

Studying the Defects of the Progression Policy and Multiple-Examination Opportunity Policy in Selected High Schools in Paulpietersburg

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Review Article

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the critical examination of two interconnected public policies implemented by the South African Department of Education: The progression policy and the Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO) policy, primarily targeting the Further Education and Training (FET) phase in high schools. Focused on selected high schools in the underdeveloped town of Paulpietersburg, located in Northern KwaZulu Natal, this study addresses the significant flaws within these policies and the community's perceptions of their impact. The progression policy, initially intended to reduce dropout rates and minimize the duration spent in the FET phase, appears to have unintended consequences. Learners, perceiving guaranteed progression regardless of academic performance, exhibit decreased motivation and diligence in their studies.

Similarly, the MEO policy, introduced to assist academically challenged learners, faces criticism for causing delays in completing matric, overloading teachers, and creating demotivated learners. This qualitative research engages stakeholders through interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis to explore perspectives on these policies. The findings highlight widespread dissatisfaction among teachers, parents, and learners, suggesting a pressing need for policy reform to address the shortcomings and promote a more effective educational system in South Africa.

Keywords: FET; MEO; Education; Stakeholders; Community

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INTRODUCTION

According to Cloete and de Coning, public policy is a statement of intent, including sometimes a more detailed program of action, to give effect to selected normative and empirical goals in order to improve or resolve perceived problem and needs in society in a specific way, thereby achieving desired changes in that society ^[1]. This is supported by Howlett and Ramesh who conceptualise the complex nature of public policy as a goal-orientated activity to improve future conditions ^[2]. Cloete and de Coning, further adds that Public policy is considered strong when it solves problems efficiently and effectively, serves justice, supports governmental institutions and policies, and encourages active citizenship ^[3].

This article studies the defects and community perceptions on two inter-related public policies that were introduced by the Department of Education in South Africa ^[4]. The study was based on the progression policy and the multiple-examination opportunity policy, applied in the FET phase in high schools ^[5]. Specifically, the research focused on selected high schools in the under developed town of Paulpietersburg which is situated in the Northern KwaZulu Natal ^[6].

These policies may seem to have the best interest of the learners at heart by seeking to promote academic excellence but they have some major defects which negatively impacts the parties involved ^[7]. The achievement of poor matric results by progressed learners is what motivated the study ^[8]. The researcher wants to identify these defects as well as the perceptions of the parties involved and come up with viable solutions which can minimize policy defects and make these policies more effective ^[9].

Background of the study

In 2005, the South African government, through the Department of Education, introduced the policy on progression applicable in the General Education and Training (GET) band ^[10]. This policy was later applied to the Further Education and Training (FET) band in 2012. In terms of the regulations pertaining to the national curriculum statement grades R-12, promulgated on 28 December 2012, a learner may only be retained once in the further education and training phase ^[11]. This was government's plan to ensure that a learner does not spend more than four years in a phase ^[12]. The basis for this policy was policy to uphold the best interest of the learner and minimise the high drop-out rate in the FET phase so that in the end a learner leaves school with a national senior certificate qualification ^[13].

The policy implies that a learner who fails a grade for the second time, cannot be retained in the grade, but, must be allowed to progress to the next grade ^[14]. However, such a learner at the end of grade 12, must satisfy all the requirements of the NSC, in order to be awarded the matric certificate. 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 ^[15]. For those who struggle, based on their performance throughout the year, the policy on Multiple Examination Opportunity (MEO), can be applied ^[16]. The MEO policy was approved at a meeting of the council of Education Ministers (CEM) held on the 6th of March 2017 ^[17]. This policy allows learners, to take their final examination in two parts ^[18]. The learner writes a minimum of three subjects (excluding LO) in the November examination sitting and the remaining subjects in the following year's June examination ^[19].

The Department of Education, state that, in order to be considered for the MEO, a person must be a progressed learner who have completed all his/her SBA requirements in all seven subjects ^[20]. Furthermore, the learner must have good school attendance which means that a learner who have been absent from school for more than 20 days with no valid reason cannot be considered ^[21]. The final criteria relating to the application of the MEO is that a learner must have written all preparatory examinations and have failed a minimum of three subjects. The decision relating to the MEO will be taken by the school authority (the principal) after considering the above mentioned factors and the learner's performance on the preparatory examinations, which are usually written in September.

