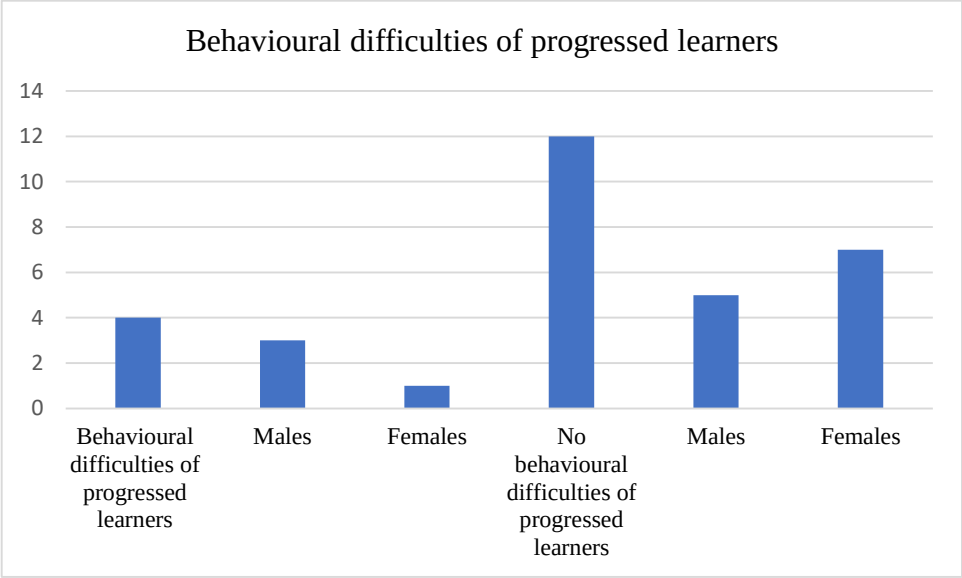


Figure 4.8: Behavioural difficulties of progressed learners

The graph above is an illustration of the questionnaire responses based on the behavioural difficulties that progressed learners are said to be faced with. As this study was mainly concerned about the 'voices' of the progressed learners, the participants gave out their responses which indicated that only 25% had behavioural challenges at school. The remaining 75% revealed that they hardly display any undesired behaviour when they are at school.

Progressed learners, more especially because of age, have increased risks of health-compromising behaviours such as emotional distress, cigarette use, alcohol use, drug abuse and violent behaviours. Furthermore, progressed learners are likely to face challenges with reading, maths and language and socio-emotional adjustment such as peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviours, and attendance. At the completion of the study, data analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that progressed learners display undesired behaviour. This is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 5****: The only thing that I do is smoking on the school premises… Cigarettes …. I feel relaxed … maybe now it's my 6th or 7th year smoking because when I was in Grade 9 I started smoking ganja but I didn't feel ganja because it messed up my mind, then I decided to leave it and carried on with cigarettes now it has become a habit I do it every day. (Learner 5, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

From the above interview, learner 5 who was from school 4 openly declared that as a progressed learner he is involved in undesirable behaviour such as smoking cigarettes and he has been doing this for quite some time now. This learner has also tried intoxicating substances such as marijuana.

> ***Learner 2****: Okay khona lomtwana lo sifunda naye eclassini so yabo yilaba aba hlaganiphe kakhulu so angiboleke iball pen yakhe angitshele ukuthi hayi yena akaboleki abantu abadom so like lapho sengimu shaya ngimu treata, ngimutathela iskafthini ne mali yakhe so naye benku nzima ukuthi vele eze azongicele cause bengihlala ngimuthusela yabo so nami nga ngahlala phansi ngazibuza why ngenze yonke lento le. [Translated to English: there is this girl in class who is one of the clever learners, I asked to borrow a pen then she said she won't borrow it to stupid people therefore I hit her, and from then on I started to bully her by taking her lunch box and money and it was hard for her to come and ask them back from me because I always threatened her, but then I asked myself why am I doing all of this for]. (Learner 2, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 2 from school 4 admitted that she has displayed undesirable behaviour at school such as bullying. It all started when one of her classmates called her names because of her progression. She then assaulted the classmate which was followed by endless threats and forcefully taking money from the classmate.

> ***Learner 12****: No not now I have changed, I was a bully last year and last of last year I didn't care who you were or who you knew or who were your parents; even if your parent was Nelson Mandela himself I didn't care I wanted what I wanted because I was progressed which means I lacked somewhere. (Learner 12, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 12 from school 4 revealed his anger as he boldly stated that he used to a bully, and he did not care whom he bullied. He revealed that he felt then that something was missing in his life so assumed that being a bully would give him some satisfaction.

4.4.9 Benefits of progression

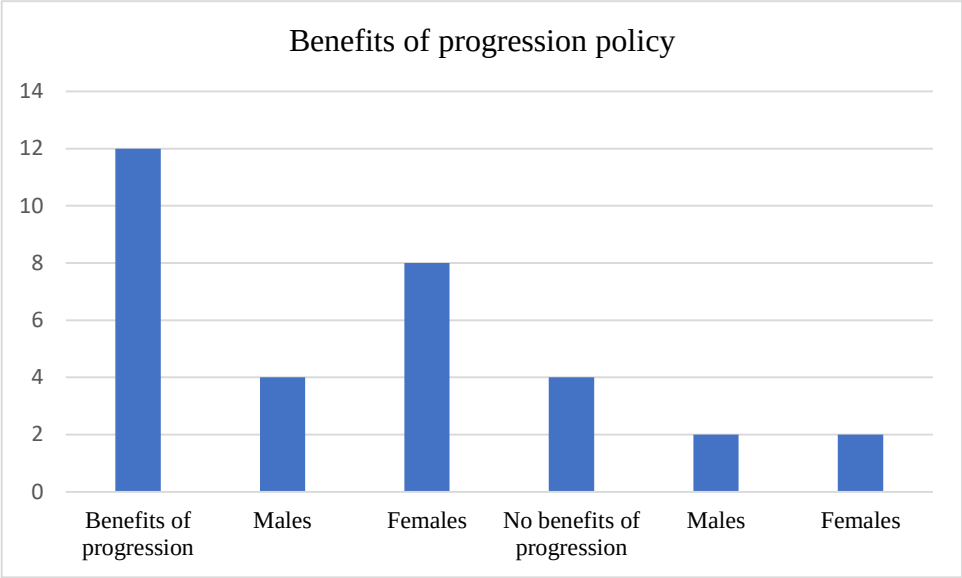


Figure 4.9: Benefits of progression policy

Figure 4.9 shows the questionnaire responses of the participants indicating benefits of being a progressed learner. The graph demonstrates that 75% felt that the progression policy brought happiness into their lives while 25% of the participants disputed any benefits.

Semi-structured interview analysis revealed different views from the participants. Some participants felt that the progression policy has helped them to gain more confidence in their studies while some specified that progression has helped them to have more friends who are also progressed. However, it remained difficult for them to associate with other learners who have met pass requirements. Furthermore, some participants indicated that there is nothing to celebrate about being a progressed learner instead they are exposed to self-pity and humiliation. To substantiate the above claims, this is what the participants had to say:

> ***Learner 3****: The advantage is that you can get more confidence to do your schoolwork or that … you can [do] what other learners can do, those who have been promoted. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school 1 felt that being a progressed learner helps one to gain confidence rather than being retained in the same class. The learner felt that if you are progressed you have a chance of working with the promoted learners and sharing information with them.

> ***Learner 13****: It has created a lot of friendship because now my friends know that I am progressed so I am getting more learners focusing on studies… study groups. (Learner 13, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 13 from school 3 maintained that being a progressed learner contributes vastly to her ability to make friends. Actually for learner 13, it was not just friends but academic friends who assist each other with academic work.

> ***Learner 9****: Is that I pull myself up and passed. (Learner 9, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 9 from school 3 felt that being a progressed learner helps him in making sure that he puts more effort in his studies so that he can pass.

> ***Learner 7****: Now it has created a lot of friends for me… like now I have more friends and … I usually talk with those who fail those who were get progressed or something so that it's not the end of the world they should try harder; they will make it. (Learner 7, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 7 from school 1 shared the same sentiments with the preceding participants as she claimed that being a progressed learner enables her to make more friends. The learner realised that by being a progressed learner does not mean that it is the end of the world, you can still make it if you put in more effort.

> ***Learner 14****: There is nothing that's beautiful about being a progressed learner… because as for me sometimes I see myself like a loser, someone who doesn't know anything because I am being progressed. (Learner 14, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 14 from school 3 had a different view from the above participants as he declared that there is nothing splendid about being a progressed learner. The learner felt that being a progressed learner is tantamount to humiliation.

4.4.10 Detriments of progression

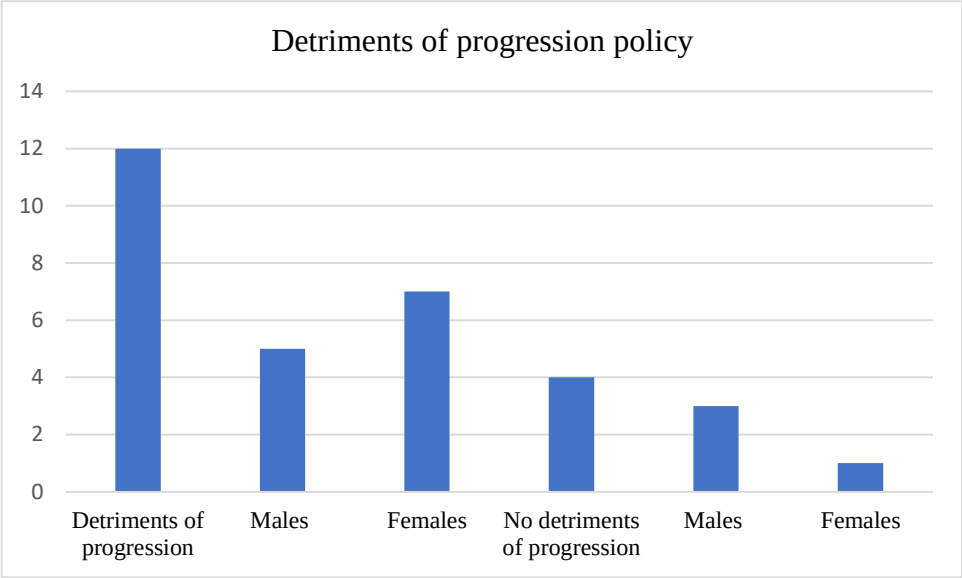


Figure 4.10: Detriments of progression policy

The above graph is a presentation of the questionnaire responses pertaining to the shortcomings experienced by progressed learners. A huge number of the participants (75%) revealed their dissatisfactions being progressed learners mainly because of the harsh treatment received from their educators. The participants submitted that their educators constantly use derogatory and dehumanising words when addressing them. It was only 25% of the participants who associated their progression with positive aspects.

There is much greater disgrace and shame suffered by learners who are incapable of doing the work that they have been certified as being able to do. The predicament educators face right now is that they are forced to either go forward with a learner they are not sure can do better or hold back a learner and make them repeat in a situation where they were not successful. At the completion of the study, it was revealed by the learner participants that the progression policy has brought nothing to them but humiliation from their educators. This is what some of the participants had to say:

> ***Learner 9**: The disadvantages of being a progressed learner is that sometimes you feel unwanted by teachers because they wanted you … you feel like when they progressed you they are disrupting you … they bring disruption in your life because why they allow you to fail and then take you to another class … that's the disadvantage I know. (Learner 9, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

In light of the above quotation from learner 9 who is from school 3, it emanated that the participant felt marginalised by the very educators who are expected to protect the interests of the learners. The learner submitted that she felt disrupted in her academic endeavours by failing and later being pushed to the next class without meeting pass requirements. Learner 9 felt that the progression policy is just a fallacious activity aimed at distracting learners.

> ***Learner 12****: The disadvantages is that progression makes you feel like small like they should at least leave you to the grade you were doing that you repeat it so that you can learn from your mistakes; and [I] know that I didn't do good on this so I have to work hard this time on this thing. (Learner 12, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 12 from school 4 shared the same sentiments with the preceding participant as she submitted that being a progressed learner vilifies one's intelligence and integrity. Learner 12 felt that it would be proper to be retained in the previous grade so that she could learn from her mistake and put more effort in rather than be belittled and become a laughingstock.

> ***Learner 6****: Being called names and having low self-esteem. (Learner 6, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 6 from school 2 also shared the same views with the preceding participants by divulging that the worst thing about being a progressed learner is to be called names and having a low self-concept which ultimately results in low self-esteem.

> ***Learner 4****: Like ngiyazi yekelela angi fundi, ngiqcina ngizi tshela ukuthi abo Ma'am bazo ngi phusha then ngifika ku the next grade bese ngiba vele angibi ne knowledge more [Translated to English: since I was progressed … I no longer care about studying hard … I am just relaxed … I know that my educators will push me to the next grade even if I fail … in that way I will lack knowledge. (Learner 4, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 4 from school 3 felt that being a progressed learner is hampering her ability to study hard. The progression policy has made her a lazy learner. Learner 4 submitted that for her it does not make sense to work hard because eventually she will be pushed to the next grade having failed to meet pass requirements or not.

> ***Learner 3****: If you don't do your school work … if you have been progressed there will be more judgment from teachers judging about how do you progressed and so they'll … have an anger cause also the classmates will do the same … they'll judge you about how do you progress … you don't make it by yourself you were just pushed. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school 1 submitted that the worst shortcoming of being a progressed learner is the deleterious judgement that you receive from both educators and classmates. Learner 3 revealed that educators constantly remind progressed learners about how they were brought to the current grade from the previous grade. Learner 3 felt that this is improper, and it tarnishes one's confidence in the schooling system.

4.4.11 Progression or promotion

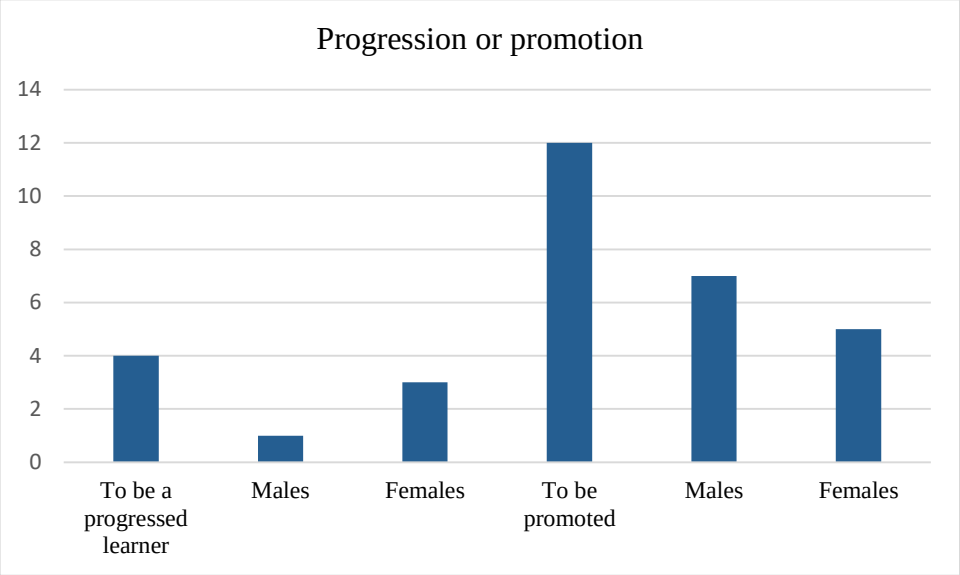


Figure 4.11: Progression or promotion

Figure 4.11 is an illustration of the questionnaire responses from the participants regarding their views whether progression is the best option, or one needs to meet pass requirements and be promoted to the next grade. The responses indicated that 25% of the participants did not support the idea of being progressed learners whilst a majority of 75% was in favour of promotion.

Either being promoted without regard to effort or achievement (progression) or retained without extra assistance sends a message to learners that little is expected from them, that they have little worth and they do not deserve the time and effort it would take to help them be successful in school. Data analysis of semi-structured interviews with the learner participants exposed different views towards being progressed or promoted. This is what they had to say:

> ***Learner 7****: Firstly, I wouldn't choose … because I didn't know how to feel or how will you perform or what but then, now I think I will choose to be progressed because I know how it feel and how you should perform … It has helped me a lot. (Learner 7, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 7 from school 1 revealed that personally she felt it was not a matter of choice when she was progressed. Nonetheless, she would choose to be progressed because being a progressed learner has made her realise her full potential and work harder towards improving her academic performance.

