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Teachers' Strategies for Curriculum Support on Learner Progression Policy: Implications for Inclusive Practices in South African Secondary Schools

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Abstract. Learner progression has been widely embraced as an ideal intervention strategy for continuous grade retention. Due to numerous factors behind progression in South Africa, identified learners differ from counterparts in that they require support to bridge the content gap. Opponents of this policy raise concerns about quality education because learners move through the system without meeting standard promotion requirements. However, progression policy stipulates the provision of curriculum support. Therefore, this study explores teachers' strategies for curriculum support on learner progression toward accessible quality education. The study uses Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as theoretical lens. UDL is an educational framework that advocates accessible learning by addressing the diverse needs of learners through principles that foster inclusivity and adaptability in education. The study is qualitative, placed within an interpretivism paradigm, and adopts a case study design to report part of the findings for a doctoral project. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews with five teachers who formed part of the larger sample. These teachers were sampled for this paper, based on the rich data provided during data collection. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Findings reveal differentiated learning as an ideal strategy to accommodate progressed learners in the teaching and learning process. In addition, teachers' professional development enhances teachers' abilities to offer relevant curriculum support based on reasons for progression. These strategies are

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critical to create equal conducive environment to learn. The study recommends school-based support teams' (SBST) collaboration towards academic support for progressed learners' cognitive inclusion.

Keywords: curriculum support; inclusive; instructional practices; learner progression policy; teachers' strategies; Universal Design for Learning

1. Introduction

Learner progression policy is embraced around the globe as an intervention strategy for grade retention. Progression/social promotion/ automatic promotion as referred to in different parts of the world is the process whereby learners move to the next class despite not meeting minimum pass requirements (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Hoff et al., 2015; Jacobs & Mantiri, 2022; Kika & Kotze, 2019). However, research indicates that these learners require learners' function below expectation and therefore require additional learning opportunities as they move with their peers (Chataa & Nkengbeza, 2019; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021). Learner progression policy in the South African context, was incepted to uphold the best interest of learners who struggle academically by keeping and including educational systems, as well as the conviction that these learners will benefit more from exposure to new content in the subsequent grade than from repeating their present one (Department of Basic Education, 2015). These learners are progressed for several reasons including, age cohort, adjustment in several subjects, and senior phase condone in Mathematics (Bhagwonparsadh & Pule, 2023; Department of Basic Education, 2011; Gama, 2014; Moagi, 2020). The idea behind the progression policy in the South African context, is to ensure learners identified for progression receive curriculum support to bridge the content gap for the previous and current class (Brahmbhatt, 2020). However, dynamics around how these learners receive curriculum support to meet promotion criteria is complex yet critical.

Empirical research carried out in developed and developing nations shows different views on the progression of learners towards impactful instructional practices. Discussions in support of learner progression (as an intervention for grade retention) cut across three categories, namely, "*enhancing education quality, improving internal efficiency of education and personal development of learners*" (Okurut, 2015, p. 85). Opponents of learner progression argue for promotion criteria as defined by school curriculum (Stott et al., 2015), which eventually guarantees accountability for learning. In Asia for example, lack of academic commitment amongst learners was picked as downfall on the progression of learners (Aggarwal, 2012). In alignment with the latter, in the United States of America, the "automatic promotion" was criticized for cumulating number of learners who were not ready for higher education (Westchester Institute for Human Services Research, 1999). These issues point to uncertainties on learner progression as an intervention for grade retention. In their study, Nkosi and Adebayo (2021) identify several obstacles to the successful implementation of learner progression policies: including lack of parental support, absenteeism, poor discipline, demotivation, resource allocation, and teacher-learner ratios. Khobe (2023), demonstrated that progression policy hurts progressed grade 12 learners'

self-esteem and thus requires mitigation in schools. This is not only a South Africa but in countries such as Zambia where the policy shows a negative impact and the overall academic performance of the identified learners in that the number of drops increases (Mwandu & Kabeta, 2024).

Like other countries, the South African education system embarked on the intervention for retention through the introduction of learner progression policy. This policy is in line with the constitution on children's right to basic education. Progression policy was recently introduced in Grades 10 to 12 referred to as Further Education and Training (FET) Phase (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The idea was to protect learners' best interests by affording them the necessary support through the system so that they obtain a National Senior Certificate. Since its promulgation in 2014 in the FET Phase, there have been critiques on how progression policy deprives learners' opportunity to access quality education. The argument around this is on the learners' ability to cope with the content of the current class while they missed that of the previous class (Ngema & Maphalala, 2021). Subsequently, teachers view learner progression as adding to their workload (Kader, 2012; Nkosi & Adebayo, 2021), because they must accommodate the individual needs of progressed learners beyond the daily school plan (Department of Basic Education, 2015). In addition, the policy on progression stipulates different reasons for progression which implies differences in terms of curriculum support for identified learners. Those are age cohort, mathematics condonation, and adjustment in a maximum of three subjects. The critical stance of this policy is on additional support programs to ensure they master the content of the missed and grade current grades. However, Engelbrecht (2020) highlights that lack of adequate support with insufficient training to meet the diverse needs of progressed learners. In the same vein, Chidi et al. (2024) argue that teachers' lack of skills to deal with academic challenges of these learners often leads to low pass rates.