The national policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements for the national curriculum statement stipulated in the government gazette states that it is necessary for schools to hold a special meeting of relevant subject's staff members to evaluate each learner that has not met their promotion requirements more than once in grade ten or eleven in order to decide whether the learner should be retained or progressed. Schools have to take into considerations various factors such as informing the parents or legal guardians about the learners' poor performance, learners response to the curriculum intervention and additional support strategies provided by the school, general behaviour and attitude of the learner towards their school work and psychosocial support. Each learners case must be evaluated holistically with supporting evidence collected by the school subject teachers throughout the year. This enables the principal to advise the parents on the retention or progression of the learner concerned. If the learner is progressed to the next grade it must reflect on their report card. The conditions for progressing the learner must be fully discussed and agreed upon by the school, the parents and the learner

(targeted participants of the study). The policy requires both the school and parents to provide necessary support to the progressed learner in order for them to pass their matric.

Problem statement

The main issue with the progression and multiple examination opportunity policy is that learners within the FET phase no longer study as hard as they should or expected to. Learners no longer put enough effort on their school work, they trust that the school will just automatically progress them to the following grade even if they don't meet the promotion requirements. Another issue at hand is that most of the learners who are admitted to these particular programmes often achieve poor matric results which makes them fail to meet the minimum requirements for university admissions. These learners end up going into TVET colleges to study for shorter courses which they never had the desire to pursue in the first place. Some of them end up staying at home after matric due to poor matric results obtained, which increases the national percentage of unemployed youth which, according to Statistics South Africa 2019, is currently sitting at 27.1%. Chisholm and Wildeman, established that progressed learners are likely to fail their matric final examinations and this lowers the pass rates of the school and may also have a negative impact on the national percentage like the Minister of Education suggested back in 2015 during her speech while announcing the 2014 matric results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The progression policy in South Africa

According to Munje and Maarman, the progression policy in lower quintile schools is plagued with a sequence of challenges and repercussions for the learner's success because of the lack of a clear framework and implementation plan. While the plan lays out general guidelines for the advancement or progression of learners based on their ages and the number of times they have repeated the grade, the help required to assist them in meeting the demands of the new classes and how and when this support should be given and by who is still uncertain. This is supported by Spaul who complained about the support structures required by progressed learners. The policy, according to Munje and Maarman does not also demonstrate how the implementing chain functions with respect to the accountability of individual schools, the monitoring and analysis of the rule features. The authors further added that together with the large classes, a number of students needed support forced some teachers to abandon the idea of individually supporting students, whatever their urgency or depth of need.

Spaul was concerned about the policy's inability to cater for learners' wellbeing and abilities. Spaul also raised some other concerns regarding the policy, specifically the chances of success and the support during the teaching and learning process. The backing that progressed learners receive from their schools is inadequate and the support systems and resources in place to simplify the coping process for learners are not satisfactory.

Munje and Maarman explained that the progression policy is causing a huge burden to the slow and struggling learners especially by moving them to new grades, where major challenges are waiting for them. Statistics obtained from one of the schools they observed during their study showed that learners who were promoted without meeting requirements struggled. Grades in the quarter term indicated that many of these learners accomplished the 1–3 codes, code 1 is not achieved, code 2 is primary quality and code 3 is intermediate performance. All three groups characterize less than 50 percent of achievements, which proves how bad the policy is.

In the same study, conducted by Munje and Maarman the learners in the schools surveyed struggled because they were not given the special support they needed with regard to knowledge and academic requirements in the previous grades as required by the DBE. This was worsened by the fact that teachers struggled with the dilemma of assisting needy learners with content knowledge of previous grades, while risking neglecting to complete the syllabus of the current grade, in the end, disadvantaging all learners in their classroom including those that were promoted genuinely.

Spaul further added that the progression policy is not suitable for lower quintile schools and most of these schools are still faced with immense development challenges. Lower quintile schools are situated in rural or semi-rural areas where most learners come from communities that are still faced with poverty and other social difficulties. Such schools can't even afford to provide learners with adequate support resources such as computers or the internet or even extra classes for underperforming learners.

Spaul states that the progression policy is an ideology of promotion without understanding. The policy allows learners to move to the next grade even if they have no understanding of the work of the previous grade. Spaul believes that if a learner is progressed to the next grade without actually meeting the promotion requirements, there is a high chance that the learner might become worse due to the lack of understanding of the basics from the previous grade.

According to Munje and Maarman teachers declared that Students who were promoted with justified judgment frequently suffered, not because they deserved it, but because they were deprived of the opportunities in new grades to acquire appropriate content.

Students achieved excellent results in class test and exams when teachers set question papers that asked questions on the basis of the restricted curriculum, but they struggled competitively on the examinations which followed and covered the full official curriculum. Such learners were stuck in a sequence of underperformance, and often remained at the same level.