> ***Learner 3****: I will like to pass on my own not to be progressed then, because you cannot be progressed in Grade 12. (Learner 3, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 3 from school 1 had a different view from the preceding participant as he disclosed that he would prefer to be able to meet pass requirements so that he moves freely to the next class without being pushed. Learner 3 was very concerned about the fact that the school is able to progress from all the grades, but nobody can progress you from Grade 12 to tertiary institutions.

> ***Learner 5****: I would chose not being a progressed learner because not being a progressed learner gives you that happiness in your life ukuthi ngipassile ngisebenzile ayikho into enzima ngesikolo ngoba mawuyi progressed learner ubona ngathi inqondo yakho ayisebenzi [Translated to English: If I were a promoted learner I can actually see that I have worked hard and there's nothing difficult about school where as when you are a progressed learner you feel like your brain doesn't function. (Learner 5, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 5 from school 4 shared the same sentiments with the preceding participant as he submitted that he would choose to be promoted rather than being a progressed learner. For this learner promotion is associated with happiness and hard work whereas progression is associated with self-pity and lack of confidence.

> ***Learner 14****: I would choose not to be a progressed learner because I want to be a successful business man one day when I am finished with my studies and get my masters or diploma and start my own business so that I can look after my family and make them happy, because some of my family members doesn't have matric so I want to be the first one to have matric. (Learner 14, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 14 from school 3 submitted that he would not choose to be a progressed learner instead he wanted to work hard towards passing on his own mainly because one of his dreams is to become a businessman. Learner 14 also mentioned that he would like to see himself achieving

academic qualifications such as a master's degree so that he can be in a good state to support his family. Learner 14 further mentioned that for him to acquire the National Senior Certificate (Matric) would be a great achievement since no one in his family has studied up to that level.

> ***Learner 10****: I would choose to be a progressed learner because I do have a potential and I am not like taking back … why I was being progressed because I do know and I do tell myself that I am a progressed learner and as I am progressed, I am going to do my best. (Learner 10, School 1, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 10 from school 1 suggested that she would choose to be a progressed learner because she felt that for one to be progressed, one needs to have the potential of making it to the next grade. She submitted that for her being a progressed learner has brought back self-confidence which makes her work harder to make sure that she passes to the next grade.

4.4.12 Educators' attitude towards progressed learners

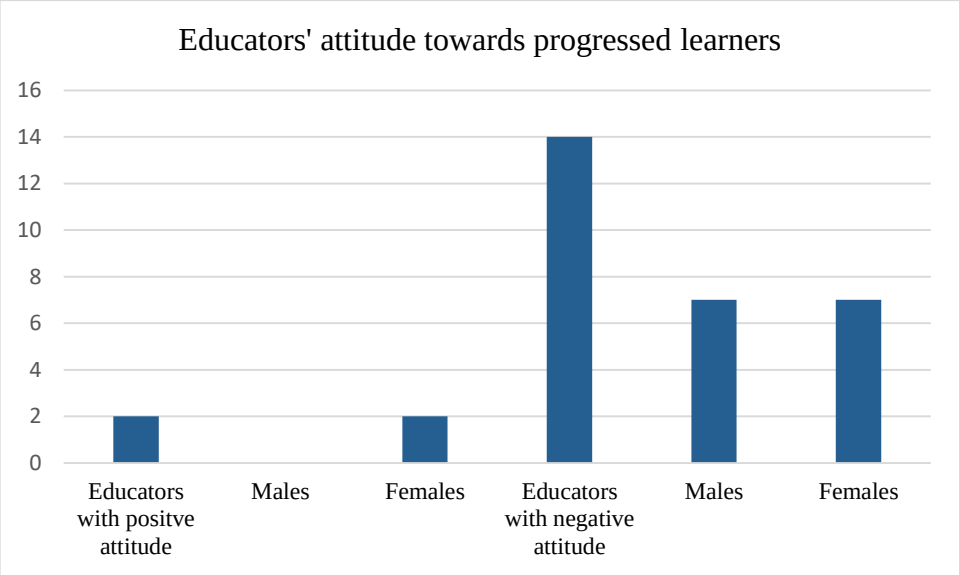


Figure 4.12: Educators' attitude towards progressed learners

The graph above is an illustration of the questionnaire responses from the learner participants regarding the attitude of educators towards progressed learners. It emanated from the responses that 87.5% of the participants felt that educators displayed an undesirable attitude towards them on daily basis while 12.5% felt that educators treated them reasonably.

Educators need to set clear learning objectives for each lesson and help the majority of or the whole class to master related skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. When designing teaching activities, educators have to consider the levels, abilities and interests of learners. At the

completion of the study, data analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed that educators had a negative attitude towards progressed learners. Constantly, progressed learners disclosed that they felt unwelcome in their classes by educators. To authenticate this claim, this is what some of the participants had to say:

> ***Learner 15****: Some of them … teachers … when they come to classes they talk vulgar language … some of them they even … beat us like in a negative way so all I can say is that I don't enjoy that aspect. (Learner 15, School 3, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 15 from school 3 divulged that some of their educators come to class not only to present their lessons but to humiliate and marginalise progressed learners by using undesirable language (swearing at learners). Learner 15 went further to state that some educators physically assault them as progressed learners which he felt is not fair and just.

> ***Learner 5****: There was this time in English period I was taught by Ma'am Mabuja last of last year when I was doing my first Grade 10; she would tell me that I have demons and that she must pray for me and that's what I didn't like so me and her till to date don't get along even today for that thing. (Learner 5, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 5 from school 4 shared the same sentiments with the preceding participants as he concurred that educators indeed do use undesired language when addressing them as progressed learners. Learner 5 disclosed that an educator declared that he was demon possessed hence he was not able to make it to the next grade.

> ***Learner 6****: When you use corporal punishment learners will continue disrespecting the teacher … and if maybe if you don't use corporal punishment they will respect you because if you beat them they'll be stubborn … they'll be stubborner and continue doing that thing and if you don't punish them if you don't use corporal punishment they won't be as stubborn … they beat us. (Learner 6, School 2, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 6 from school 2 disclosed that as a progressed learner he has been a victim of corporal punishment whereby educators assaulted him physically. Learner 6 felt that constant physical abuse does not correct one's blunders instead it makes one stubborn.

> ***Learner 8****: They tell you that you will never make it in life you keep on repeating the same grade over and over you see so that touches us emotionally. (Learner 8, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 8 from school 4 also thought that educators always display a negative attitude towards progressed learners. Learner 8 disclosed that constantly, educators would remind them as

progressed learners that they will never be successful in life and such remarks have a remarkable emotional impact on them.

> ***Learner 12****: They always reminding us how they progress us. (Learner 12, School 4, Interview, 2018)*

Learner 12 from school 4 also shared the same opinion with the above participants that educators fail to not use choice words when addressing them as progressed learners. Learner 12 submitted that educators constantly remind them how they were progressed which she felt was not acceptable.

Hearing the 'voices' of the progressed learners who participated in this study was a great experience for me as the participants gave a clear picture about their school experiences at the hands of their educators. While principals and educators painted a very positive picture of the state of inclusion in their teaching, citing some of the strategies they applied to include all learners particularly progressed learners, it emanated from the learner semi-structured interviews that what the educators advocated contradicted what the learners revealed. For instance, educators were not including learners in their teaching instead, they used excluding tendencies such as name calling and labelling which is not part of inclusion.

Almost every participant expressed their sad feelings about the conduct of their educators who constantly display inhumane behaviour towards them which includes swearing, naming, labelling and marginalising. The participants revealed that it was only those learners who are gifted that enjoy fair and just access to education in their schools. The participants revealed that educators were not including learners in their teaching and they showed excluding tendencies. Participants felt they were not able to participate fully in class, citing various reasons. This form of exclusion contributes vastly to learners having a low self-esteem and a low self-concept. In addition, the participants further indicated that they were also marginalised by their counterparts, the non-progressed learners who constantly used derogatory labels and refused to socialise with them.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an interpretative analytic discussion of the entire research study. Data from the different participants were analysed thematically and, in the other stages, an interpretative and comparative inductive exploration was carried out to determine the meanings

and arrive at some conclusions. I believe though that having to include the principals, educators and learners in the study awarded me with enough opportunity to explore the reality regarding inclusion and the implementation of the progression policy in schools. The findings indicated that all the participants (principals, educators and learners) had their own views in understanding to what extent the policy and practice of progression furthers the aims of inclusive education. The subsequent chapter analyses the data which were presented in the findings chapter (Chapter Four) in relation to the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the different sets of data are discussed in relation to the themes identified and how the data were triangulated – that is, the data from the questionnaire responses of the learners, semi-structured interviews with both learners and principals and focus group interviews with educators. This chapter analyses the data which were presented in the findings chapter (Chapter Four) in relation to the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

The chapter is structured thematically according to the research questions posed. In order to achieve a comprehensive and coherent analysis, I commence this chapter by giving a brief account on my data sources in a table form and indicate how they benefited the study. The fundamental aim of this chapter is to discuss the themes with regard to policies, retention, progression, inclusive education, identity and experiences of progressed learners as part of the analysis of the empirical data. Essentially, the data were closely read several times to ensure that I was fully conversant with them, thus making the process of analysis more practicable. It is from the data gathered from the sources where I drew up themes which were aimed at answering both key questions of this study which are as follows:

Question 1: How are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression?

Question 2: To what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education?

Table 5.1: Data sources

Data Source	Benefit
Learners' Questionnaire Section A: personal details Section B: open ended questions responses Section C: multiple choice Section D: Yes or No response	I got insights from the learners pertaining to their understanding of grade progression, inclusive education and their experiences of being progressed learners in schools and this further allowed easy analysis of results.
Learners' semi-structured interviews	Participating learners were further probed with questions in connection to grade progression, inclusion and school experiences of progressed learners.
Principals' semi-structured interviews	Participants gave their views on grade progression, inclusive education and commented on the identities and experiences of progressed learners in their schools. Furthermore, participating principals gave their insights pertaining to policies regulating inclusion and progression.
Educators' focus group interviews	I obtained detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions related to progression, inclusion and the experiences of progressed learners in their schools. In addition, participating educators also gave their knowledge of policies regulating inclusive education and progression.

5.2 Policies

A full knowledge and understanding of educational policies by education practitioners in schools has proved to be of great importance. Policies are effective in helping schools towards the proper establishment of rules and regulations and promoting standards of excellence for learning and safety, as well as prospects and accountability. It becomes a challenge, therefore, when principals and educators in schools know little of policies which are meant to be the road map towards the daily running of such institutions. As a result, schools ultimately lack the mission and vision necessary to provide the educational needs of learners. In the South African context, certain policies are common throughout all schools as stipulated by the Department of Basic Education, whereas others are planned specifically for each school. This study focuses on the implementation of the progression policy in schools and evaluates the extent it could be considered inclusive. My argument is rooted in the fact that the progression policy is inclusive in nature as it allows learners who have failed to meet the stipulated pass requirements of a certain grade to proceed with their peers to the next grade, therefore, adhering to the principles of inclusive education. Inclusive education, on the other hand, is an educational approach aimed at educating all children regardless of diverse abilities and learning difficulties in the same space using the same available resources. As I have indicated, it is essential for schools to have clear policies with well-established rules and regulations encompassing details from finances, governance, attendance, learner discipline, emergency procedures and of course the curriculum. Nonetheless, it emanated from the findings of this study that both principals and educators of the participating schools had little or no knowledge on both the implementation of progression and inclusive education policies. In support of my argument, I will now discuss the progression policy, retention and inclusive education policies with regard to the findings of this study.

5.3 Retention

The concept “retention” in relation to schools means repeating an academic year of school or being held back instead of proceeding to the next grade due to poor performance. Grade retention is the opposite of grade progression (social promotion), in which learners proceed with their age mates to the next grade irrespective of academic performance. It has been pointed out that grade retention produces harmful emotional and psychological consequences and greatly increases the likelihood the students will drop out of school. The findings of this study indicated that the participating principals and educators were completely against the practice

of retaining learners due to its negative repercussions. This is similar to a finding by scholars such as Jimerson et al. (2000) who agree that grade retention can have a variety of negative effects on learners, and that in many cases grade retention does not work; learners who are held back often never catch up with their peers, and they are at a greater risk of dropping out during adolescence. In this section of the chapter I will discuss retention in relation to the findings of this study and retention as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter.

The participants of this study felt that retaining learners was not a positive solution mainly because they believed that learners would not outgrow learning and attention issues by repeating a grade. The participants felt that repeating a grade may contribute to long-term issues with low self-esteem, as well as emotional or social difficulties and retained learners were more likely to drop out of school. This finding is in line with the findings from a study conducted by Jimerson et al. (2006) which suggests that when learners are retained in a grade, they are likely to suffer a great deal of socio-emotional and behavioural adjustment as well as academic adjustment. The study by Jimerson et al. (2006) further states that neither grade retention nor social promotion (progression) alone is an effective strategy for improving learners' academic, behavioural, and social and emotional success. Schools need to come up with a targeted approach that addresses learners' academic, social and mental health issues. In another dimension, a study conducted by Ferreira, Golsteyn, and Parra-Cely (2018) conclude that in as much as retention could be helpful in assisting learners to acquire basic knowledge needed to perform well later on, retention is one of the factors that leads to learners displaying unruly behaviours at school and ultimately dropping out of school. Retained learners could be angry when they learn what is happening, seeing themselves as failures and might become the victims of bullying and ridicule.

The focus of this study was on the experiences of Grade 10 progressed learners in four mainstream secondary schools and the findings indicated that the majority of the progressed learners who participated in this study had been in Grade 10 at least for more than one academic year. Furthermore, a large portion of those once retained learners were males. Participating educators revealed that girls were less problematic in their classes compared to boys and they were more attentive in class. Female learners were reported to be considerate with their schoolwork as they demonstrated more passion to do schoolwork than males. It is assumed that girls achieve higher scores than boys do at all ages. In a study conducted by Van Der Berg et al. (2019) in the South African context, females were more likely than males to perform

exceptionally well in schools in terms of completed grade for age and were less likely to drop out of school. The findings of this study revealed that male learners engaged in activities such as bunking of classes, not being able to meet deadlines, substance and drug abuse, disrespecting educators, bullying other learners and the use of undesired language on the school premises. It appears that, compared to girls, boys are more exposed to anti-school attitudes and behaviours in their peer groups and experience more pressure from their peers to exhibit anti-school attitudes and behaviours. A study conducted by Statistics South Africa based on gender and grade, indicates that the largest number of learners who were retained in Grade 10 in 2016 were males (see Figure 2.2). Researchers such as Van Houtte (2004), Karande and Kulkarni (2005) and Ullah and Ullah (2019) agree that school attitudes between boys and girls, poor family relations, substance and drug abuse, violent behaviour, medical problems, below average intelligence and emotional problems are some of the factors that are pivotal towards grade retention being experienced by male learners. A study conducted by Jimerson (2001) suggests that besides academic challenges, retained learners are likely to demonstrate social and emotional disorders compared to socially promoted or progressed learners. It is from this background that the Department of Basic Education introduced the progression policy (social promotion) with the intention of easing the tension and frustration brought by retention in learners. As mentioned in Chapter Two, retention cannot be discussed in isolation but in conjunction with grade progression. In the following section, I will discuss grade progression which complements grade retention, in line with the findings of this study.

5.4 Progression

Grade progression, as it is known in the South African context (social promotion) is the practice of promoting learners to the next grade level even when they have not learned the material they were taught or achieved expected learning standards – it is considered to be an alternative to grade retention. In the history of South African education, progression dates back to 1998 when the then National Department of Education introduced the *Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools* aimed at limiting grade repetition or retention to once within a phase. In 2012, the South African National Department of Basic Education introduced the *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12* as a guideline on how learners should be promoted to the next grade. In addition, Circular E35 of 2015 was issued by the Department of Basic Education which implied that a learner who has not met the promotion requirements in either Grade 10 or Grade

11, after repeating the grade, may be progressed to the next grade. The justification behind the implementation of the progression policy was to curb the escalating dropout rate in schools which appeared to be a result of extensive retention of learners. The accommodation of all children in schools regardless of any learning difficulty that might exist is congruent to the principles of inclusive education, therefore, the progression policy is inclusive in nature.