A key philosophy anchoring progression policy in South Africa is "the right to quality education" in line with United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Sayed & Moriarty, 2020). This goal promotes opportunities for lifelong learning for all and ensures inclusive, equitable, high-quality education. Progression policy indicates curriculum support provided to learners identified for progression towards effective learning and achievement of progressed learners across various processes of schooling. Despite that some of the learners identified for progression obtain the National Senior Certificate, a significant percentage of these learners still drop out of school (George, 2019). This is a contradiction to the intents of this policy. While the Progression Policy intends to ensure that progressed learners get an opportunity to achieve a National Senior Certificate, this group of learners still must comply with certification requirements because, in Grade 12, there is no progression. The policy is inconsistent in terms of the process through which identified learners are made to achieve educational goals.

Current debates on learner progression revolve around the notion of providing quality education to all. Hence, the emphasis on additional learning opportunities

for learners identified for progression to bridge the content gap. Some challenges highlighted in the literature involve progressed learners' inability to read and write (Hennick, 2008), and unpleasant behaviors such as negative attitudes towards schoolwork (Berliner, 2009). From an Inclusive Education perspective, every learner has the right to participate in education (Unesco, 1994). This implies that education systems need to respond to the individual needs of all learners through ways that are accessible to them. For progressed learners, individualized curriculum support activities become critical to advance their learning. However, abstract focus rather than practicality on curriculum support is an area of concern (Munje & Maarman, 2017). In line with this, this study sought to explore strategies teachers use to offer curriculum support to progressed learners.

The study thus responded to the following research questions:

1. What strategies do teachers use to offer curriculum support to progressed learners?
2. How do these strategies influence inclusive instructional practices?

2. Literature review

This section addresses several aspects to give context to the current study. Thus, inclusive instructional practices and curriculum support concerning progressed learners' various reasons for progression.

2.1 Inclusive Instructional Practices

Tomlinson (2014) defines inclusive instructional practices as essential strategies that afford learners equitable learning platforms through adjusting teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of learners (in this case progressed learners). Inclusive instructional practices aim to accommodate diverse learning needs for all, notwithstanding backgrounds, abilities, or identities (Cerna et al., 2021). These practices may create conducive learning environments where each learner feels acknowledged, valued, and supported in the learning route. Drawing from the Inclusive Education perspective, literature captures key principles and examples of inclusive instructional practices such as differentiation, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), collaborative learning, active learning, scaffolded instruction, flexible assessment, and reflective teaching (Gronseth & Dalton, 2020; Sormunen, 2020; Westwood, 2018). Inclusive instructional practices have the potential to assist teachers in creating conducive learning environments where all learners get an opportunity to thrive. While this is the case, the issue of inclusion seems to be a huge challenge within education systems around the globe (Ainscow, 2020; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024; Ryan, 2012). Challenges revolve around conceptualization, misconceptions, and eventually implementation. Literature shows misconceptions between inclusive and special needs education which only focuses on learners with different disabilities (Chireshe, 2013; Suleymanov, 2015). This has implications for the implementation process of Inclusive strategies that are inclusive to a diverse classroom.

Within the context of this study, progressed learners' success rate depends on curriculum support while moving with their peers. Research on learner progression indicates this intervention strategy responds largely to continuous

retention (Kika & Kotze, 2019; Sabharwal, 2018). However, another level of intervention is required given that progression is determined for various reasons. What this means is that progressed learners require inclusive instructional practices that respond to individual needs as defined by reasons for progression. According to Pellegrini and Vivanet (2021), progression policy embodies principles of inclusivity, but the question is whether it is effective and has an impact on educational outcomes. In the same vein, Costa et al. (2024) argue that the implementation of learner progression policy receives critiques and praises which brings about its effectiveness.

Inclusive instructional practices entail acknowledging diversity in the classroom and then planning and implementing teaching strategies that respond to the needs of individual learners (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). It encourages teachers to be considerate of diversity in their classrooms to advance inclusive practices to support and instruct learners with a diverse range of learning needs (Varcoe & Boyle, 2014). Unesco (2017) pronounces ways that teachers may effectively consider the needs of individual learners as they facilitate the learning process in an inclusive classroom. For this study, the learner progression policy brings in another range of diversity that requires inclusivity. In addition, identified learners require consideration in the learning process given that they have progressed for numerous reasons. Thus, for age cohort, adjustment and/or condone on the subject as determined by guidelines and circulars from national structures (Department of Basic Education, 2012, 2015; Equal Education Law Centre, 2022). Different reasons for progression suggest the need to support progressed learners to bridge the content gap based on individual needs.