The mercy and leniency provided by the progression policy encouraged inactive and demotivated attitudes on learners because now they know that they are going to be pushed to the next grade regardless of their academic performance. Learners now know that progression is certain based on reasons other than regular school attendance or satisfactory results. Shepard and Smith also emphasized that learners who moved on to the next grade (progressed) perform more poorly if they had gone on without repeating.

According to the Inclusive education SA the implementation of progression policy and the MEO policy has formed major problems for both schools and parents. Parents and teachers view these policies as a problematic, whereas the real issue lies with the fact that progressed learners do not receive enough support. The Inclusive Education SA also added that these two policies are not being understood by both parents and there isn't enough support provided by the department of education for progressed learners.

“Support less progression has permanent and lifelong impacts on learners and the South African economy. More than 66% of students leave before graduation. Many of these students had academic difficulties at school and progressed during their school career without support” Inclusive Education SA.

The inclusive education SA, believes that there is merit in a learner who will not benefit from repeating a year moving forward with his peers, what is critical is that he/she moves to the next grade with support. The reality for many learners is that they are functioning below grade level and may have a level of learning potential lower than that of their peers. This is especially true of learners experiencing cognitive barriers to learning. Whilst some learners benefit from another year in the grade to catch up to their peers, some do not.

In a study conducted by Kader in 2012, it appeared that teachers often position these progressed learners in a bad way which seems to lead to marking and labelling of these learners as one teacher noted:

"You sit there doing nothing, you know that you don't deserve being in grade 11. Remember you can only be 'put over' once in a phase and you had your chance. This is laziness and unacceptable."

Learners who have been positioned in certain or negative ways often act out or show a disaffection for classroom activities.

Pupils who do not receive encouraging or encouraging feedback from their teachers certainly lose the reason to do well and thus suffer from their academic potential which might lead them to drop out. This can also lead to isolation, or detachment from the educational familiarity.

The employment of the progression policy in the FET phase at South African schools led to a significant drop in the South African matric pass rate in 2015. The class of 2015 had the highest number of progressed learners since the policy was formulated. In the class of 2015, only 37.6% Out of the 65 671 progressed learners passed their matric.

The national senior certificate examination report highlighted that since the execution of the progression policy in the FET phase in 2013, the national pass rate dropped from 78.8% in 2013 to 70.7% in 2015 (Table 1).

Table 1. National pass rate from 2009 to 2015.

	Number wrote NSC	Number passed NSC	Pass rate
2009	552073	334718	60.6%
2010	537543	364513	67.8%
2011	496090	348117	70.2%
2012	511152	377829	73.9%
2013	562112	439779	78.2%
2014	532860	403874	75.8%
2015	644536	455825	70.7%

Figure 1, adapted from the NSC examination report shows pass rates since 2009 by province. The figure shows that the KwaZulu natal province, (specifically because the Paulpietersburg area is located in this province) had a significant drop in their matric pass rate from 77.4% in 2013 to 60.7% in 2015. The decreasing trend in the KZN's pass rate started to appear in 2013, the same year the progression policy was implemented in the FET phase.

Figure 1. Matric pass rate by province from 2009 to 2015

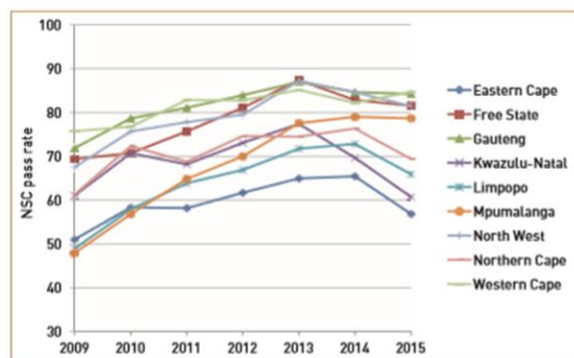


Table 2 shows the decrease in the percentage of South African learners who obtained bachelor passes, which is the minimum entry requirement for most Universities in South Africa.

Table 2. National Bachelor passes from 2013 till 2018.

Year	Total number wrote	Bachelor	
		Achieved	% Achieved
2013	562112	171755	30.5
2014	532860	150752	28.3
2015	644536	166263	25.7
2016	610178	162374	26.6
2017	534484	153610	28.7
2018	512735	172043	33.5

The defects of the progression policy in South Africa

The national senior of challenges which included the fact that the policy was interpreted differently certificate examination report highlighted that "the policy on progression presented a number across the system and hence there was variable implementation of the policy across schools and the dispensation relating to the multiple examination opportunity was looked at, by some school principals and teachers, as a mechanism to manipulate the pass rate of the school, given that the pass rate is determined based on learners that offer all subjects in the first examination sitting". The report further explained that progressed children are stigmatized and thus carry this label through their school years and most of the time teachers are unable to provide the progressed learners distinguished support that they require. This causes a lot of frustration for these learners and can lead them to dropping out of school.