Grade progression promotes learners' self-esteem as they move along with their peers, eliminates the difficulties learners face with retention and prevents learners from dropping out of school. In actuality, Jimerson et al. (2006) clearly state that progressing learners from one grade to the next is mainly implemented to curb grade retention which is assumed to have a negative effect on learner achievement, attitudes toward school, school attendance and learner dropout rates. As I have indicated, when discussing retention participating educators of this study solely discredited it and indicated that the practice of progression was much better than retention even though it was not a solution. This group of educators pointed out that when appropriate support is offered to progressed learners, they were capable of achieving the minimum qualification which is the National Senior Certificate (Matric) in the South African context. This finding supports the argument made by Jimerson et al. (2006) that progression promotes learners' self-esteem as they view themselves equal to their peers. Progressed learners have been found to have higher emotional health than those who are retained. It shows, therefore, that the progression policy and its objectives are rooted in inclusive education programmes. Nevertheless, it is important to note that some educators revealed that progressed learners only brought disruption, disgust, and shame to their classes as they displayed signs of laziness, rebelliousness, were disrespectful and overwhelmed by schoolwork. This group of educators went further to claim that the progression policy disadvantaged them as they were forced to work extra hours in order to offer support to progressed learners. Additionally, one principal stated that the progression policy gave learners more rights and deprived educators of their freedom, because educators had to face learners who were not credible enough to be in those classes they had been progressed to.

The participating opponents of the progression policy in this study further revealed that the policy promoted failure in the sense that learners who knew they would be automatically progressed showed no interest in their schoolwork. Studies conducted by Munje and Maarman (2016) and Kika and Kotze (2018) in the South African context conclude that one, among other reasons, progressed learners are not offered support in schools is that many school-based

educators together with principals had little or no knowledge about the implementation of the grade progression policy. As a result, progressed learners were academically affected as they were likely to struggle to handle the workload of the new grades. The participating principals stated that most of the educators had strong negative feelings about progression and felt that decision makers were not being reasonable by not considering factors such as class size, inadequate resources, and lack of adequate educator preparation. Educators and principals who opposed the progression policy further indicated that this practice was aimed at hiding the failures of the DoBE which is evident in the little or no support offered to schools. One principal further stated that the progression policy is a burden not only to educators, but largely to learners, as they were constantly under the impression that they had acquired enough skills for that grade, but yet had not. The mixed views of educators on the progression policy indicated that they had little knowledge on the progression policy.

5.5 Educators' Understanding of Policies and Inclusive Education

My conviction in this study is that the progression policy is inclusive in nature. It becomes a necessity, therefore, for educators to know what inclusive education entails. The findings of this study indicated that both principals and educators had little knowledge of inclusive education and as a result they displayed little understanding of other policies which meet the principles of inclusive education in schools. Inclusive education denotes that every child is teachable in mainstream schools irrespective of any learning barrier that child might experience. Inclusive education is about offering learners of different backgrounds equal and equitable opportunities in order to realize their academic endeavors. It emanated from the findings of this study that progressed learners were constantly sidelined and marginalized mainly because their educators lacked understanding of inclusive practices in general. A study conducted by Engelbrecht et al. (2015) in the South African context reveals that educators' little knowledge on inclusive education greatly hampered the academic performance of learners in schools. According to Engelbrecht et al. (2015) educators tend to apply a "one-size-fits-all" rule in their classes instead of acknowledging and respecting diversity.

The participating educators and principals in this study revealed that they faced challenges in accommodating all learners in their classrooms including those who are experiencing learning difficulties. This is an indication that the participating educators lack inclusive education skills. Inclusive education calls for the implementation of an inclusive curriculum that would accommodate and benefit every learner. The findings of a study conducted by Engelbrecht et

al. (2015) validates that teaching methods and approaches that contribute to the cognitive development of learners are considered to be inclusive. Engelbrecht et al. (2015) further state that most educators in the South African context lack inclusive education skills. This is similar to the findings of this study because all the participating educators admitted that they were not properly trained to implement inclusive education in their schools and as a result this affected their understanding of other policies which are inclusive in nature such as the progression policy.

5.6 Inclusive Education

My standpoint in this study is that the grade progression policy is rooted in the principles of inclusive education, hence, it strives to keep learners within the schooling system rather than them dropping out without attaining at least a minimum qualification. It is from this background that my argument on inclusive education will constantly refer to the grade progression policy. Inclusive education means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded, in this study, progressed learners represent those who have been excluded. It appears though that educators have different and negative presumptions of what inclusive education entails. Constantly, inclusive education is confused with special education by educators due to limited knowledge and training. To answer the second research question, the study sought to find out if educators in South African mainstream secondary schools were informed about the implementation of the progression policy which is inclusive in nature. As I have indicated earlier in my discussion, inclusive education refers to the process of having all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools (mainstreaming), to be taught together alongside those who have traditionally been excluded – not only children with disabilities, but speakers of minority languages as well. On the other hand, progression is the practice of enabling learners to progress to the next grade with their peers even if the learners have not satisfied academic requirements or met performance standards at key grades. The findings of this study indicated that both principals and educators demonstrated little or no knowledge pertaining to the implementation of the inclusive education policy. In this section, I will focus on the findings pertaining to the participants' insufficient knowledge on inclusive education.

Inclusive education policies and legislation in the South African context are all linked to the broader international educational interventions which include, but are not limited to, the EFA, MDGs, SDGs and the Salamanca Declaration. Scholars such as Walton (2018) and Winter and O'Raw (2010) concur that it was an initiative made by the United Nations in 1945 when a

Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 were designed in order to protect and promote the rights of children not only in education but in all spheres of life that laid a firm foundation for inclusive societies. The findings of this study indicated that both principals and educators demonstrated little knowledge on the background of inclusive education from an international perspective. None of the participating principals and educators associated inclusive education with the rights' model as stipulated in the UN documents, instead, for these educators, inclusive education is tantamount to special education. In essence, principals and educators are central to the advancement of inclusion in schools mainly because they play a crucial role in terms of admitting, placement, integration, and the success of learners faced with learning difficulties. Principals are leaders and managers of educational institutions who are also agents of change within inclusive schools, therefore, they need to possess a variety of competencies. Knowledge of inclusive education or learners with learning barriers enriches both principals' and educators' willingness to work with and accept them into mainstream education classrooms alongside learners who do not have such disabilities or needs. This finding is similar to the studies conducted by Walton (2018) and Engelbrecht et al. (2016) which suggest that barriers and obstacles in educational centres such as a lack of teacher training, which is crucial towards responding to the needs of all learners, poses a threat towards the realisation of an inclusive education system in the South African context. In another study conducted by Mkhuma et al. (2014) they further insist that principals and educators are not yet fully qualified or trained to understand the logistics of an inclusive school and this is evident in their lack of experience in dealing with severe and profound disabilities in schools, as well as their inability to include all learners in all school activities. Effective implementation of inclusive programmes requires that principals and educators should be familiar with the characteristics of children with disabilities, the special education laws, strategies for assessing the learners' needs and strategies for teaching and structuring instruction to individual learner needs if they are to successfully educate exceptional learners in inclusive settings.

In the South African context, inclusive education is mainly rooted in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 as amended (RSA, 1996a) which is the roadmap towards bringing about societal change, that is, from being discriminatory to being accommodative and inclusive. In addition to the republic's Constitution, the Department of Basic Education has advanced official documents such as: the *National Education Policy Act* (1996); *The South African Schools Act* (Act 84 of 1996 as amended); White Paper 6 (DoE 2001); the *National Strategy on Screening Identification, Assessment and Support* (DoBE,

2008a) (SIAS); *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (2010a); *Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom through Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (DoE, 2011) which are key towards the implementation of an inclusive education system in South African. The findings of this study indicated that the participating principals and educators could hardly relate to any of the above-mentioned documents in support of inclusion and this indicated their little or no knowledge on inclusive education. Both principals and educators shared the same sentiment when they highlighted that lack of training towards attaining inclusive education skills was the most important detriment relating to the execution of their duties. Studies conducted by Walton (2018), Walton (2016), Engelbrecht et al. (2015) and Mkhuma et al. (2014) indicate clearly that inclusive education skills offered to South African educators tend to be fragmented and short-term with little knowledge, thus not enabling them to deal with the diversity of learners. It is a necessity that educators must be well trained in all aspects before they enter the classroom, and they must receive ongoing training even as they work in the classroom. When this training does not happen, there is a risk that educators will not execute their duties as expected.

A study conducted by Walton (2018) in the South African context indicates that negative attitudes towards inclusion can be associated with less inclusive classroom learning environments, with evidence to suggest that educators with less positive attitudes toward inclusion have learners who report less satisfaction and cohesiveness within the classroom, and greater friction, competitiveness and difficulty between the learners. The responses of the principals to the interviews exposed that educators demonstrated negative attitudes towards progressed learners by constantly using derogatory and swear words during teaching and learning sessions which constantly reminded them of their plight of not meeting pass requirements. The participants further stated that these negative attitudes are not necessarily due to dislike or discrimination but are due to the labels that progressed learners are given. The participating principals strongly emphasised that educators tended to severely underestimate the abilities of progressed learners instead of offering them the necessary academic support. Educators' attitudes affect whether or not a classroom learning environment is conducive to inclusive education. The findings indicated that even though educators accepted progressed learners in their classes, they accepted them with low expectations of what they are able to achieve as a result of the attitudes that already existed among educators. My conviction is that the progression policy is inclusive in nature, therefore, it should not discriminate, segregate nor marginalise other learners, instead, the reality in schools is that educators are failing to

understand the principles of inclusive education. The findings indicated that progressed learners are often given a second-class learner status which is completely at odds with the principles of inclusive education as well.

Educators' perceptions of inclusive education are noteworthy mainly because they can influence the degree to which learners with barriers to learning are accepted and accommodated within mainstream schools. Full realisation of inclusive education depends heavily on the perceptions and attitudes of educators within mainstream schools toward learners with special needs or barriers to learning. Positive perceptions and feelings on the part of educators tend to encourage successful inclusion. Engelbrecht et al. (2016) suggest that the majority of educators are negative about inclusive education mainly because they lack relevant and appropriate skills necessary for the realisation of inclusion. Findings of this study indicated that educators demonstrated negative attitudes towards the progression policy as they perceived it to be an additional burden on their already stressed workloads.

5.7 Educator Support and Training

Reducing barriers to learning within all education and training institutions through strengthened education support services became a priority to the Department of Basic Education towards the realisation of inclusive education (DoE, 2001). In achieving full support of educators and schools, the Department of Basic Education introduced DBSTs aimed at liaising with School Based Support Teams (SBSTs). DBSTs refers to an integrated professional team provided at district level. The key function of the DBSTs is to assist educational institutions, which include early childhood learning centres, schools, adult learning centres, colleges and higher institutions of learning, to identify barriers to learning and support learners in accessing the curriculum (DoE, 2001). On the other hand, SBSTs previously referred to as Institutional-Level Support Teams (ILST), are school based teams which are composed of selected educators and other professionals whose main function is to identify and address barriers to learning.

The findings of this study revealed that principals, educators, and learners hardly received any support from the nearest district offices, instead they relied on the limited expertise of their SBSTs. The role of the SBST is to identify and assess learners experiencing learning barriers and then have a plan on how to address such barriers. The White Paper 6 calls upon schools to put in place SBSTs that would liaise with DBSTs whose primary duty is working towards the

administering of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) of learners who experience barriers to learning in schools. Nonetheless, principals and educators in this study made it known that they hardly receive any support from the district offices, which made it harder for them to implement most of the inclusive programmes as highlighted in some of the official departmental documents.

A study conducted by Walton (2016) clearly indicates that in as much as South Africa has witnessed political transformation since the advent of democracy in 1994, little has been done towards the realisation of inclusive education as outlined in the White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy. In yet another study conducted by Walton (2018), it is made known that the successful implementation and accomplishment of inclusive education in schools is determined by the readiness of educators to take responsibility for the education of all learners; this includes educators in schools and those who are district based. The findings of a study conducted by Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht, and Nel (2016) indicate that in the South African context, major support systems aimed at assisting educators and learners are in place. This includes, but is not limited to, the creation of DBSTs, Institution-Level Based Support Teams (ILST) (also called SBSTs), Full-Service Schools (FSS) as well as Special Schools as Resource Centres (SSRC). Nonetheless, the participating principals and educators did mention the availability of SBSTs in their institutions, but they expressed their heartfelt dissatisfaction about the little or no help that they received from the DBST. Furthermore, Diko, Haupt, and Molefe (2011) conclude that the role and functions of district offices were clarified as those of providing adequate resources and ensuring quality teaching and learning in schools. The justification behind the instituting of district offices was to bring education authorities closer to schools and it was expected that their role would be to make schools effective and efficient by providing educational resources and professional support. The participating principals and educators made it clear that the only time they had visits from the district officials was when they were expected to account for both syllabus and assessment coverage.

The responses of principals and educators in this study indicated that most of the male progressed learners displayed undesired behaviours, most of which included disrespect of teachers in terms of disobedience and rudeness, followed by talking out of turn, verbal aggression and drug related issues. Learners' behaviour can affect their abilities to learn as well as other learners' learning environments. Learners who behave disruptively by bullying other learners, talking during teaching and learning, or by requiring the educator to interrupt lessons

to discipline them can have a negative effect on an entire classroom. Inclusive education programmes require that educators be knowledgeable in dealing with learners who experience behavioural problems in schools. Research findings by Nel et al. (2016) in the South African context indicate that educators who have been trained to educate learners with learning barriers such as progressed learners, express more favourable attitudes and emotional reactions compared to educators who had no such training. These scholars suggest that inclusive policies and legislation in the South African context, such as the Education White Paper 6 and SIAS policy, require that inclusive practices be made available to everybody, everywhere and at all times. Nel et al. (2016) further state that in their findings in the South African context, as many as 65% of mainstream educators do not have a relevant inclusive education qualification that included training on how to respond within mainstream classrooms to diverse learning needs. These educators were either trained only for general mainstream education or so-called "specialised education" in separate educational settings. This hinders the manner and way in which educators are expected to conduct themselves when dealing with learners with learning barriers. It appears that the majority of educators do not have adequate training to provide support to learners with special educational needs and this poses a big challenge to schools and educators. Educators need to be supported and trained to adopt different teaching techniques, strategies, styles, and approaches to teach and support diverse learners in their classrooms. Inclusive education is grounded on the rights' model which suggests that a learner should be able to choose their classroom and school preference, and that adequate support should be provided in that chosen classroom.

The findings of this study exposed that learners with behavioural disorders and emotional difficulties attracted the least favourable attention from mainstream educators. Educators constantly assume that learners experiencing academic challenges are disruptive in their classrooms, therefore, they tended not to understand such learners and were more likely to resist the placement of these learners in their classrooms. The findings of this study indicated that the progression policy and the practice of progressing learners from one grade to the next could not further the aims of inclusive education mainly because the participating principals and educators had little or no awareness of inclusive education practices. I have indicated that progression (social promotion) is inclusive in its nature, in actuality, for one to understand progression, one ought to fully acquaint themselves with the principles of inclusive education. Inclusive education suggests that every child has a right to be taught in mainstream schools regardless of any learning difficulties that the child might be experiencing, rather than special

schools. The following section of this chapter will discuss the experiences of progressed learners in relation to the findings of this study and evaluate how the progression policy and its implementation contributed towards the shaping of their social identities. I will start by discussing learners' identities in relation to Erik Erikson and Stuart Hall and will then discuss Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory.

5.8 The Identity of the Progressed Learner

As I have mentioned earlier, all the learner participants were adolescents at the time the study was conducted. It is important, therefore, to understand the behaviour and identity formation of adolescence as described by Erikson in his theory of psychosocial developmental stages, notably stage five, identity vs. role confusion (adolescence and emerging adulthood), which puts more emphasis on adolescents' pursuit of a sense of self and personal identity through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs and goals. Erikson believes that the prime psychosocial task of adolescence is establishing an identity. According to Marcia (2010) in support of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, adolescents are not only confined to a single identity but to multiple identities which include religious identity, political identity, vocational identity, gender identity and ethnic identity which are all influenced by their parents and communities. When teenagers are developing their identity, they are learning what makes them unique while also feeling the need to fit in. The findings of this study revealed that some educators, principals, and non-progressed learners viewed and identified progressed learners as having a single identity. Progressed learners were only identified as learners who struggled with their schoolwork.