According to the national senior certificate examination report, the implementation of the progression policy has negatively affected the national matric pass rate. The national pass rate increased from 60.6% to 78.2% between 2009 and 2013 and after implementing the progression policy in 2013, national pass percentage decreased from 78.2% to 70.7% between 2013 and 2015. On the other hand, the national senior certificate examination report (2018) stated that the matric pass rate of the KwaZulu Natal province decreased significantly, from 77.4% to 66.4% between 2013 and 2016.

In the context of the Free State Province, Scott, Dreyer, and Venter discovered that there is a huge difference between the

pass rate of promoted learners and the progress learners. For the class of 2014, the pass rate for promoted learners in Free State was 88.7% while the pass rate for progressed learners was sitting at only 49%. The pass percentage despair caused by the progressed learners was more noticeable in lower quintile schools. In quintile 1 and 2 schools in the Mofeng district in Free State, the pass percentage of the progressed learners was 31.4% matched to 73.4% in quintile 5 schools. The study further explained that the implementation of these policies is dropping the pass percentage schools within Free State province. In quintile 5 schools the decrease is only 0.9%, due to lesser quantity of progressed learners.

According to Clark and Linder, in lower quintile schools, teachers end up neglecting the junior grades while trying to support the senior grades with progressed learners. This has a negative impact on the learners in junior or lower grades. Munje and Maarman believe that these policies, especially the progression policy, only concentrates on progressing learners to the following grade while overlooking conditions they will be subjected to.

The department of basic education requires educators to provide additional support to students who have progressed or admitted to the MEO, but fail to address problems such as the coping process required by these pupils as well as the number of pupils who need help at a particular time in each grade. The department of basic education also fails to take into account the ability of teachers to provide the necessary assistance or support to progressed learners.

An article in Pretoria News is written by Bongani Nkosi and Thami Magubane in January 2019, it appeared that teacher unions want these policies to be scrapped. According to the article, teacher unions feel as if these policies are discouraging teachers and these policies aren't receiving enough support from the Education Department.

The article explained that trade unions questioned the intentions of the two policies which allow learners to progress to grade 12 if the majority of them are not going to be allowed to write all their exams. Out of 128,634 learners who failed Grade 11 in 2017 and were pushed (progressed) to matric last year, only 33,412 sat for all their subjects. Of these, only 2,676 obtained passes that allow them to enrol at traditional universities. 95,222 progressed to grade 12 learners did not sit for all their subjects (were admitted into the MEO program) and they were unaccounted for in the national 78.2% pass rate.

In the article written by Nkosi and Magubane the deputy president of the National Teachers Union (Natu), Allen Thompson, was quoted saying; "It's not acceptable that we have more than 120 000 learners are progressed and only 33,000 write the examinations. It means we're having overcrowded classes. But at the end of the day, people who we have been teaching the whole year do not sit for exams. That's a waste of time. You're attending classes for the whole year but then told not to write the full exam. What do you call that? It's a wasteful expenditure."

Thompson sees these policies as the government's means to protect the national pass rate. The deputy president of the National Teachers Union recommended that these policies should be scrapped or revised because they are demoralizing and overloading teachers while at the same time wasting time for learners.

Another critic came from the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). SADTU accused the department of education saying the department does not have designated programs devoted to assisting the progressed learners. SADTU added that progressed learners are treated the same as the ones who had passed on their own and in the end the department expects the teachers to perform miracles.

Professor Labby Ramrathan of the UKZN School of Education Studies commented on the article saying both policies had both negative and positive aspects. Professor Ramanathan alleged that the policies play an important role in solving the problem of overage learners but the policies also possess negative aspects as they create more pressure and work for teachers.

In October 2017, Mpumalanga News reported that grade 12 learners of Mjindini Secondary school in Mpumalanga boycotted classes for a whole week. The teaching and learning activities were disturbed as grade 12 learners were refusing to fill in forms to write subjects falling in the MEO. According to the article on Mpumalanga news, a small group of learners influenced other learners to cause destruction, disturbing classes simply because they were objecting to the MEO program. One of the defects of the MEO policy is that learners do not have an understanding of the policy and they end up rejecting it. If learners can go as far as throwing stones in classrooms and threaten to burn the school, become so wild to a point that police have to be called to the scene (some even throwing bottles and stones at police vehicles) shows how much the policy is rejected.

Another incident happened at Ndaliso senior secondary school in Eastern Cape where grade 12 learners burnt down the administration block and classrooms while protesting against the MEO. According to an article on TimesLive, 358 pupils were registered to write exams at the school and out of the 358, a total of 350 were scheduled to write their English exam on Tuesday, but none of them ended up writing it due to the violent protest. During the protest, the learners ended up assaulted the deputy principal of the school. A meeting was held between students and relevant stakeholders where

students requested that they all be allowed to write all seven subjects but all parties failed to reach consensus. Students were divided into two groups, some wanted to write and some didn't want to write their exams at all.

Teachers' perspective

Most educators are against the progression policy and the multiple examination opportunity policies, this is evident in the study by Kader where teachers indicated that issues such as age, commitment, and endurance have no importance because expectations of academic success are central to their minds.

Teachers, according to Kader say they have the skills and responsibility to lead students to achieve greater grades. Teachers aren't worried about learners' poverty or poor upbringings or experiences but they recognize these realities. Teachers believe that grade repetition is not harmful at all, it gives learners a second chance to learn and avoid certain mistakes. Progressing underserving learners is harmful because it doesn't teach them any sense of responsibility. Teachers, according to Kader believe that it is their sacred duty and responsibility to prepare learners for the future and teach the importance of working hard.

Teachers, according to Kader view themselves as schools' gatekeepers who are tasked with upholding school values. Teachers seemed to attribute learners' difficulties to home factors like parents' attitudes towards education or personal features such as being lazy, unmotivated, or disorganized. Most teachers do believe in retention as it encourages hard-working ethics among learners. High school dropout can be prevented if retained learners received the special intervention. One of the teachers was quoted saying; "this thing (progression policy) is not working for learners because they become very lazy. They know they can be progressed to the next grade if they don't pass. They know the policy and they have very relaxed attitudes. They no longer see the need to work hard".

A study conducted in 2015 by Scott, Dreyer, and Venter made it clear how teachers feel about the implementation of these policies. Teachers from selected schools in the Free State province elucidated that the progressed learners are slow and they are having a very difficult time coping with the workload of the following grade. Progressed learners, according to Scott, Dreyer, and Venter still struggle even if they are admitted into the MEO program. They added that a majority of these learners are unenthusiastic, disinterested, ill-equipped and lack discipline. They bunk classes, do not attend the extra classes provided and they do not do their class and homework.

Scott, Dreyer, and Venter highlighted that teachers from the province complained about the Shortage of resources such as desks, chairs, and textbooks due to enlarged class sizes. Scott, Dreyer, and Venter eluded on the issue of exhaustion among teachers. Teacher gets overworked when they have to provide extra classes in the afternoons and weekends. Scott, Dreyer, and Venter added that poor performance of the progressed learners causes a lot of discouragement among teachers and the pressure from the Department of Basic Education to get these learners to perform better makes it worse.

According to Scott, Dreyer, and Venter, there were reports in the Free State Province between 2014 and 2015 where some teachers resigned and other teachers threatening to resign while others were refusing to teach classes with progressed learners. Some teachers, according to Scott, Dreyer, and Venter believe that the reduction in pass percentage of the Free State province from 2013 to 2014 was caused by the existence of progressed learners.

In an article written by Lehlohonolo Mofokeng teachers in the Eastern Cape Province say a learner cannot do fine in a grade they don't deserve to be in. Teachers feel as if the policy of progressing students who have failed is not working for both teachers and learners and it should be scrapped. They believe that when a learner repeats a grade they end up getting more understanding of the curriculum, sometimes doing very well, and fairly moving to the next grade. The progression policy, according to Mofokeng is failing the learners, teachers and the education system as a whole.

Mofokeng states that when a learner progresses knowing very little about the current grade's curriculum, they cannot cope or succeed in the next grade. Some teachers feel as if the government is only using them as implementation tools because they never consulted, while contradicts with the principles of the public policy defined by Cloete that all relevant stakeholders should be consulted in the adoption or formulation of a policy before its implementation.

One of the teachers said; "I teach English in grade 10 and I can tell you now this thing of promoting undeserving learners is not working for the benefit of students. I have two extreme cases of learners who failed grade nine but were sent to grade 10. They failed last year because they cannot write. I had to start from basics and go back to as far as grade four: Spelling and grammar were poor. Our curriculum is results orientated—I have to work on finishing the syllabus in time. How do I do that when I have 76 learners in one class and half of them have been promoted from lower grades without passing? It is practically impossible".

From the literature it is crystal clear that these policies, the progression policy, and the MEO policy have more negative impacts than positive, even though most literature focused on the progression policy. The MEO policy was implemented few

years ago, which explains why there isn't much literature on this policy.