The findings of the study further revealed that progressed learners were experiencing identity crises and a lack of a sense of belonging. This was mainly because of the exclusion and marginalisation they experienced at the hands of their educators and peers. According to Erikson, when one is experiencing an identity crisis, they may be questioning their sense of self or identity. The findings of this study indicated that most of the progressed learners experienced identity crises as they were constantly caught or involved in unacceptable activities at school such as being moody and irritable, defiant or rebellious, using alcohol and substance abuse, lying or withholding information and being disrespectful to educators. This often occurs due to certain changes or stressors in life, or due to factors such as age or advancement from a certain stage, for example, school or childhood. The findings revealed that educators and peers of the participating progressed learners constantly used derogatory labels

which led to the creation of “them” and “us”. According to Erikson, self-identity forms the basis of our self-esteem. In adolescents, the way they view themselves changes in response to peers, family, and school, among other social environments. The findings of the study exposed that the treatment experienced by progressed learners from their educators and peers resulted in the social identity they ultimately acquired.

According to Hall (1989), the postmodern subject is considered to have no fixed, essential, or permanent identity. People have inconsistent identities which at times brings about confusion as they pull in different directions. The findings of this study revealed that some participating educators and principals viewed progressed learners as only having a unified and homogeneous identity simply as progressed learners. It appeared that these participants overlooked the other identities that progressed learners possessed on the grounds that that they could not meet pass requirements. In essence, educators are expected to be efficient communicators, good listeners, focus on collaboration, adaptable, engaging, empathetic, patient and be able to share best practices. It emanated from the findings that some of the participants lacked such qualities.

In contrast, some participating educators gave counter responses on the identities of progressed learners as they indicated that progressed learners were not only learners faced with learning difficulties, but they had something good to offer. Progressed learners, according to the responses of these educators, experienced learning difficulties which at times interfered with literacy skills development, their ability to focus and organisational skills, however, they still had a right to be taught in mainstream schools. This group of educators viewed and identified progressed learners holistically considering their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, family structure, home language, where they live and possibly activities they enjoy. Furthermore, the responses of these educators highlighted the positive aspects demonstrated by progressed learners, more especially their will to excel in their academic endeavours. The responses of these educators demonstrated their understanding that an individual is not confined to one identity but many, likewise with progressed learners as they are labelled in schools – beyond schooling spaces they have multiple and inconsistent identities which include being teenagers, male or female, gay or lesbian, African, Christians and many more.

5.9 How Do Progressed Learners View Themselves?

There is a growing consensus that individuals hold multiple identities as suggested by scholars such as Stuart Hall, with multiple identities based on membership of many social groups (Tajfel

& Turner, 1979). In most cases, a person may hold one identity status in one aspect of their life and another identity status in a different life sphere. The findings of this study indicated that the participating progressed learners did not only view themselves as progressed learners but as individuals having multiple identities varying from being teenagers, soccer players, dancers, Christians, Africans, among others. The participating progressed learners' identities were not only confined within the schooling system, but they viewed themselves holistically as members of the community who had other roles to play. Some of the male participating progressed learners expressed their positive contributions in their soccer teams and how those teams viewed them as valuable players. Furthermore, one participating female learner revealed how she was identified as an aspiring fashion model in her community. This is an indication that the participating progressed learners did not only view themselves as failures in life but had other activities to partake in. Failure is something that all learners experience at some level, in and out of school. In common with the rest of the human race, learners sometimes fail to achieve what they set out to do, fail to communicate intentions, to solve problems and to complete tasks. Nevertheless, some of the participating progressed learners from the different schools saw failure as an event not a state. The findings indicated that these learners were able to develop a deep belief that, although all humans experience failure, no human is a failure. The labels that learners received from their educators were unjustifiable mainly because labels perpetuate the notion that learners with mild disabilities are qualitatively different from other learners. Furthermore, it appears that educators confused the learners with the labels. Labels reflect categories of disabilities. When a learner is placed in a category, an educator who knows some of the characteristics of a category may ascribe all known characteristics to each labelled learner. This is stereotyping and it harm learners when educators rationalize low achievement by citing characteristics of the label.

Some of the participating progressed learners indicated that it was not difficult for them to socialise with other members of the community; this meant that they viewed themselves not only as progressed learners but as active citizens. In contrast, it has been suggested by scholars such as Erikson that adolescents in different societies experience a number of social challenges related to sexual behaviour, drugs, and suicide. Teenagers tend to be insecure, more especially when they are not doing well and do not feel good about themselves. They cover up their inadequacies with an aggressive attitude. The findings of this study indicated that some progressed learners indeed engaged themselves in some of the social challenges mentioned by Erikson as part of their identity crises and shifted the blame to some of their educators as the

key source, by not addressing their academic needs appropriately. Nonetheless, the very same progressed learners viewed themselves as able human beings who had charisma, the ability to understand others' points of view, the ability to reason with people, having a strong will and the ability to relate to others.

5.10 Experiences of Progressed Learners

The "voice" is defined as the meaning that resides in the individual and the struggle for "voice" begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Research evidence by Clark (2005) shows that children have always been left out in data collection processes, yet it is important to engage them when investigating issues that affect them. Fleming (2010) and Prout (2002) cited in Walton (2011, p. 83) argue that "children can reveal novel or different aspects or perspectives of situations which may be invisible to adults". This is done through allowing children the opportunity to express their views and discuss situations or feelings that they were never given a chance to talk about. For children to offer authentic information that would be helpful to researchers, they need to be comfortable around the researchers and this could be achieved through ethical and sensitive interactions. Clark (2005) recommends means and ways in which children's voices could be heard and this includes the following: observation, interviews, questionnaires, and structured activities. It was from this perspective that I decided to involve learners in this study in order to probe their experiences of being progressed learners in mainstream secondary schools. In this section I will focus on the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979) (SIT) in relation to the findings of the study as discussed in the findings chapter.

5.11 Progressed Learners and Self-Esteem

The SIT of Tajfel and Turner (1979) is rooted on the notion that people's sense of who they are is commonly based on their group membership(s). As I have indicated earlier in my argument, progressed learners are learners in schools who have failed to meet pass requirements, nonetheless, are progressed to the next grade albeit not meeting pass requirements in order to keep them in the schooling system. SIT suggests that the groups which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity which is a sense of belonging to the social world. The responses of the participating learners to the open ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews indicated that the constant labels they were given by their educators contributed vastly to their

dented self-esteems which played a role in their poor performances in class. Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth and it is important because it heavily influences people's choices and decisions.

In other words, self-esteem serves a motivational function by making it more or less likely that people will take care of themselves and explore their full potential. This is similar to the conclusion made by scholars such as Coll and Falsafi (2010), Lim et al. (2005) and Branden (2001), who made it clear that one's self-esteem is essential because it impacts on one's physical and psychological well-being. The participating learners felt confined as progressed learners and they have been made to believe that they cannot do anything, yet, increasing self-esteem allows adolescents greater opportunities to participate in activities in which they are competent – and increased perspective-taking abilities will enable them to gather more support from others by behaving in more socially acceptable ways as suggested by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) STI. Coll and Falsafi (2010) conclude that living with low self-esteem can harm your mental health and lead to problems such as depression and anxiety. It is likely that someone with a low self-esteem may also develop unhelpful habits, such as smoking and drinking too much, as a way of coping. Responses of the educators' focus group interviews and some principals who participated in this study made it clear that, indeed, most of the progressed learners could not cope with the demands of the curriculum and often sought solace from intoxicating substances such as dagga to boost their low self-esteem.

SIT proposes that there is always a direct relationship between positive social identity and self-esteem. Responses of learners' semi structured interviews exposed that their low self-esteem was as a result of their failure to cope with their studies and this extensively affected their positive social identity, hence, they are labelled progressed learners. A study conducted by Branden (2001) concludes that individuals with low self-esteem, who feel poorly about themselves and judge themselves to be inferior to others are at risk of not fulfilling their true potential in life. They may not take the initiative to set and pursue personal goals; they may not put any effort into their education or careers and they may accept poor treatment from family, friends and their educators because they do not see any worth in themselves. This is typical of the findings of this study as some progressed learners who participated in this study made it clear that living was null and void for them as they are doomed for failure. Nevertheless, some learners who participated in this study disclosed that progression had enabled them a second chance academically; it brought back their confidence as it enabled them to realise the

importance of working harder. After being progressed, some learners were able to put more effort into their studies and they eventually passed to the next grade fairly well. Through progression, learners were able to change their attitudes towards school and it also enabled them to continue to socialise with their peers. Some learners further stated that progression helped them to remain in school, and if it were not for the policy, they would have long left school long before reaching Grade 12, in that way their esteem was uplifted.

SIT proposes that there are three mental processes involved in evaluating others as "us" or "them" and these are social categorisation, social identification and social comparison, which I shall discuss next in relation to the findings of this study.

5.12 Being Categorised as a Progressed Learner

Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that people categorise objects in order to have a full understanding of them and identify them in a certain manner. Typically, people categorise themselves in order to understand their social environment and they use social categories such as African, European, Asian, Christian, teacher, lecturer and many more. Similarly, people find out things about themselves by knowing what categories they belong to. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that people define appropriate behaviour by referencing the norms of groups they belong to – but they can only do this if they can tell who belongs to their group. This is identical to the responses of some of the participating progressed learners who viewed themselves only as progressed learners mainly because they have been categorised in that fashion by their educators and in policy. Their educators and policies expected them to function in a different derogatory manner than the rest of the learners. This is known as in-group (us) and out-group (them) according to SIT. The central hypothesis of SIT is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that social categorisation influences our perceptions of groups, for instance, the perception of out-group homogeneity. When people are categorised into groups, stereotypes and prejudice which may lead to marginalisation become inevitable. Participating learners revealed their constant experience of being marginalised by their educators, friends and sometimes family members because of their inability to cope with their academic studies in school as a traumatic experience. Furthermore, both principals' and educators' responses established that they were expected by educational policies and legislations to categorise learners in a demeaning fashion which resulted in marginalisation.

The participating learners commented on how their educators marginalised them and how they were forced to live on the fringes rather than in the mainstream, further leading to their limited participation in classes as they were downgraded to second class learner status. Furthermore, the participating learners indicated that they also experienced some social injustices from their peers who at times refused to socialise with them. The participating progressed learners revealed that it was hard for the non-progressed learners to share any academic information with them as they were considered the weakest learners in class. Furthermore, the responses of the progressed learners exposed that they were constantly mocked by the non-progressed learners based on their inability to cope with reading skills, mathematics skills, finishing class activities on time, doing homework and not wanting to complete worksheets. Most of the progressed learners revealed that their participation in class was minimal mainly because non-progressed learners viewed them differently and as a result, they experienced social isolation.

Social identification is an individual sense of who people are based on their group membership(s) and is one of the mental processes of SIT as discussed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). It suggests that the groups, for instance, social class, family, football team, sexual orientation, (dis)abilities and religion/religious beliefs which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. The participating progressed learners indicated that, frequently, they enjoyed flocking together as progressed learners based on the fact that it has become easier for them to relate amongst themselves. The more people identify with a particular group, the more that group plays a role in shaping how people feel about themselves. Social identification is important according to Tajfel and Turner (1979), mainly because it influences how people see themselves and how they interact with others. If people have a positive view of their identity within a group, they are more likely to relate well to others in that group and feel positive emotions about themselves. Furthermore, a study that was conducted by Jenkins (2008) concludes that social identification can provide people with a sense of self-esteem and a framework for socialising, and it can influence their behaviour and also how other people treat them.

The majority of the participating learners rejected the inferiority complex associated with being a progressed learner by viewing and identifying themselves as equal to the rest of the learners. Some participating learners indicated that when you label yourself as part of a particular group, it gives you a psychological shortcut on how you should think and behave. Instead of thinking for yourself, all you need to do is copy what other members of your group are doing. The

learners' responses indicated that labelling yourself could often lead to blind conformity. Conformity is common amongst adolescents which appears to be an element that holds the peer clique together as indicated by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) SIT. In essence, using undesired identifications and labels for learners is not acceptable as an educator may have preconceived ideas of the learners' capabilities based on the label and may not teach the learners to their fullest capability. Learners in their responses to semi-structured interviews cited that the maltreatment they received from their educators resulted in anxiety, sadness, depression and feelings of guilt and emptiness. As a result, learners exposed that such practices by the educators often translated into depression, loss of interest and stress-related ailments. The responses of the learners to the semi-structured interviews indicated that the constant derogatory identifications by their educators made them feel different to other learners in some way, or "less than". On the other hand, the findings of this study indicated that non-progressed learners heaped more exclusion and marginalisation on progressed learners than educators, as they constantly labelled them using derogatory words such as being "stubborn" or "uncooperative" leading to poor self-esteem. The participating progressed learners indicated that non-progressed learners tended to be egocentric as they dominated discussions and refused to listen to progressed learners' contributions. One participant made it clear that because of his limited English vocabulary and different interests from one of his classmates who happened to be a non-progressed learner, this classmate told him that he would never achieve anything in life. Ultimately, his self-esteem was extremely dented. The participating progressed learners revealed that they got bored and frustrated in class as a result of being mocked and vilified by their counterparts, non-progressed learners. This is tantamount to what Tajfel and Turner's (1979) SIT refers to as social identification, whereby people are identified according to their in-groups. This practice, according to Tajfel and Turner's (1979) SIT results in social comparisons as people start to compare themselves with the out-group. The responses of the participating learners to the open ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews indicated that their educators and other learners instilled in them a feeling of rejection, a practice which impacted on their feelings of belonging and how they perceived their identities, which as a result hampered their self-worth.

Social comparisons can make us feel inferior if we make the error of only comparing ourselves to people with certain traits. For example, the findings of this study indicated that participating principals and educators constantly compared learners' performances based on their abilities instead of embracing learners' diversities and accommodating all learners regardless of any

learning difficulties experienced by others. SIT concludes that when making such comparisons, people tend to compare other people only to the most gifted people they know. This was also found in this study which revealed that progressed learners constantly compared themselves with the "normal" learners and this resulted in unnecessary labelling. In essence, the process of comparisons and labelling can have an effect on a person's social identity as they are likely to carry these with them for a lifetime as suggested by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). The responses of educators' focus group interviews indicated that the identities given to progressed learners actually shift the blame and the guilt for the learners' learning difficulties squarely on the learners and parents' shoulders. It appeared in the responses that such undesired identifications from the educators were unjustified because learners may be mislabelled, or educators may not fully understand the many different causes of learning difficulties. The attitudes that educators had toward progressed learners in general and the extent and manner in which teacher education, teacher training and teaching experience were associated with these attitudes, was exposed in their responses in the focus group interviews. As highlighted by Walton (2011), Walton (2018), Engelbrecht et al. (2015), Jafarov (2015), Sapungan and Sapungan (2014), Lemmer (2007) and Matshe (2014), teacher readiness and attitudes are critical towards the realisation and implementation of inclusive education in schools. The social comparison process has been associated with numerous consequences and these include a dented self-esteem, especially when not doing well relative to others. For example, having the worst final score in a class can decrease a learner's self-esteem quite a bit. Tajfel and Turner (1979) conclude that when you compare yourself to somebody else, you do not really focus on your work. All you think about is how quick you are, or not, when seeing your results compared to the other person. This is distracting and can lead to poor quality work. Research by Jenkins (2008) found that comparing people breeds feelings of envy, low-self-confidence and depression, as well as compromises our ability to trust others. Progressed learners who participated in this study stated that they would like to be recognised like the so-called "normal" learners in their schools rather than being compared and ridiculed.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) identify three strategies that could be used by group members to achieve positive social identity amongst themselves and these are: social mobility, social change and social creativity, which I shall discuss next in relation to the findings of the study.

5.13 Social Mobility and Progressed Learners

SIT notes that social mobility refers to the movement of individuals, families, or groups through a system of social hierarchy or stratification. A study conducted by Ellemers et al. (2002) indicates that social mobility offers those who are from underprivileged backgrounds an opportunity to break the boundary of their social class. The participating progressed learners indicated that their inability to meet pass requirements posed a threat to their academic endeavours and this made them work harder in order to perform to the expected standards. According to SIT, social mobility can take many forms, the most obvious one being when group members leave a low status group and gain membership in a group with higher societal status. Nonetheless, although it is not always possible to leave a low status group, people can still pursue individual mobility by psychologically distancing themselves from the in-group. The use of social mobility to improve social identity is restricted by contextual factors as well as individual differences, as some participating progressed learners advanced different reasons why they could not meet pass requirements.

Education, among other factors, has been identified as a key element in helping learners belonging to lower strata of society to move up in the social scale and ultimately occupy a higher social position. For instance, some participating educators gave positive responses on the identities of progressed learners as they indicated that progressed learners were not only learners faced with learning difficulties, but they had something good to offer. These educators admitted that indeed, progressed learners had learning difficulties – a condition that can cause an individual to experience problems in a traditional classroom learning context. Progressed learners, according to the responses of these educators, experienced learning difficulties which at times interfered with literacy skills development, their ability to focus and organisational skills, however, they still had a right to be taught in mainstream schools. This group of educators viewed and identified progressed learners holistically and considered their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, family structure, home language, where they live, and possibly activities they enjoy. Furthermore, the responses of these educators highlighted the positive aspects demonstrated by progressed learners, more especially their will to excel in their academic endeavours. Additionally, most of the participating progressed learners indicated in their responses that they were willing to achieve better scores in their subjects taught at school so that they would be able to join tertiary institutions. Some of the participating progressed learners were eager to improve their academic results by adopting innovative

learning skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills in order to meet pass requirements. Some highlighted the desire to change the socio-economic status in their different homes. They made it clear that it was through education that they would be able to join those in the higher economic ranks of society. The responses of the progressed learners indicated that social mobility was vital for their success in life regardless of the learning barriers they experienced in their different schools. Social mobility proves essential, therefore, for progressed learners, considering that education can initiate social changes by bringing about a change in outlook and attitude of individuals. It can bring about a change in the pattern of social relationships and institutions and thereby, it may cause social change which I shall discuss next.

5.14 Social Change and Progressed Learners

Social change, according to SIT refers to the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. Our societies are made up of multiple webs of social relationships and hence social change means change in the system of social relationships. The responses of the participating learners exposed that both at school and at home they had negative relationships with their educators, friends and parents which made it a necessity for them to ultimately achieve social change. Tajfel and Turner (1979) conclude that unsatisfactory, underprivileged, or stigmatised group membership results in low self-concept and the desire to prosper in life, therefore, social change becomes essential. Research conducted by Ellemers et al. (2002) indicate that the most prominent element of social change is that it results in less violation of human rights. As I have indicated earlier, some participating educators not only viewed progressed learners as doomed individuals but human beings who were still capable of contributing positively to society; this means that they were conscious and cautious of other people's rights, more especially children's. The ideal relationship between an educator and a learner is one of mutual respect. The educator must respect the fact that their learners are developing human beings that are there to learn and grow and are expected to make mistakes, then be helped to fix those mistakes. Research by Idrisa, Hassana, Ya'acoba, Gill, and Awal (2011) indicates that for educators to enable learners to achieve social change through education they should teach with enthusiasm and passion, display a positive attitude, make learning fun, show an interest in their learners' lives outside the classroom, treat learners with respect and create a secure and safe environment for learners. Despite this, the findings of this study reveal that social mobility for progressed learners is limited and difficult.

5.15 Social Creativity and Progressed Learners

The responses of some of the participating progressed learners indicated that they were in favour of social creativity which according to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) implies that people are likely to modify their perceptions of the in-group's standing. According to studies conducted by Jenkins (2008) and Ellemers et al. (2002), social creativity occurs when members of the in-group augment the social ranking of their existing group by improving some element of the between-group comparison. This is achievable through comparing the in-group to a different out-group, more especially, one that holds a lower social status. When the participating progressed learners were asked whether they would like to see themselves being progressed in the future, they responded by stating that they would like to see themselves being able to meet the pass requirements and that would require them to put more effort into their studies. Most of the participating progressed learners further explained that they were willing to work with their "gifted" classmates in order for them to acquire more knowledge and such a move is viewed as creativity because that would mean improving cooperation and communication skills with others.

In order to answer my research questions which are as follows:

1. How are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression?
2. To what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education?

I have noted that most policies introduced by the DoBE which includes the progression policy in the South African context appear to be the core challenge towards the attainment of an inclusive education system in South Africa. South Africa's endeavours of creating an inclusive education system that would promote a just and equal society, even for the previously disadvantaged citizens, are evident in all educational policies and legislations which are more intertwined with international interventions. It appears, nonetheless, that the principles of an inclusive education system in the South African context have not yet been achieved irrespective of the well-designed policies which call upon for increased access to mainstream classrooms, the accommodation and recognition of learners with diverse educational needs and full participation of all learners. This is embedded in the fact that some South African educational policies are endorsed only for their political symbolism rather than their logicality as observed

by Jansen (2001) as cited in Donohue and Bornman (2014). As a result, ambiguous policies are passed with no one to monitor their effectiveness; ultimately, no one takes responsibility for their failure. There is, therefore, a serious call for full transformation from the DoBE, the provincial departments of basic education and local district offices to make sure that systematic shortcomings are addressed in order to realise the implementation of inclusive education. The DoBE needs to take responsibility for the policy that was introduced in 2001 (White Paper 6) in making sure that there is full implementation of inclusive education at all levels. For instance, Donohue and Bornman (2014) conclude that the White Paper 6, which is the roadmap for the full implementation of inclusive education in South Africa, lacks specificity and detail, as it only contains undefined strategies which are difficult to comprehend creating obstacles towards implementation. Policies and legislations regulating education in South Africa must be reviewed at national level for a possible inclusive society that would witness the inclusion of progressed learners, without any form of marginalisation and exclusion taking place.

The categorisation of progressed learners in schools due to the practice of grade progression has indeed created a new learners' social identity. The progression policy, which is also known as social promotion, is inclusive in the sense that when learners with learning difficulties are isolated and taught only in special education classrooms, they are not given the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of learners. Due to the inability of educators to implement the progression policy in the South Africa context as observed by Kika and Kotze (2018) and their failure to understand that it is inclusive in nature, it appears that progressed learners have been subjected to a derogatory identity. The educational inequality between progressed learners and those who are classified as normal learners, continues to perpetuate social divisions amongst learners in mainstream secondary schools. As a result, learners' experiences of the practice of grade progression have contributed vastly to their social identities.

The DoBE, therefore, needs to create a way of improving the educational experience for all learners and narrowing inequality gaps created by policies – it must be seen as a central force for change in the education system and equalise the share of resources among all school systems. In the end, policies are only guidelines for human activity, and cannot substitute for its basic humanity. Humanity in this context requires each of us to engage our common sense, common compassion, and common creativity to build a more inclusive environment for our learners.

In answering the second research question, I view the policy and practice of progression as a tool of furthering the aims of inclusive education to a large extent as it strives to keep learners in schools regardless of their inability of meeting pass requirements. The justification behind the implementation of the progression policy was to curb the escalating dropout rates in schools which appeared to be a result of extensive retention of learners. Nonetheless, it appears that the policy and the practice of progression has been viewed as a burden by most educational practitioners merely because a lot of school based educators together with principals have little knowledge about the implementation of the grade progression policy. I therefore feel that it is the responsibility of the DoBE to adopt and adapt the principles of the emancipatory/transformative approach whose major objectives include focusing on social action and privileging the voices of marginalised groups of people in societies such as progressed learners in schools. It seeks not only to generate new knowledge, but to actually remove barriers and promote social inclusion and equality. My conviction is that the DoBE must align itself with the emancipatory/transformative approach as it calls for the complete transformation of policies, attitudes, educational institutions and societies as suggested by Mertens (2009) and Rose and Glass (2008) in their studies. The emancipatory approach calls for the complete change of all structures in order for an inclusive education system to be attainable.

It appears that a majority of educators are struggling to implement inclusive education policies into practice mainly because of inadequate training, sufficient support and negative attitudes. Education has become a societal responsibility, by and large we all have a role to play, not only educators in schools. In the South African context, there is a call for the upgrading of infrastructure, eradicating mud schools, fixing basic infrastructure, training of educators, and building inclusive schools and libraries that would provide conducive teaching and learning environments. The DoBE needs to set minimum standards for all elements of the education system so that parents know what they should expect from the government and can hold it accountable.

In my discussion above, I have made it clear that progressed learners' social identities are to a larger extent shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression in schools as they are made to conform to the expectations of policy and legislations. Furthermore, I have indicated the extent to which the policy and practice of progression furthers the aims of

inclusive education, nonetheless, factors such as lack of teacher training appear to be the greatest challenges towards the implementation of an inclusive education system.

5.16 Conclusion

The South African education system has witnessed a lot of changes since the advent of a democratic dispensation. When the apartheid government came to power in 1948, it saw the schooling system as the major vehicle for the spread of its beliefs. For the period of its duration, schools were one of the system's starkest symbols. It has been the duty of the new and democratic government to repair and reconstruct the fabric of South Africa's ravaged past, by putting more attention on the educational sphere. Various educational policies and legislations have been introduced in a bid to neutralise the educational imbalances that existed during apartheid. One of the policies was the White Paper 6 which outlines how the education and training system must transform itself to contribute towards establishing a caring and humane society, how it must change to accommodate the full range of learning needs and the mechanisms that should be put in place. Nonetheless, almost 20 years later, little has been achieved from this policy. The grade progression policy is yet another policy that has brought about confusion in mainstream secondary schools as educators have proved incompetent in its implementation. Grade progression, as it is known in the South African context (social promotion) is the practice of promoting learners to the next grade level even when they have not learned the material they were taught or achieved expected learning standards and it is considered to be an alternative to grade retention. The unpreparedness of educators to implement the mentioned policies has led to the creation of a new social identity in schools known as progressed learners. As a result, progressed learners have been ridiculed, mocked, marginalised and excluded by their educators and peers based on their inability to cope with the curriculum demands. Progressed learners have been classified, categorised and identified in a derogatory manner making their school experiences filled with shame and despair.

The main focus of this chapter was to analyse and synthesise the data which were presented in the findings chapter in relation to the theoretical framework adopted in this study and answer the research questions. The implementation of the grade progression policy in schools, which is inclusive in nature, has contributed vastly to the shaping of learners' social identities by creating a new identity known as progressed learners. As progressed learners were subjected to various forms of humiliation at the hands of their educators and peers a distinguished identity was created and it appears that such humiliation made them felt unwelcome at school. The

voices of the participating progressed learners revealed that various factors contributed towards the shaping of their identities and this includes violent behaviour such as bullying, substance abuse, verbal abuse, vandalism and a host of other antisocial behaviour. Ultimately, the participating progressed learners viewed their schools as insecure places which contributed towards the suffocating of their dreams and reducing their positive school experiences. Nevertheless, the voices of the participating progressed learners exposed that it is crucial to note that progressed learners not only possess a single negative identity as perceived by their educators and peers but multiple identities. It emanated from the voices of the progressed learners that they were able and capable of engaging in positive activities in and out of the classroom environment. This is also evident from the literature where it is suggested that progressed learners were able to achieve their National Senior Certificates in some instances (see 2.2.3). As a researcher, I was concerned particularly about the long-term effects on learners who are victims of marginalisation and exclusion. Their self-esteem drops, their school performance is affected, some drop out of school and for many, their social and personal development is also affected. The research findings of this study indicated that progressed learners, as a minority group in schools, are crudely and cruelly identified by both their educators and peers leading to disgruntled and low self-esteemed youths. The findings showed that their school experiences and voices are not given priority. Instead, these learners have become victims of the same education system that should be protecting their academic interests. Furthermore, it emanated from the findings of this study that the South African education system as a whole seems to be in dire need of transformation in order to achieve an inclusive education system.

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter restates the research question and the objectives of the study. The findings of the study are presented according to the research questions. I compared the themes in Chapter Four against the background of the literature review in Chapter Two to arrive at a number of conclusions to determine the contribution the study has made to the existing body of knowledge in this field. Based on the findings, recommendations for the implementation of both the progression and inclusive education policy are made. The chapter concludes by listing the limitations of the study and areas for further research.

6.2 Restating the Research Aim of the Study

6.2.1 Research questions

The primary aim of the study was to answer the two research questions which are as follows:

3. How are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression?
4. To what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education?

Therefore, the overall objectives of the study were to:

- Offer learners in mainstream secondary schools settings a voice regarding being progressed, as well as to share their personal experiences on the implementation and practise of the progression policy which has led to the creation of the "progressed learner" identity.
- Offer insights which may be of value to stakeholders in education such as the Department of Basic Education, educational professionals, policy makers, educators and parents on how learners feel when progressed to the next grade without meeting pass requirements.

6.3 Summary of the Study

The study was aimed at exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools. Progression, which is also known as social promotion, is rooted in the practice of promoting a learner to the next grade irrespective of meeting pass requirements of that particular school year. In the South African context, the progression policy was viewed by the Department of Basic Education as a remedy towards combatting the drop out of learners from the schooling system. The Department of Basic Education introduced this policy partially to prevent learners from being retained in a phase for more than two years, and also to prevent learners from dropping out of the schooling system. This was a way of including and keeping all learners in schools. Progression was introduced as an alternative to grade retention which refers to the practice of keeping learners in schools in their present grade after having failed to meet pass requirements and not having mastered the skills necessary to progress to the next grade. It appeared that learners who have been retained felt demotivated by learning the same content of the previous year and that on its own exacerbated the situation. My conviction is that the progression policy is inclusive in nature as it strives to keep all learners in schools irrespective of learning barriers they might be experiencing.

The justification behind the discussion of inclusive education in this study is embedded in the notion that the progression policy is inclusive in nature. As indicated by scholars such as Walton (2018), Mitchell (2015), and Price (2018), inclusive education means educating learners with special educational needs together with learners who do not experience any learning difficulties in mainstream or regular education settings. Inclusive education discourages marginalisation, segregation and exclusion of learners based on any given factor; rather, it promotes integration which is a process of placing learners with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as they are able to adjust to the standardised requirements of such institutions. It is from this background that my argument on inclusive education constantly referred to the grade progression policy. Inclusive education policies and legislation in the South African context are well-versed to the broader international educational interventions including EFA, MDGs, SDGs and the Salamanca Declaration. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 as amended (RSA, 1996a) is key to inclusive education since it is consistent with the principles of inclusive education which includes human dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights (RSA 1996a, section 1(a)), freedom from discrimination (RSA 1996a, section 9(4)) and the fundamental right to basic education

(RSA 1996a, section 29(1)). In an attempt to realize and achieving the principles of inclusive education through the implementation of the progression policy, a new social identity has been created by institutions of learning known as progressed learners in the South African context.

As an educator in a mainstream secondary school, the identities of progressed learners who have not met pass requirements was of particular interest to me mainly because I thought as progressed they would have had a chance to still pass and being a progreesed learner was a positive experience. I found however they were subjected to marginalisation and exclusion from both educators and fellow learners. I used Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory to explore the experiences of progressed learners which emphasises that part of a person's concept of self comes from the groups to which that person belongs. An individual does not just have a single personal selfhood, but multiple selves and identities associated with their affiliated groups. A person might act differently in varying social contexts according to the groups they belong to, which might include a sports team they follow, their family, their country of nationality and the neighbourhood they live in. Furthermore, I made use of Stuart Hall's perspective on multiple identities in which he suggests that people are not confined to a homogeneous identity but have multiple identities. Progressed learners, as they are identified in schools using policies and legislation, are viewed as having low capabilities with a homogeneous identity. I further discussed Erikson's eight stages of identity development. The fifth stage which is identity vs. role confusion (adolescence and emerging adulthood) was of prime importance to me because this study focused on the exploration of progressed learners' identities in mainstream secondary schools who happened to be in the same age cohort.