Research design and methodology

This article uses a qualitative research methodology. The qualitative aspect involves direct engagement with participants through interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, allowing for a deeper understanding of their perspectives. The research methodology encompasses data gathering and analysis strategies, with a method approach emphasizing descriptive qualitative methods for exploring teacher, parent, and student perspectives on high school progression and multiple examination policies in Paulpietersburg. The population includes high school teachers, parents, and learners from selected schools in the area, and the study's location is Paulpietersburg in KwaZulu Natal. Sampling procedures prioritize representativeness, employing purposive sampling to interview participants from three schools with varying academic performance records. Data collection relies on interviews with open-ended questions, conducted in collaboration with school authorities and community members over a 7-day period, ensuring confidentiality and participant comfort.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The progression policy

On December 28, 2012, the department of basic education introduced the progression policy in the further education and training phase, which was initially designed for the general education and training stream. This policy allowed learners to be retained only once in this phase, with the goal of reducing dropout rates and limiting the time spent in this educational phase to no more than four years, according to the department of education.

Despite several shortcomings in the policy, a few advantages have been identified by the research. Some participants acknowledged that the policy effectively reduced dropout rates and the time learners spent in the further education and training phase. A small percentage of parents (5%) and learners (10%) praised the policy for allowing older or mature learners to progress to the next grade with their peers, as being held back demotivated them and made them feel isolated among younger classmates. Additionally, the policy was commended for providing a second chance to hardworking learners who may struggle academically, granting them an opportunity to advance to the next grade and motivating them to work harder. However, the study revealed that the policy had very few advantages, highlighting its overall limitations. Similarly, the MEO policy also showed limited advantages, as identified by the study participants.

The defects of the progression policy: Implementation of the progression policy in schools has created major problems for both schools and parents. All school teachers who were interviewed and about ninety percent interviewed parents agreed that the policy is problematic on its own. Most of the progressed learners are incompetent and they always struggle to cope with the workload of the next grade and they do not perform better or pass in the following grade, especially in matric. In the lower grades, learners do not work as hard as they should because they trust that they will be progressed even if they fail.

As a result of the implementation of this policy, learners have become lazy and they no longer study. This study discovered that learners have become disruptive and uncontrollable, both at school and at home, they do not do their given home works, school projects and assignments trusting that the progression policy will promote them regardless of what happens. The progression policy does not provide learners with enough support to perform better in the next grade. The level of teaching and assessment at the higher grade always seem complex for such learners and that causes frustration for them. Progressing underserving learners has irreversible and enduring consequences. This statement is supported by Inclusive Education SA who stated that the implications of the progression policy for learners and the South African economy are severe and long-term. According to the Inclusive Education SA (2018) over 66% learners leave school without passing their grade 12. Some of these learners have suffered at school academically and have gone through their school years without support.

For many students, the fact is that they work below grade level and may have a lower learning ability than their peers and it refers in general to students facing learning obstacles. Most of these progressed learners do not pass their matric which causes financial problems for parents who then have to spend large amounts of money sending their kids to private finishing schools.

Parents' perception regarding the progression policy: This study discovered that parents feel as if there isn't enough support provided for progressed learners and their parents. Parents believe that the act of progressing underserving learners is killing the education system of this country. The progression policy seems to be undermining the purpose of teaching and

learning and assessment.

According to some parents, the policy is bad because it progresses academically undeserving learners who have very slim chances of passing their matric. Some learners struggle to cope with the pressure and the workload of the higher grade. This is supported by the literature discussed earlier in this article where Spaul argued that if a learner is progressed to the next grade without actually meeting the promotion requirements, there is a high chance that the learner might become worse due to the increased work load and the lack of understanding of the basics from the previous grade.

One parent raised an alarming concern about learners who struggle to cope at school. Learners who are struggling to cope might end up resorting to drugs and substance abuse or worse suicide. It is also hard for parents to accept the fact that a child has moved to the next grade because of the policy and not because they passed on their own. "The future of our children is doomed because of this policy. The future of our kids was never taken into account when this policy was formulated. This policy has a lot of problems and it should go", said one of the parents.

Parents believe that even if progressed learners do pass their grade twelve, they are bound to struggle after matric because there is no progression policy in institutions of higher learning (Universities and colleges).

Parents want the policy to be scrapped and they believe that learners should move to the next grade because they met all the promotion requirements not because they were pushed by an unfriendly government policy. Some parents trust that bringing back corporal punishment might be a viable solution to some of the problems that are in schools. They believe that corporal punishment will bring discipline to learners and with a little bit of discipline, learners will be more focused and can achieve better results and such policies won't be necessary.