6.4 Discussion of Findings

This qualitative study was conducted at four South African secondary mainstream schools around Kwa-Thema in the East Rand Area of Gauteng where the progression policy is implemented. The first research question was: How are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression? It appeared that the experiences and voices of progressed learners are not considered in schools. The findings of this study indicated that the voices of learners experiencing learning barriers such as progressed learners are seldom put into considerations. Progressed learners stated that when they are at school, they live in their isolated spaces because no one cares about their well-being. The findings of this study exposed that progressed learners are not only rejected by their educators but even their peers. Progressed learners, as they are popularly known are only viewed as progressed learners by

their educators. Due to educators' little knowledge on the implementation of the progression policy as indicated earlier, the findings of the study revealed that progressed learners are only identified as progressed learners, yet scholars such as Hall (1989) make it clear that people are not confined to a single identity. Progressed learners, as they are labelled in schools, beyond schooling spaces have multiple and inconsistent identities which include being teenagers, male or female, gay or lesbian, African, Christian and many more. Learners shape their identities from what they learn both at home and in schools. Schools in particular play a major role towards the development of learners' identities. In addition, educators used various derogatory and dehumanising utterances when addressing progressed learners which made them feel less human and unwelcome in their schooling spaces. It is important for educators to acknowledge the identities that learners bring into the classroom because people possess more than a single identity. The study revealed that the progression policy has brought self-hate, self-pity, and low self-esteem to progressed learners as they are made by their educators to conform to the needs of the education system. It was concluded by the majority of the educators who participated in the study that educating learners with barriers to learning, such as progressed learners, is challenging because it requires additional time.

It appeared from the findings that most educators and principals who participated in this study have little knowledge on the implementation of the progression policy. Instead of viewing the progression policy as a positive academic intervention aimed at helping struggling learners, both educators and principals declared the progression policy a challenge, mainly because they find it difficult to deal with learners faced with learning barriers such as progressed learners. For these educators and principals, the progression policy poses a threat in their day-to-day teaching and learning activities as they feel less confident and professionally unprepared to deal with progressed learners. In essence, I concluded that educators' unpreparedness makes it difficult to implement the progression policy effectively in schools and this leads to progressed learners being labelled, marginalised and excluded from the schooling system. Both educators and principals viewed the progression policy as an extra burden and one that poses as a barrier to learning as they have to deal with learners who have been "pushed" from one grade to the next without meeting the required pass requirements. It is from this understanding that I concluded that a new identity has been created as a result of the progression policy known as progressed learners.

I then concluded that the participating educators failed to understand that the progression policy is inclusive in nature as it allows learners who have failed to meet the stipulated pass requirements of a certain grade to proceed with their peers to the next grade. I realised that it was difficult for the participating educators to understand the motive behind the introduction of the progression policy mainly because of their limited knowledge of inclusive education practices in their different schools. The second research question was: To what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education? Since inclusive education is an educational approach aimed at educating all children regardless of diverse abilities and learning difficulties in the same space using the same available resources, the progression policy, therefore, furthers the aims of inclusive education to a large extent. The study has found that educators and principals have little understanding of what inclusive education is and what it is not. I then concluded that the participating educators and principals have little knowledge about the implementation of inclusive education policies in their institutions, hence, it is difficult for them to understand the progression policy which is inclusive in nature. Educators demonstrated negative attitudes towards inclusive education. I concluded, therefore, that the negativity displayed by the educators emanate from their limited training, limited expertise and lack of sufficient resources which as a result, affect academic endeavours of progressed learners as they are exposed to derogatory labeling by their educators. The negative attitudes demonstrated by educators are evident in their unwillingness and unpreparedness to work with progressed learners which results in progressed learners being marginalised and excluded from the schooling system.

The findings of the study further revealed that progressed learners are not only marginalised by their educators but even by their counterparts - non-progressed learners. Progressed learners are made to feel inferior by non-progressed learners due to their inability to cope with academic activities such as reading and writing legibly, resisting doing worksheets and homework. As a result, progressed learners feel frustrated and bored when at school as non-progressed learners dominate discussions and refuse to listen to progressed learners' contributions. The findings of the study further revealed that non-progressed learners mock progressed learners in various aspects and that damages their self-esteem and their self-worth. Ultimately, progressed learners cry easily, prefer to work alone, and will not readily participate orally which makes progressed learners appear immature in their social development. As a result, progressed learners subject themselves to absenteeism, truancy and undesired behaviour such as disrespecting their educators. The findings further indicated that the provocation mounted by non-progressed

learners results in them losing or failing to develop self-esteem, experiencing feelings of isolation, and ultimately becoming withdrawn and depressed.

The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools is associated with many challenges. Educators and principals felt that they have to spend more time in dealing with progressed learners and receive no support from the Department of Basic Education to ensure that inclusion is appropriately implemented. The participating principals and educators lamented that it is hard to feel like a professional when you do not feel competent, when you get no training or support, when you teach learners with severe academic and emotional needs and when you have no idea how to address these needs. The Department of Basic Education must ensure the availability of educator professional development which focuses on helping educators employ quality instructional practices, formative assessment, feedback, clarity in explanations that have shown direct measurable impacts on learner cognitive development. Educator support is not huge, but rather a multilayered collection of different types of assistance that help educators successfully transfer learning from a professional development setting to a classroom setting. It can include administrative, instructional, resources, peer support, supervisory support and instructional support from a more knowledgeable other. It is important, therefore, that all educators, irrespective of their length of service and career stage are not only given the opportunities to engage in professional development activities, but also act on them and develop change in their practice. The findings exposed that the District personnel do not afford themselves enough time to support schools, instead they present themselves as nitpickers.

It appeared that educators only rely on their SBST which possess limited knowledge regarding inclusive education. In essence, the participating educators confused inclusive education with special education. Special education is the practice of educating learners in a way that addresses their individual differences and special needs, whereas inclusive education means educating learners with special educational needs together with learners who do not experience any learning difficulties in mainstream or regular education settings. Nonetheless, the findings indicated that educators felt that progressed learners should only be taught in their designated spaces.

6.5 Implications of the Study (Policy and Practice)

The findings in this study implied that educators are not knowledgeable about educational policies implemented in their schools. Such policies include the progression and inclusive education policies and as a result, this affects their practices. This inadequacy has further led to educators developing negative attitudes towards their practices. In most cases, policies normally stem from the mission and vision of an organization, which are usually formed in strategic management meetings at the top level of the organization. The findings revealed that educators are bitter about the top-down approach used by the Department of Basic Education when introducing policies. Educators felt that the Department of Basic Education seldom includes them as practitioners when designing, introducing, and implementing policies in their schools. By and large, the findings of this study revealed that the nearby district offices hardly offer any form of support, instead, educators are only expected to meet deadlines by completing the curriculum. Issues affecting teaching and learning are constantly overlooked.

Policies in schools are important because they address pertinent issues such as what constitutes acceptable behaviour by educators. The findings revealed that educators lack knowledge of the policies mainly because the Department of Basic Education does not offer them any support through workshops aimed at empowering them about the execution of such policies. For instance, the *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (DoE, 2001) was introduced almost two decades ago, being the cornerstone of inclusive education in the South African context. Walton and Lloyd (2011) suggest that the White Paper 6 aims at giving out a national strategy towards achieving an inclusive education system that will address and accommodate learners who experience various barriers to learning such as progressed learners. Nevertheless, to date, it appears that the majority of educators are still unfamiliar with the White Paper 6. This is an indication that the Department of Basic Education simply launched the document without frequent monitoring of whether educators were adhering to the content of the document or not. Policies are aimed at ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, giving guidance for decision-making, and streamlining internal processes. From the findings of the study it was evident that both the progression and inclusive education policies have been imperfectly and irrationally implemented, hence, learners experiencing learning barriers are constant victims of educational discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion within the education system.

6.6 Significance of the Progression Policy and Practice Implications

The rationale behind the policy on progression is that it is intended to minimise both the high dropout rate and school retention. As I have mentioned in my argument that the policy affords academically struggling learners a privilege of moving along with their peers even if the learners have not satisfied academic requirements or met performance standards at key grades. I have also maintained that the policy on progression is line with inclusive education which is a new approach towards educating learners with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones in the same classroom environment. It brings all learners together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential. Nevertheless, opponents of the progression policy suggest that the progression of unprepared learners does little to increase their achievement or life chances. At the same time, research also shows that the practice of having learners repeat a grade (grade retention) often has negative educational consequences, such as increasing their chances of dropping out of school. When progressed learners are advanced to the next grade without meeting pass requirements, educators are forced to work tirelessly in order to meet the demands of the curriculum so that those learners are not completely lost. Schools have been requested to provide such learners with additional support to address their specific subject deficiencies so that they will be able to cope with the demands of the next grade. Educators are also inclined to spend more time helping lower performing learners which leaves higher performing learners with much less individual instruction time. It is crucial to note that the progression policy could only be beneficial to the progressed learners if they were provided with favourable learning environments, as that could enable such learners to succeed in the subjects that they had failed. Without appropriate support, learners may reach the last grade of schooling without basic necessary skills and a proper mind-set to function in society such as organization, maturity, and accountability. In addition, it should be recognized that policy itself is not enough, attitudes need to be changed among educators and learners, infrastructure, and change in pedagogy also needs to be considered. Policy, therefore, is not enough other interventions need to be considered.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

The qualitative study was conducted at four South African secondary mainstream schools around Kwa-Thema in the East Rand Area of Gauteng where the progression policy is implemented and it remains uncertain if the findings could be transferred to other schools

within the same province or in other provinces. The schools in South Africa have similar but not identical settings, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings. The study was further limited because the progression policy is not implemented in all schools across the country. Lack of previous research studies on the topic appeared to be a limitation as I constantly had to refer to international standards. Since the study was conducted at four institutions, the findings may not be applicable to other institutions, regions, provinces, or countries. As part of data generation tools, research diaries were offered to participating progressed learners; nevertheless, only four out of 16 returned their diaries and this was a limitation in the sense that I could not get recorded experiences of all the participating learners. The study was further limited because it focused only on 16 learners which is a small population - a bigger number would have probably yielded different results. Additionally, the study only focused on four principals from four different schools; this limited the study because I only received four different views and other principals might have had different views from those who participated. The focus group interviews were comprised of only five Grade 10 educators from each school and this was a limitation in the sense that other educators teaching other grades were not included who might have had different views pertaining to the phenomenon of interest. Last but not least, initially, I had pre-conceived biases and other personal issues about the progression policy; however, the findings of the study offered me a different perspective on the phenomenon of interest. For instance, prior to the exploration I was under the impression that the progression policy brought happiness to learners as they would be 'pushed' to the next grade irrespective of meeting pass requirements. I have always thought that the progression policy allowed learners to feel good about themselves because they see themselves as being competitive with their peers. It is unfortunate that the study revealed that many of the progressed learners who participated in the study suffered from psychosocial problems that educators could not deal with and as a result were used against the learners to label them as failures. Furthermore, the findings of the exploration exposed that progressed learners were subjected to shame, humiliation, marginalization and exclusion from the schooling environment by both their educators and peers which resulted to dented self-esteems.

6.8 Recommendations for Further Research

Since the research was limited to four mainstream secondary schools around Kwa-Thema in the East Rand Area of Gauteng, it remains uncertain if the findings could be transferred to other schools within the same province or in other provinces. The schools in South Africa have

similar but not identical settings, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings. I recommend that for future research in this topic and or other relevant topics, the sample should be much bigger, and the duration of the exploration be extended. I recommend that future research on the effectiveness of grade progression must be based on high-quality studies using methodically strong research designs. The effectiveness of grade progression needs to be studied long-term, using large, representative samples of learners from all types of schools throughout the country. This could be achieved through tracking learners from lower grades until they leave school.

I recommend that future research be conducted on appropriate academic interventions that would benefit progressed learners. It appears that the current SSIP intervention is only aimed at assisting Grade 12 learners and the other grades are ignored. Progressed learners need to be provided with adequate support and intensive interventions that involve more individualised services tailored to the unique needs of the individual learner.

It is further recommended that future research be conducted on the experiences of progressed learners after finishing school. As indicated in Chapter Two, some progressed learners were able to achieve their National Senior Certificates obtaining a bachelor's degree pass (a minimum requirement for university entry for an undergraduate degree) and some not. It would be interesting to know the fates of those who did not make it to tertiary institutions. Likewise, it would be interesting as well to know how those who were able to further their studies in tertiary institutions coped with the academic demands of such institutions.

I further recommend that the Department of Education provides efficient training both to school-based and district-based educators pertaining the implementation of both the progression and inclusive education policies. The existing non-liaising between SBSTs and DBSTs is mainly because educators are not well trained both at school level and at district level. They tend not to understand their responsibilities as stipulated in policies such as the White Paper 6 which calls upon for the collaboration mainly between schools and school districts.

I further recommend that the Department of Basic Education offer relevant in-service workshops to school based educators that would enable them to acquire pedagogical content knowledge which would assist in handling not only progressed learners but all learners experiencing learning barriers in mainstream secondary schools. It appears that educators do

not understand the learning styles of their learners such as progressed learners. This is crucial because not all learners will experience the same challenges in class.

6.9 Conclusion of the Study

The study has revealed how the experiences and voices of learners experiencing learning barriers, in this case, progressed learners, are overlooked by school-based education practitioners in mainstream secondary schools. The implementation of the progression policy is aimed at attaining some of inclusive education principles such as having and keeping all learners in mainstream schools. The progression policy allows learners to move to the next grade with their peers even though they have failed to meet the pass requirements of that particular grade. In that way, the progression policy's primary objective is to curb the dropout rate and grade retention which is said to have negative repercussions. Nevertheless, the implementation of the progression policy has created a new learner identity in the South African classrooms known as progressed learners. The study has revealed that progressed learners, as they are popularly known, have become victims of the policy as they are constantly marginalized and labeled by both their educators and peers.

It also revealed that inclusive education, which is rooted on the notion that every child is teachable in mainstream schools, has not yet been attained in South African classrooms. Educators, who are key towards the implementation of inclusive education indicated less interest in educating learners experiencing learning barriers such as progressed learners, mainly because of inadequate training in the subject. It emanated from the findings of the study that educators could not manage the pressure associated with assisting progressed learners in their classes. As a result, educators resorted to exclusion, marginalization, labelling and stigmatization of progressed learners. The study further exposed that progressed learners were not only victimized by their educators, but even non-progressed learners took advantage of them and this was evident in their reluctance in socializing with them.

It emanated from the findings that the implementation of the progression policy has contributed to the development of progressed learners' social identities. Social identity, as discussed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), refers to a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Social groups such as social classes, families, and football teams which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. The study revealed that progressed learners are classified and categorised as having a homogenous identity. According to SIT

people are not confined to a single identity but have multiple identities. Likewise, Hall (1989) concludes that people have more than one identity. The study revealed that progressed learners were not only confined by being progressed learners, but they had other identities outside the school premises. Furthermore, Erikson's psychosocial development theory also suggests that people possesses different identities from birth until adulthood. Erikson's five stages which includes identity vs. role confusion (adolescence and emerging adulthood) states that during this stage, adolescents explore their independence and develop a sense of self and personal identity through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals. Yet in policy and practice progressed learners were only viewed as progressed by educators, principals and other learners, and the many dimensions of their identities were not recognized.

The fundamental aim of this study was to explore the experiences of progressed learners in the South African context which makes it essential to know and understand who progressed learners are and how they are identified with regard to educational policies and legislations. Progressed learners, as they are popularly known, are learners who have failed to meet pass requirements in schools and they have been progressed to the next grade. Due to their inability to cope with the demands of the curriculum, they have been subjected to marginalization, exclusion and humiliation by the schooling system. Consequently, as an educator who teaches in a mainstream secondary school I realized that their 'voices' were suppressed. It is from this background that I decided to venture into this exploration in which listening to the voices of progressed learners became essential. My aim was to unveil their experiences in schools as progressed learners particularly on how they were identified by both their educators and other learners. It emerged from the findings that progressed learners were exposed to marginalization and exclusion. I actually hope that progressed learners' voices could be heard and considered in future as this might help in reconstructing their dented self-esteems. It appears that a lot of learners experiencing learning barriers are left out instead of being supported, loved and encouraged so that they could unleash their potentials positively. Such positive reinforcement would instill a strong sense of self-esteem, self-wroth and self-confidence even if they are faced with challenges.

This concluding chapter restated the research question and the objectives of the study. The findings of the study were presented according to the research questions. I compared the themes in Chapter Four against the background of the literature review in Chapter Two to arrive at a number of conclusions to determine the contribution the study has made to the existing body

of knowledge in this field. Based on the findings, recommendations for the implementation of both the progression and inclusive education policy are made. The chapter concluded by listing the limitations of the study and areas for further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Permission to Conduct Research to the Principal

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

[Date to be filled in]

The Principal

(Schools name)

Re: Permission to Conduct Research at Your School

My name is Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, and I am a PhD student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my degree I am conducting research within the field of inclusive education with a focus on unearthing how are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression and to discover to what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education. The title of my research is: **Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.**

I am requesting your permission to carry out my doctoral study at your school. This study is a qualitative study and data will be collected in a variety of ways: surveying the four grade 10 learners using a printed questionnaire, giving four grade 10 learners research diaries which they will use for a period of three months, conducting semi-structured interviews with the same four grade 10 learners, conducting a focus group interview session with 5 educators who teach grade 10 that indicate their willingness to participate, and an individual semi-structured interview with you (principal). The data collection process will take place during the school term that is most convenient for you, however I would like to suggest either the second or third term, giving me time to analyse and code the data thereafter. I do not intend interrupting any contact time neither will I interfere with the day to day running of the school.

If you agree to allow your school to participate in my study, participation would be as follows. Participation would consist of inviting grade 10 learners to respond to a questionnaire, I shall also give selected four grade 10 learners research diaries which they shall use for three months and finally, the four grade 10 learners shall be invited to participate in an individual semi structured interview. I shall invite five grade 10 educators to participate in a focus group interview. Lastly, I shall invite you (principal) to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Given that the learners are minors I would have to gain parental consent as well as assent from the learners themselves in order to participate in the study. For the focus group interviews with

the educators, I shall take handwritten notes as well as use an audio-recording device to record and later transcribe the interviews. All expenses incurred would be covered by myself. The data will be documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings be used for academic purposes including books, journals and or conference presentations and therefore your schools name will never be divulged, and all participant details will be strictly confidential. Please be assured that all participant's names and identities will not be mentioned at any point within the research report or any other academic publications or presentations. To ensure this confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used. All school participants may also refuse to participate; refuse to answer any questions in the interviews conducted; and may also choose to withdraw their consent at any time during the research study without any negative consequences.

Your school's involvement in this study is of vital importance but is **completely voluntary** and refusal for your school to be involved or choosing to discontinue involvement during the study will not be held against your school in any way. I would however require your assistance in indicating to me which are the grade 10 learners to hand out the questionnaires. It would be greatly appreciated if you could assist in facilitating the process of privately contacting and meeting teachers individually to ensure that they are willing to participate in this project from the onset. Participants in this study include the learners from grade 10, their educators, and yourself (principal).

All research data will be kept securely in a locked cabinet and will be completely destroyed within 5 years after completion of the project. A summary of the research report and findings will be made available electronically upon finalization should you wish to receive one.

I look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me on the following contact numbers:

(011) 737 4543 or 076 936 5707, or via

sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

alternatively, you may contact my supervisor:

Supervisor

Prof. Nazir Carrim on (011) 717 3025 or via

nazir.carrim@wits.ac.za

Principal: Acknowledgement of information sheet and proposed research study, "*Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study"*

It would be greatly appreciated if you could please acknowledge permission granted and receipt of the information sheet requesting permission to conduct research in your school.

You will be acknowledging that:

 Involvement is completely voluntary and selected participants may choose not to participate or to withdraw their consent at any given time without any negative consequences.

 You have read and understand the information sheet and acknowledge its contents.

 The school's name and participant's information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity.

 Learners' and their parents' / guardian / caregivers' consent will be obtained before data collection begins.

 The data collection process will not interfere with the day to day running of the school, nor will it interfere with the learners' schoolwork.

 It is envisaged that the research findings will be used for academic purposes including books, journals and or conference proceedings.

I, _____ (*Principal's full name*) acknowledge the information stated above and grant permission for Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini to conduct research within _____ (*school's name)* in 2018.

Please provide details should you wish to receive an electronic summary of the research findings.

E-mail address: _____

Principal's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2: Information sheet for Parents – Learner Questionnaire, Research diary and a Semi-structured interview

Invitation for your child to participate in a Survey (questionnaire), Research diary, a Semi-structured interview and participant information letter

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

[Date to be filled in]

Dear [Parent / Guardian / Caregiver]

My name is Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, and I am a PhD student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my degree I am conducting research within the field of inclusive education with a focus on unearthing how are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression and to discover to what extent does the Policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education. The title of my research is: **Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.**

I am hereby inviting your child to participate in my study. You are receiving this letter as your learner is in grade 10 and I am inviting grade 10 learners at your child's school to participate in my study. Given that your child is under the age of 18, parental consent is also required. This will include a survey by questionnaire, a research diary that your child shall have for three months and a semi-structured interview that will take 30 minutes. I am requesting your permission to allow your child to participate in the research study. **Participation is completely voluntary** and there are no negative consequences should you or your child choose not to participate. Participation will involve your child answering questions in the questionnaire and should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. There is an option provided for your child to participate further in the second phase of the research, which will require your child to record experiences in a research diary for three months. Furthermore, your child will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview which will take not more than 30 minutes should your child wish to do so.

In agreeing to your child's participation, please be advised that you will not incur any expenses and your son/daughter will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way, nor will he/she be given any money for participating. Your child's marks will not be affected in any way. He/she will be reassured that he/she may choose not to participate or choose to withdraw his/her permission at any time during the research study without any penalty of any kind.

The data will be documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings be used for academic purposes including books, journals and or conference presentations and therefore it is of utmost importance that your child's details as well as the schools details be kept confidential. In no way will your child's name and identity be mentioned at any point within the study or research report. His / her individual privacy will be maintained at all times. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used to ensure that no-one would be able to recognise your child in any publication or presentation arising from the research. A summary of the findings will also be made available should you be interested.

I guarantee that all research data will be kept securely in a locked cabinet at the Wits School of Education and will be destroyed within 3 – 5 years after completion of the project. Please complete and sign the attached consent forms and return it to me via your child's class teacher no later than (date).

Thank you very much for your help. Your contribution to this study is highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me on the following contact numbers:

(011) 737 4543 or 076 936 5707, or via

sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Alternatively you may contact my supervisor:

Supervisor

Prof. Nazir Carrim on (011) 717 3025 or via

nazir.carrim@wits.ac.za

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS ALLOWING THEIR MINOR CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Research Project: Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.

Informed Consent Form: Learner Questionnaire, Research diary and a Semi-structured interview

I, _____ (parent's full name) parent of _____ (learner participant's full name) [PLEASE PRINT]

☐ ☐

am willing / am not willing

to allow my learner to participate in the research project by completing a 15-minute questionnaire.

Please also indicate the following by ticking your response:

- I have read and understand the "Invitation for my child to participate in a research survey (questionnaire), research diary, a semi-structured interview and participant information letter": Yes / No
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes / No
- I understand that this research project is not in any way connected to my child's academic marks and/or progress: Yes / No
- I understand that by providing full consent on this form I am accepting my child's invitation to participate in the survey (questionnaire), research diary and a semi-structured interview: Yes / No
- I understand that my child may withdraw his/her participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes / No
- I understand that my child has the right to decline to answer any of the questions contained in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview: Yes / No

- I understand that my child's participation in the questionnaire (phase 1) does not oblige him/her to participate in the interview (phase 2): Yes / No

- I understand that I will indicate my child's willingness to participate in the interview (phase 2) in a response on the questionnaire: Yes / No

- I understand that when my learner indicates on the questionnaire their willingness to participate in the semi-structured interview (phase 2), he/she will provide their personal contact details: Yes / No

- I understand that when my child indicates on the questionnaire their willingness to participate in the semi-structured interview (phase 2) they are making themselves available to be selected for a semi-structured interview: Yes / No

- I know that the researcher and supervisor will keep my information confidential and safe and that my child's name and the name of my child's institution will not be revealed: Yes / No

- I understand that the questionnaire responses, research diary and semi-structured interview will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books: Yes / No

- I understand that my child's responses will be used anonymously and confidentially at all times and he/she will not be identified in any research publications: Yes / No

- I understand that the data will be kept securely in a locked office and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes / No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you ticked all the 'Yes' responses, you will be contacted to schedule a semi-structured interview. For clarification of any of the statements above, please contact me on 076 936 5707 or via sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Information sheet for Learners: Learner Questionnaire, Research diary and a Semi-structured interview

Invitation for learner to participate in a Survey (questionnaire), Research diary, a Semi-structured interview and participant information letter

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

[Date to be filled in]

Dear Learner

My name is Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, and I am a PhD student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my degree I am conducting research within the field of inclusive education with a focus on unearthing how are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression and to discover to what extent does the Policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education. The title of my research is: **Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.**

I am hereby inviting you to participate in my study. You are receiving this letter as you are a grade 10 learner and I have chosen to carry out a qualitative study at your school with four grade 10 progressed learners including yourself. Given that you are under the age of 18 and you are considered a minor, parental consent is also required. This study will use a questionnaire, research diary and a semi-structured interview and you are thus invited to partake in the research study. **Participation is completely voluntary** and there are no negative consequences should you choose not to participate. Participation will require you to respond a questionnaire, and should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete, you shall also be given a research diary where you will be expected to record all incidents related to the study for three months. There is an option provided for you to participate further in the second phase of the research, which will be an individual semi-structured interview should you wish to do so.

In agreeing to your participation, please be advised that you will not incur any expenses and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way, nor will you be given any money for participating. This study will not affect your marks in any way. You can be reassured that you may choose not to participate, or you may choose to withdraw your permission at any time during the research study without any penalty of any kind.

The data will be documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings be used for academic purposes including books, journals and or conference presentations and

therefore it is of utmost importance that your details as well as the schools details be kept confidential. In no way will your name and identity be mentioned at any point within the study or research report. Your individual privacy will be maintained at all times. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used to ensure that no-one would be able to recognise you in any publication or presentation arising from the research. A summary of the findings will also be made available should you be interested.

I guarantee that all research data will be kept securely in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed within 3 – 5 years after completion of the project. Please complete and sign the attached consent forms and return it to me via your class teacher no later than (date).

Thank you very much for your help. Your contribution to this study is highly valuable.

Yours sincerely,

Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me on the following contact numbers

(011) 737 4543 or 076 936 5707, or via

sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor:

Supervisor

Prof. Nazir Carrim on (011) 717 3025 or via

nazir.carrim@wits.ac.za

CONSENT FORM FOR LEARNERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Research Project: Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.

Informed Consent Form: Learner Questionnaire, Research diary and a Semi-structured interview

I, -

_____

_

(Learner participant's full name) [PLEASE PRINT]

☐ ☐

am willing / am not willing

to participate in the research project by completing a 20-minute questionnaire.

Please also indicate the following by ticking on your response:

- I have read and understand the "Invitation to participate in research questionnaire, research diary, a semi-structured interview and participant information letter": Yes / No
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes / No
- I understand that this research project is not in any way connected to my academic marks and/or progress: Yes / No
- I understand that by providing assent on this form I am accepting the invitation to participate in the questionnaire, research diary and a semi-structured interview: Yes / No
- I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes / No
- I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions contained in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview: Yes / No

- I understand that my participation in the questionnaire (phase 1) does not oblige me to participate in the interview (phase 2): Yes / No
- I understand that I will indicate my willingness to participate in the interview (phase 2) in a response on the questionnaire: Yes / No
- I understand that when I indicate on the questionnaire my willingness to participate in the interview (phase 2) I will provide my personal contact details: Yes / No
- I understand that when I indicate on the questionnaire my willingness to participate in the interview (phase 2) I am making myself available to be selected for an interview: Yes / No
- I know that the researcher will keep my information confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my institution will not be revealed: Yes / No
- I understand that the data will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books: Yes / No
- I understand that my responses will be used anonymously and confidentially at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications: Yes / No
- I understand that the questionnaire, research diary and the semi-structured interview data will be kept securely in a locked office and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes / No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For clarification of any of the statements above, please contact me on 076 936 5707 or via sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Appendix 4: Information sheet for Educators: Focus Group Interview

Invitation to participate in teacher focus group interview and participant information letter

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

[Date to be filled in]

Dear teacher (NAME)

My name is Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, and I am a PhD student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my degree I am conducting research within the field of inclusive education with a focus on unearthing how are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression and to discover to what extent does the Policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education. The title of my research is: **Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.**

Your school has been purposefully selected for the abovementioned study. This study is a qualitative study and data will be collected in a variety of ways: surveying grade 10 learners using a printed questionnaire, giving four grade 10 learners research diaries which they will use for a period of three months, conducting semi-structured interviews with the same four grade 10 learners, conducting a focus group interview session with 5 educators (yourself) who teach grade 10 that indicate their willingness to participate, and an individual semi-structured interview with the principal of your school. Your school's involvement in this study is of vital importance but is completely voluntary and refusal for your school to be involved or choosing to discontinue involvement during the study will not be held against your school in any way.

Since you are a grade 10 teacher, I am inviting you to participate in a focus group interview with up to 4 colleagues. The maximum number of participants in any focus group interview will be 5. Participation in the focus group interview will mean that I will ask ten open-ended questions to you and your colleagues and each of you will provide your responses, taking turns to speak. During focus group interview, and with your permission, I shall take handwritten notes as well as use an audio-recording device to record and later transcribe the interviews. All expenses incurred will be covered by myself. Should you wish to participate in this focus group interview, a time and place that is convenient to yourself and your colleagues will be arranged. **Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary**. If you choose to participate there will be no reward or payment, however, you would be asked to indicate your understanding of the processes and conditions of participation, and your consent to participate in the interview.

If you choose not to participate there will be no penalty and you will not be prejudiced in any way. If you agree to be a part of this focus group interview, then you would be given pseudonyms (a made-up name so you cannot be identified). Neither your name nor that of the institution will be revealed at any time or in any of the research documentation. Confidentiality will be maintained, and you can be assured that the privacy of participants will be protected. Given that this is a focus group, it is important to note that despite my best attempts, I am unable to ensure complete anonymity as there are multiple members in an interview.

The data will be documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings be used for academic purposes including books, journals and or conference presentations and therefore your school's name will never be divulged, and all participant details will be strictly confidential. Each focus group participant will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement that they will not reveal any information arising from the focus group interview, thus allowing your responses to be private. All participants may also refuse to participate; refuse to answer any questions in the interviews conducted; and may also choose to withdraw their consent at any time during the research study without any negative consequences. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study and no form of remuneration will be offered to participants. All research data will be kept securely in a locked at the Wits School of Education and will be completely destroyed within 5 years after completion of the project.

A summary of the research report and findings will be made available electronically upon finalization should you wish to receive one.

Thank you very much for your help. Your contribution to this study is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me on the following contact numbers:

(011) 737 4543 or 076 936 5707, or via

sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor:

Supervisor

Prof. Nazir Carrim on (011) 717 3025 or via

nazir.carrim@wits.ac.za

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Research Project: Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.

Informed Consent Form: TEACHER FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

I _____

(participant's full name) [PLEASE PRINT]

☐ **am willing / am not willing** ☐

to participate in the research project by being interviewed for this study in a 45-minute focus group interview at a time and place convenient to me.

Permission to be audiotaped (please tick your response):

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview: Yes / No

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only: Yes / No

I know that I can ask not to be audiotaped: Yes / No

Please also indicate the following by ticking your response:

- I have read and understand the "Invitation to participate in research interview and participant information letter": Yes / No
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes / No
- I understand that this research project is not in any way connected to my performance as a teacher and/or progress and promotion at this school: Yes / No
- I understand that by providing full consent on this form I am accepting the invitation to participate in the focus group interview and will be contacted by the researcher to arrange a suitable time and place for the interview: Yes / No
- I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes / No
- I understand that I can stop the interview at any time with no negative consequences to me: Yes / No

- I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions during the interview and that there would be no negative consequences to me: Yes / No

- I know that the researcher will keep my information confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my institution will not be revealed: Yes / No

- I understand that the responses I give during the interview will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books: Yes / No

- I understand that my responses will be used anonymously and confidentially at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications or presentations: Yes / No

- I understand that the focus group interview data, audiotapes and transcripts will be kept securely at the Wits School of Education and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes / No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you ticked all the 'Yes' responses, you will be contacted to schedule the focus group interview.