Learners' perspective on the progression policy: The study discovered that learners are also dissatisfied with the policy and all that it entails. They feel like the policy is putting their future in jeopardy because of the reasons or factors mentioned earlier in this article. One learner said "This policy is killing the education system, learners no longer study because of this policy".

Learners from one of the schools complained about teachers who often discriminate progressed learners which is one of the things highlighted by Kader who pointed out that sometimes school teachers position these progressed learners in a negative way which appears to lead to marking and labelling. Learners want the policy to be discontinued.

Educators' subjective opinions and their perceptions in relation to the progression policy: Teachers feel like the policy's act of promoting unfit learners is not working at all. A grade twelve teacher from one of the targeted schools gave a scenario where a few learners who were progressed to grade twelve after repeating grade eleven two times. These learners struggled in grade twelve because they were not fit enough for grade twelve and as a result they did not pass grade twelve. Some of these learners struggle with basic things such as reading and writing. Their spelling and grammar is disappointing.

Grade twelve teachers are sometimes forced to pay extra attention to the learners who were progressed and also to teach the basics of grade ten and grade eleven to those progressed learners who have no understanding at all. When this happens, the learners who passed on merit end up suffering because the teachers now have to focus more on the slow, progressed learners.

Another teacher added that some learners end up having problems with self-esteem when they're in a class where they feel lost. "Some of these learners get agitated and become disruptive when they don't understand what I'm teaching. Some are very slow learners and teaching them is strenuous and frustrating", one of the teachers commented. Most teachers complained about the attitude of these learners and their lack of seriousness towards their studies, towards their futures. They added that some of the progressed learners do not even attend the extra classes, which were designed to help them. When the policy was introduced, the government or the department of education did not provide necessary or sufficient resources for the teachers to help progressed learners. This is supported by the literature discussed earlier in this article where Nkosi and Magubane criticised the department of education for not having designated programmes devoted to assist the progressed learners.

Teachers were expecting resources such as computers, tables, internet access at schools as well as sufficient textbooks but none of those things were received.

According to teachers, progression of learners leads to large classroom sizes with unmotivated learners which make teaching a difficult task. Teaching such large classrooms, with a high number of progressed learners, is exhausting and some teachers feel overworked. This is supported by the literature discussed earlier where Munje and Maarman stated that the progression policy is failing to consider teachers' ability to offer the required support, and also its actual impact on the teaching and learning process in terms of time needed to support needy learners in relation to the goals of fellow learners that progressed genuinely. Teachers are convinced that the policy undermined the purpose of assessment and they want the policy to be scrapped.

The multiple examination opportunity policy

On the 6th March 2017, the CEM approved the multiple examination opportunity policy. The policy was meant to help grade twelve learners who are struggling academically, especially progressed learners. The Multiple Examination Opportunity policy allowed those learners to write their final matric examinations in two parts. A minimum of three subjects (excluding LO) can be written in the November examination sitting and the remaining subjects shall be written in June the following year.

The policy, according to the school teachers who were interviewed, considers learners with good school attendance and complies with all the school based assessment requirements. Furthermore, the learner's performance on the preparatory examinations is taken into account when deciding if a learner should be admitted into the multiple examination opportunity policy or not. Some study participants believe that the policy is good at some point because it helps the underperforming learners by reducing the work load of studying for all seven examinations. Struggling learners can now cope and focus on only three subjects and worry about the rest the following year. Some grade twelve learners believe that the Multiple Examination Opportunity policy gives them a chance to even work harder.

Defects of the multiple examination opportunity policy: The policy delays learners. The policy deprives learners an opportunity to finish matric in time with their peers and possibly going to institutions of higher learning with their peers since they don't get their results in time. The policy is a sincere time waster and is overloading the teachers.

The policy demoralised teachers because they spend the entire year teaching learners who won't write all their exams at the end of the year of which is a statement supported by Thompson, cited in Nkosi and Magubane, who commented; "You're attending classes for the whole year but then told not to write the full exam. What do you call that? It's wasteful expenditure." According to teachers, there is a serious lack of organisation from the side of the department of education. In some cases, when it is time for multiple examination opportunity policy learners to write their remaining exams, some timetables don't even arrive at schools and the learners without timetables end up not writing their remaining exams.

Learners who fall under the multiple examination opportunity policy are not allowed to attend school the following year before their second phase of examination and there are no government programmes to assist multiple examination opportunity learners with exam preparations between January and June the following year. Even when learners write exams in two phases, half of their exams in November and the rest in June the following year, they still fail to meet the minimum university admission requirements. This makes the initial objective of the policy seem worthless.