For clarification of any of the statements above, please contact me on 076 936 5707 or via sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

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CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TEACHER FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

A focus group interview consists of the researcher asking a question, and then allowing each participant in the group, in turn, to respond. All interviews will be audio-recorded. Some respondents may say things you may/may not agree with, and others might agree with you. However, no matter how each person responds, each is entitled to privacy. Therefore, by signing this agreement, you are agreeing not to repeat any information shared at the focus group interview with anyone else once the interview is complete.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Principals as Participants– Semi-Structured Interview

Invitation for principal to participate in research interview and participant information letter

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

[Date to be filled in]

Dear (NAME)

My name is Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, and I am a PhD student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my degree I am conducting research within the field of inclusive education with a focus on unearthing how are the learners' social identities shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression and to discover to what extent does the Policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education. The title of my research is: **Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.**

Your school has been purposefully selected for the abovementioned study. This study is a qualitative study and data will be collected in a variety of ways: surveying the grade 10 learners using a printed questionnaire, giving four grade 10 learners research diaries which they will use for a period of three months, conducting semi-structured interviews with the same four grade 10 learners, conducting a focus group interview session with 5 educators who teach grade 10 that indicate their willingness to participate, and an individual semi-structured interview with the principal (yourself) should you wish to do so. Your school's involvement in this study is of vital importance but is completely voluntary and refusal for your school to be involved or choosing to discontinue involvement during the study will not be held against your school in any way.

Since you are the head of the school, and you are directly involved in decision-making processes at the school, I am inviting you to participate in an individual interview. The purpose of this interview is to gain your perspective on how learners' social identities are shaped by their experiences of the practice of grade progression and to discover to what extent does the policy and practice of progression further the aims of inclusive education. Participation in the interview will mean that I will ask 10 open-ended questions to you. During the interview, I shall take handwritten notes as well as use an audio-recording device to record and later transcribe the interviews. All expenses incurred will be covered by myself. Should you wish to participate in this interview, a time and place that is convenient to yourself will be arranged.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate there will be no reward or payment, however, you would be asked to indicate your understanding of the processes and conditions of participation, and your consent to participate in the interview. If you choose not to participate there will be no penalty and you will not be prejudiced in any way. If you agree to be a part of this phase of the research, please note that participants would be given pseudonyms (a made-up name so you cannot be identified). Neither your name nor that of the institution will be revealed at any time or in any of the research documentation. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained, and you can be assured that the privacy of all participants will be protected at all times.

The data will be documented in a research report and it is envisaged that the research findings be used for academic purposes including books, journals and or conference presentations and therefore your schools name will never be divulged, and all participant details will be strictly confidential and anonymous. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study and no form of remuneration will be offered to participants.

All research data will be kept securely at the Wits School of Education and will be completely destroyed within 5 years after completion of the project. A summary of the research report and findings will be made available electronically upon finalization should you wish to receive one.

I look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

Should you require further information throughout the course of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me on the following contact numbers:

(011) 737 4543 or 076 936 5707, or via

sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor:

Supervisor

Prof. Nazir Carrim on (011) 717 3025 or via

Nazir.Carrim@wits.ac.za

CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPAL AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW (semi-structured)

Research Project: Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study.

Informed Consent Form: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

I _____
(participant's full name) [PLEASE PRINT]

☐ ☐

am willing / am not willing

to participate in the research project by being interviewed for this study in a 45-minute individual interview at a time and place convenient to me.

Permission to be audiotaped (please click on your response):

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview: Yes / No

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only: Yes / No

I know that I can ask not to be audiotaped: Yes / No

Please also indicate the following by clicking on your response:

- I have read and understand the "Invitation to participate in research interview and participant information letter": Yes / No
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes / No
- I understand that this research project is not in any way connected to my performance as a principal and/or progress and promotion at this school: Yes / No
- I understand that by providing full consent on this form I am accepting the invitation to participate in the interview and will be contacted by the researcher to arrange a suitable time and place for the interview: Yes / No

- I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes / No
- I understand that I can stop the interview at any time with no negative consequences to me: Yes / No
- I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions during the interview and that there would be no negative consequences to me: Yes / No
- I know that the researcher will keep my information confidential and anonymous, and that my name and the name of my institution will not be revealed: Yes / No
- I understand that the responses I give during the interview will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books: Yes / No
- I understand that my responses will be used anonymously and confidentially at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications: Yes / No
- I understand that the questionnaire data, audiotapes and transcripts will be kept securely at the Wits School of Education and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes / No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you ticked all the 'Yes' responses, you will be contacted to schedule the individual interview

For clarification of any of the statements above, please contact me on 076 936 5707 or via sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com

Supervisors

Prof. Nazir Carrim on (011) 717 3025 or via

Nazir.Carrim@wits.ac.za

Appendix 6: Learners' Questionnaire

(will be refined closer to the study commencement)

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

Participant will be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions, I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

Participants will be assured that their names as well as their schools' identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms which will ensure confidentiality.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS

In this questionnaire, you will find questions about yourself, your school and your educators. Some questions ask for facts while other questions ask for your opinions. The questionnaire is divided into four sections: Section A; requires personal details, Section B; requires your personal opinions and you can give as much information as you can, Section C; requires you to circle the best answer from the four options, Section D; requires a Yes or No response.

Read each question carefully and answer as accurately as possible. You may ask for help if you do not understand something or are not sure how to respond.

Section A

Date of birth (Day)…… (Month)…… (Year)……

Gender Male / Female

Home language ……

Name of School …….

Current Grade ……..

Subjects ……

Section B

The schoolwork we do helps me to learn.

…….

The schoolwork we do is interesting.

……..

What I learn in this class is useful to me in real life.

……..

I get bored in this class.

……..

In this class we learn almost every day.

……..

My teacher makes sure we think hard about the things we read and write.

……..

When the work is too hard, my teacher helps me keep trying.

……..

In this class, it is more important to understand the lesson than to memorize the answers.

……..

My teacher uses a lot of different ways to explain things.

……..

My teacher tells us what we are learning and why.

……..

Learners feel comfortable sharing their ideas in this class

……..

Section C

My teacher accepts nothing less than our full effort.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher knows when I work hard and am doing my best.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

We learn to correct our mistakes.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher wants us to improve our thinking skills.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher wants me to explain my thinking.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

We learn a lot almost every day.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher tells us what we are learning and why.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher helps us set goals for our learning and keep track of our progress.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher makes schoolwork interesting.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

We get choices in how to complete activities.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher makes me work hard so I learn what I need to know.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

My teacher assigns homework that helps me learn.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

When my teacher marks my work, he/she writes on my papers to help me understand.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

The comments that I get on my work help me understand how to do my work better.

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always

Section D

1. Have you repeated a class since you started school?

Yes / No

2. Do you consider yourself intelligent academically?

Yes / No

3. Do you feel that you and your peers are given equal opportunities?

Yes / No

4. Do you understand what it means to be a progressed learner?

Yes / No

5. Have you been progressed before the grade you are in currently?

Yes / No

6. Are you aware of the reasons of being progressed from the previous grade to the current grade?

Yes / No

7. Does your progression from the previous grade to the current grade affect the way you perceive yourself?

Yes / No

8. Have you lost friends because of being a progressed learner?

Yes / No

9. Have you been neglected by your family because of being a progressed learner?

Yes / No

10. Have you been treated unfairly at school because of being a progressed learner?

Yes / No

11. Have you been marginalized by your educators because of being a progressed learner?

Yes / No

12. Have you gotten into fights with other schoolmates because of being a progressed learner?

Yes / No

13. Have you engaged in illegal academic activities (such as copying during an assessment) in order to obtain good marks?

Yes / No

14. Do you perceive yourself a failure in life because of being a progressed learner?

Yes / No

Appendix 7: Learners' Semi-Structured interview questions

(will be refined closer to the study commencement)

Process for individual semi-structured interview:

1. Remind the participant of interview protocols:

Participant will be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions, I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

Participants will be assured that their names as well as their schools' identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms which will ensure confidentiality.

Participants will be offered a light refreshment before the interview to help them feel at ease around the interview.

2. Start with the interview process and questions:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

i. How would you describe your school experience?
Prompt
Are there aspects of school that you enjoy?
Are there aspects of school that you do not enjoy?
What is your general mood at school?

ii. What is your understanding of the difference between the practice of progression and the promotion of learners in mainstream secondary schools?

iii. Have you always been in a mainstream secondary school?
Prompt
Have you ever met the pass requirements of any grade in this school?
Have you been progressed from one grade to the next since you joined this school?
Can you describe the experience on not being able to meet pass requirements in a grade?

iv. Are you aware of the reasons of being progressed from the previous grade to the current grade?

v. Does your progression from the previous grade to the current grade affect the way you perceive yourself?

Prompt

Would you see yourself differently if you were not progressed?

How do you think others perceive you because of being a progressed learner?

Do you think progression contributes to the way others perceive you?

vi. How progression does affect your academic achievement?

Prompt

Are there any benefits or shortcomings that progression have on your academic endeavors?

vii. How progression does affects social aspects of a teenager's life?

Prompt

Does progression affect the kind of friends you have?

Does bullying and discrimination (if any) paly a factor because of your progression? If yes, why?

Since you are a progressed learner, has that limited your socialisation with other learners or it has created a lot of friendship for you?

Is it easy to make friends outside of your progression and why?

viii. How does progression affect the way you feel?

Prompt

Does progression have a direct correlation with how you feel every day and why?

Does progression paly a factor in your emotional state and how?

ix. If you had to imagine that you could choose being a progressed learner or not, tell me a bit about what would you choose and why?

x. In general, and to wrap this interview up, how does your progression affect you as a person?

Prompt

Does progression change your outlook on life and how?

Do you think you would be a different kind of person if you were not a progressed learner and why?

3. Learners will be shown their responses of the questionnaires and asked if there is anything that they would like to change, edit or discard from their responses. A final date when their interview transcripts can be seen will be arranged.
4. The participants will be thanked for their participation throughout the research.

Appendix 8: Educators' Focus Group Interview Schedule

(will be refined closer to the study commencement)

Process for focus group interview:
Remind the participants of interview protocols:

Participants will be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions, I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort. Participants will be assured that their names as well as their schools' identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms which will ensure confidentiality.Participants will be offered a light refreshment before the interview to help them feel at ease around the interview.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Many countries around the world are pursuing a model of inclusive education. What is your understanding of the concept of inclusive education?

2. How knowledgeable do you think you are in relation to successfully including learners who experience difficulties with learning and behaviour?

3. How confident do you think you are in relation to successfully including learners who experience difficulties with learning and behaviour?

4. How important is it to you that your school implement the policy on progression of learners to the next grade without meeting pass requirements? (Explain first what the term "progression" encompasses)

5. How are learners progressed at your school? Can you please give me examples of some of the criteria that is used?

6. What challenges (if any) do you encounter when teaching progressed learners?

7. Describe any unique behavior demonstrated by progressed learners in your school.

8. Do you consider the progression policy to be inclusive or exclusive?

9. Are progressed learners treated differently from the other learners?

10. Is there anything about progression of learners that you feel is very important, that I have not asked you about?

Thank you for your time and your valuable input towards this study.

Appendix 9: Semi-structured Interview Schedule (Principal)

(will be refined closer to the study commencement)

Process for focus group interview:

Remind the participants of interview protocols:
Participants will be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions, I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

Participants will be assured that their names as well as their schools' identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms which will ensure confidentiality.

Participants will be offered a light refreshment before the interview to help them feel at ease around the interview.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Many countries around the world are pursuing a model of inclusive education. What is your understanding of the concept of inclusive education?
2. How knowledgeable do you think you are in relation to successfully including learners who experience difficulties with learning and behaviour?
3. How confident do you think you are in relation to successfully including learners who experience difficulties with learning and behaviour?
4. How important is it to you that your school implement the policy on progression of learners to the next grade without meeting pass requirements? (Explain first what the term "progression" encompasses)
5. Describe any unique behavior demonstrated by progressed learners in your school.
6. Do you consider the progression policy to be inclusive or exclusive?
7. Describe the treatment that you give progressed learners. Is it different from the rest of the learners?
8. What would you recommend, grade retention or progression? Please give reasons.

Thank you for your time and your valuable input towards this study.

Appendix 10: Ethics Clearance

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Tel: +27 11 717-3064 Fax: +27 11 717-3100 E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za Website: www.wits.ac.za

07 May 2018

Student Number: 1716859

Protocol Number: 2018ECE007D

Dear Siboniso Dlamini

Application for Ethics Clearance: Doctor of Philosophy

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

Exploring the identities of progressed learners in four township schools: A phenomenological study

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that clearance was granted. However, there were a few small issues which the committee would appreciate you attending to before embarking on your research.

The following comments were made:

- Generally - your information letters are very detailed and may lose the reader I suggest that you read through again and see if you can tighten certain paragraphs.
- Section 5.1 where participants are grade 10 learners I believe the level of risk is medium not high; Section 6.1 with respect to learners confidentiality this section sounds more like anonymity - be aware there is a distinction.
- Ensure GDE form is signed before it is sent.

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Appendix 11: GDE Research Approval Letter

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	08 June 2018
Validity of Research Approval:	05 February 2018 – 28 September 2018 2018/103
Name of Researcher:	Dlamini SP
Address of Researcher:	13 Van Vollenhoven Street
	Sheerwood Gardens
	Brakpan North, 1540
Telephone Number:	076 936 5707
Email address:	sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Exploring the identity of progressed in five township schools: A phenomenological study
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	Four Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Gauteng East

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

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

11/06/2018

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
4. *A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
5. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
6. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
7. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
8. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
12. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

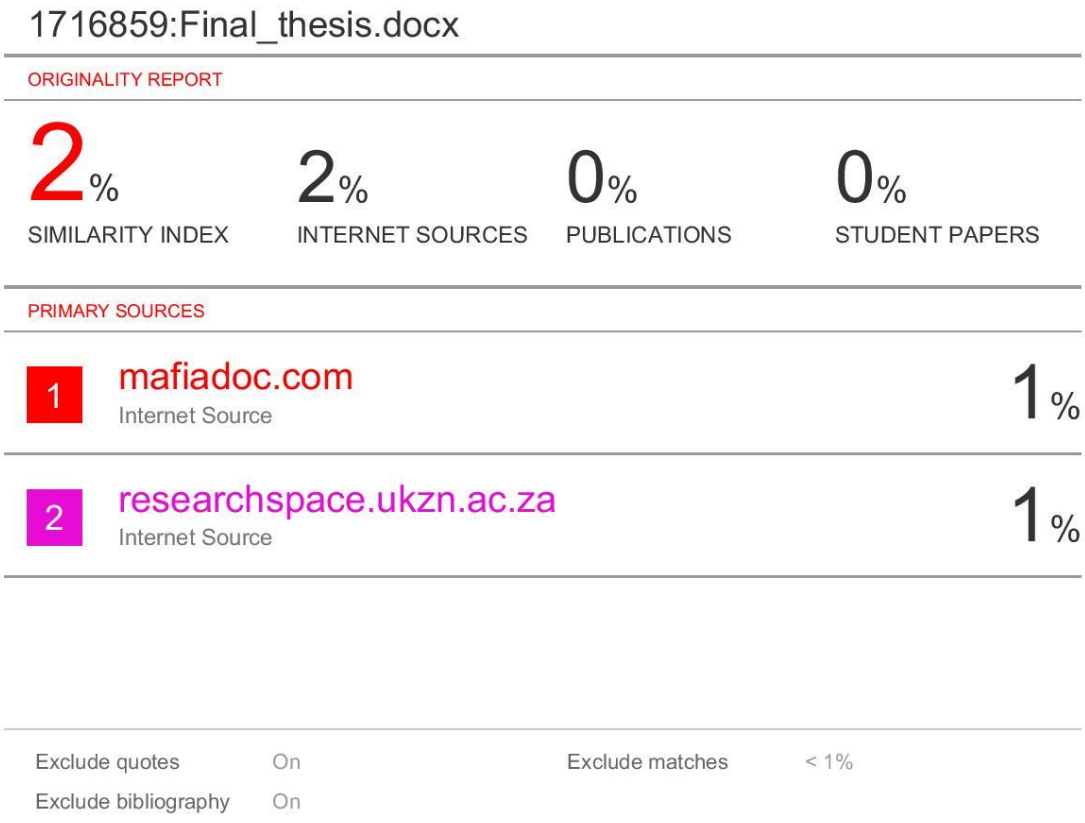
Kind regards

.....

Mr Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 11/06/2018

Appendix 12: Turnitin Report



1716859:Final_thesis.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

2%	2%	0%	0%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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