Parents' perceptions regarding the multiple examination opportunity policy: The standard of education in South Africa is slowly decreasing because of this policy. "The kids are the future of this country. How are we going to compete with third world countries if our own government is destroying the future of our kids like this? How can we possibly move towards the 4th Industrial revolution when the government is doing this to us", one of the parents added.

Parents believe that lack of discipline is the root cause of the poor performance among learners in schools. "While we were still at school we were beaten hard and we listened to our teachers. We did our school work and we passed. There were no policies. If government can bring back corporal punishment all will be well," one of the parents added.

Parents also expressed that they do not know how to support their multiple examination opportunity policy children before their second phase of examination since multiple examination opportunity policy learners are not allowed to attend school the following year before their second phase of examination. Parents do not have the resources and the capabilities to help them. Some parents are illiterate and they cannot help their children with school work. They want teachers to work extra hard to help learners pass on their own so that they won't have to be subjected to such policies.

Learners' perspective on the multiple examination opportunity policy: Learners expressed how discouraging it is spending all year in school only to write half of your exams in the end. A grade twelve learner from one of the targeted schools added; "Watching your peers or former classmates go to universities and colleges in January while you know you still have to write three more exams in June seems like torture".

Educators' subjective opinions and their perceptions in relation to the multiple examination opportunity policy: All the teachers who were interviewed are dissatisfied with the policy. They believe that the policy is making things worse in schools. They expressed how unruly and disrespectful learners have become. Some Multiple Examination Opportunity policy learners do not attend lessons for the particular subjects that they're not going to write that year. Teachers explained to the researcher how demotivated learners become when they hear that they won't write all their exams in the same year and how the policy delays them instead of helping them.

According to teachers, most of the MEO learners do not even pass their matric. A similar statement from the literature was made by Scott, Dreyer and Venter who stated that progressed learners are slow and they struggle to cope with the workload

of the following grade. Even when they are admitted into the multiple examination opportunity they still fail. Teachers raised concerns about such learners not receiving support from their parents and the government before their second phase of examination. One of the teachers complained about how there is no government support for Multiple Examination Opportunity learners. “We are all told about the policy and what it entails but we don’t not get additional support. Learners end up giving up when they see that there is no support for them. The policy isn’t ideal for South Africa’s future”, one of the teachers commented.

CONCLUSION

This study was successful as it met all its initial objectives. The data that was collected qualitatively shed light to some of the things that were mention in the problem statement. This study made it clear that both policies, the progression policy and the multiple examination opportunity policy, have a lot of defects. The study identified multiple defects such as the lack of government support as well as the lack of necessary or sufficient resources in schools. Teachers feel demoralized while learners on the other hand get demotivated. The study suggests that the policies to be scrapped. The MEO policy has been scrapped by the department of education. Most actions can be expected from the government who should invest in special education and technology. The government should also improve rural based schools and equip them with the latest technology, which is more fitting since the country is moving towards the 4th Industrial revolution. This way the future of South Africa’s education system can be saved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The both policies need to be completely scrapped. In lower grades, learners must have a good foundation or understanding and if a learner lacks this base, he or she won’t definitely catch up in the higher grade and they should remain in that lower grade until the entire content is understood. The following recommendations could be useful.

- Government should establish private special schools, which will be free of charge, with special educators who are going to help slow learners or learners with learning disorders. These schools should have special teachers who are highly trained to assist learners. These teachers should provide extra help and work individually or in small groups with these learners to provide the necessary support they need in order to pass.
- Another initiative could be an establishment of skills development centres which will provide technical and physical skills to young individuals who are struggling academically.
- Rural based schools should have trained professionals, present at school, who can provide counselling services (psychological help) to learners who might be having difficulties at home or at school.
- The government should work extra hard to improve rural based schools and equip them with the latest technology. Government schools, especially the ones situated in rural areas, need to invest in e-learning which can provide learners with information literacy skills, digital literacy, printed media, audio-visuals and e-books.
- Parents also expressed their feelings towards the policy. They felt that the policy shouldn’t have come alone. Parents wished that the department of basic education, before implementing this policy, was supposed to provide well-resourced and functional school libraries with sufficient library material (computers, tablets, books and educational DVDs) to support progressed learners, especially in rural schools like the ones based in Paulpietersburg.
- In order for learners to pass, rightfully, parents should work hand in hand with schools. Parents should help their kids with school projects and assignments and also monitor their homework.
- When it comes to examination time, parents should encourage their children to study at home and help them where they need help. In addition, parents should attend all school meetings as requested by schools and they should also go to schools to check on their children’s conduct or progress regularly.
- Learners on the other hand should be motivated by both parents and teachers to attend all classes, including extra classes, have a positive attitude and obey all instructions given by the teachers. This can be a foundation of better school performance for all learners.

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