2.2 Curriculum Support for Learner Progression in South Africa

Curriculum support is an overarching drive towards an effective and efficient execution of learner progression policy. Progression policy emerged as one of the various policies that the education system promulgated in pursuit of educational inclusivity to address discrepancies and to promote quality meaningful learning opportunities (Costa et al., 2024). While progression policy stipulates intervention strategies for identified learners; different conceptualizations and interpretations often lead to varied implementation processes. Studies conducted on learner progression in the Further and Education Training phase indicate uncertainties in curriculum support. Muedi et al. (2021) report that no specific support measures are in place to help learners identified for progress to bridge the content gap. On the other hand, Kolobe and Mihai (2021) emphasized that information and communication technology (ICT) is a useful strategy to support progressed learners. Dube and Ndaba (2021) stressed that *“it is important to emancipate teachers so that they can bricolise the environment for teaching and learning”* (p. 22) to mitigate challenges faced by progressed learners. Thus, to address the uncertainty of teaching and learning through shifting people’s thoughts around. While research shows awareness of the need to offer additional learning opportunities, researchers indicate the focus on abstract rather than practical intervention strategies for cognitive inclusion. When examining progressed learners’ academic achievement through the Capability Approach framework, Munje and Maarman (2017) contend that the implementation of progression policy projects

discomforts for learners and teachers, especially in rural schools. According to them, this framework “argues that individuals and schools should not be assessed based on the number of resources at their disposal without considering the salient but silent variables (internal and external characteristics) that influence their abilities to achieve what they value in life relating to education” (Maarman & Munje, 2017, p. 191). This study argues that with adequate curriculum support, progressed learners may overcome learning barriers and continue their educational journey. Hence there is a need to explore strategies for curriculum support for learners identified for progression and how these strategies influence instructional practices.

3. Theoretical Framework: Universal Design for Learning

The study adopted UDL as a theoretical lens to guide this study. Rose and Meyer (2006) describe UDL as a framework to design inclusive educational experiences in a school or classroom setting. Researchers who adopt this theoretical lens believe in designing flexible, inclusive, and responsive instructional practices to accommodate the diverse needs of learners (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021). Thus, to create learning environments where all learners thrive and reach their full potential. Within the UDL framework, teachers get an opportunity to focus on inclusion within the classroom (Sewell et al., 2022). In this study, teachers were requested to share strategies they use to support learners identified for progression to bridge the content gap. Their strategies were deemed important to suggest inclusive instructional practices in which curriculum support could be enhanced. It is worth noting that the learner progression policy advocates for additional learning opportunities taking into cognizance that these learners did not meet passing requirements and are progressed for different reasons. Hence a need to establish the extent to which teachers support progressed learners’ academic journey.

UDL requires teachers to acknowledge diversity in the classroom to design curriculum and plan instructional practices accordingly. According to Cook and Rao (2018), UDL provides teachers with a framework to design inclusive and effective learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of learners. Within the context of this study, UDL makes sense of teachers’ intervention strategies to ensure that progressed learners are not left behind. Furthermore, it affords the researcher to explore how these intervention strategies imply instructional practices. Through its principles of flexibility, accessibility, and inclusivity, this framework helps diverse learners gain increased access to and participation in mainstream curriculum (Craig et al., 2022). Thus, flexibility is a crucial component in creating inclusive learning environments to accommodate various learners’ preferences together with their abilities to learn. Accessibility, to ensure that all learners engage with the curriculum by removing obstacles that might prevent participation. lastly, inclusivity involves designing learning experiences that ensure meaningful participation. Providing numerous ways to engage, various means of representation, and several actions and expressions that may scaffold progressed learners towards achieving learning outcomes and eventually success of learner progression policy.

This framework aligns with this study in that the emphasis is on flexible teaching methods that cater to the diverse needs of learners including those who need additional support. This alignment fosters an inclusive environment, where teaching is adaptable to ensure that all learners succeed (Al-Azawei et al., 2016). According to Smith et al. (2020), teachers may present content in multiple formats offer individualized feedback and ensure that all learners regardless of their progress level get equitable access to succeed. Therefore, UDL served as an adequate theoretical lens to explore the phenomenon of progressed learners' cognitive inclusion.

4. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach placed within interpretive paradigm. Interpretivists argue that expertise and truth are structured through interacting with humans and how they view the world (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The qualitative approach enabled researchers to solicit rich, detailed insights and not statistical analysis which in many instances provides breadth of the problem (Creswell, 2014). Aligned with interpretivism, the approach was appropriate to engage with teachers to gain extensive insight into their social realities on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Subsequently, an exploratory case study design was used to investigate teachers' strategies for curriculum support on learner progression (Yin, 2018). The study explored how teachers modified their teaching to accommodate the needs of progressed learners. This exploratory case study design provided opportunities to bring insights into the inclusive instructional practices to accommodate progressed learners' individual needs in a diverse classroom. This study's population comprised secondary school teachers in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The focus was on learner progression from grade ten to twelve commonly known as FET Phase. Therefore, five teachers were purposively sampled from each school to determine strategies to support progressed learners based on their stories and feelings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These teachers were regarded as information-rich participants because they had progressed learners in their classrooms and the subjects, they taught were either adjusted or condoned during the implementation of learner progression policy in the schools understudy (Creswell, 2015). In addition, the five teachers were selected from the sample of a larger study, based on their responses which were sufficient to respond to the research question for the current study. These participants played a crucial role by sharing their insights through real-life examples and viewpoints to allow us to address research objectives. This study was delimited to capture selected teachers' lived experiences to delve deeply into their insights rather than providing generalizable conclusions (Creswell, 2014). Their responses were not meant to generalize, but instead transferable to similar contexts (Creswell, 2015).

Semi-structured individual interviews were used to solicit data from participants. This data collection instrument aided in determining teachers' views and beliefs about learner progression policy which influenced strategies for curriculum support and eventually inclusive instructional practices (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This data collection instrument was suitable for this study because it aimed to explore teachers' subjective viewpoints on the phenomenon

(Creswell, 2015). This paper reports part of the findings of a doctoral study, ethical clearance and permission from gatekeepers were sought from the university where the study was conducted and the Limpopo Department of Education respectively. During data collection, a digital recorder was used to capture participants' words verbatim, and consent to partake in and record interviews was granted. Interviews were transcribed and data was categorized into themes relevant to the analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. This technique, allowed researchers to familiarize themselves with data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name the themes, and lastly produce the report as outlined by Braun and Clarke's (2006) step of data analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, all participants signed informed consent before interviews and confirmed verbatims post transcription. Codes were used to protect their identities and were informed to withdraw from the study anytime. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) accentuate the importance of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality in research. This study was delimited to capture selected teachers' lived experiences to delve deeply into their insights rather than providing generalizable conclusions (Creswell, 2014).

5. Presentation of Results

As mentioned in the previous section, codes were used to present insights from five teacher participants for this study. Thus, T for Teacher and number 1 – 5 for each of the schools. The demographic profile of the participants is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Demographic profile of participants

Participant	Teaching experience	Subject adjusted/ condoned for progression	Gender
T1	5 years	Physical Science	Female
T2	10 years	Geography	Female
T3	20 years	Maths Literacy	Male
T4	12 years	Economics	Female
T5	7 years	Physical Science	Male

Data was transcribed and analyzed where two themes emerged on strategies for curriculum support for learner progression and how these strategies influence inclusive instructional practices. The themes are presented in the sections below.

5.1 Differentiated Learning

To respond to the research question *What strategies do teachers use to offer curriculum support to progressed learners?* this study revealed that differentiated learning plays a critical role in addressing the diverse needs of progressed learners, given that these learners are progressed for different reasons. Participants of this study employed various strategies to not only bridge content gaps but also enhance holistic engagement and performance.

5.1.1 Plan for curriculum support

This study discovered that teachers use differentiated learning to accommodate the individual needs of progressed learners based on the reasons for progression. Thus, using different strategies to ensure that all learners receive tailored instruction to their individual curriculum needs. From the school database, teachers identified learner problems to design and implement different strategies to enable the learning process, T3 had this to say:

"I have an alternative schedule; this helped a lot because I remain in school to work with them in groups of not more than three post-identifications. So, I work with learners with similar or related learning needs. This has been very helpful because I saw holistic subject improvements."

In agreement with T3, T5 also highlighted the other version of differentiated learning:

"I ensure that I make copies of questions that are always in the question paper and target topics around them for Saturday class with progressed learners. I also have a WhatsApp group with them where I feed them relevant materials and encourage the spirit of sharing. One other thing that is working for me is that I request my former learner to offer audio WhatsApp lessons where they explain concepts at the levels of the learners. This has so far worked for me because my subject has improved. I can accommodate them according to their cognitive levels."

T2 asserted that:

"I source a list from the school schedule to identify progressed learners and item analysis is very instrumental to identify some of the content areas that learners did not perform well. That tells me areas for emphasis during teaching and learning."

Participants of this study show attempts to expand progressed learners to expand their knowledge, enhance their abilities, and explore interests beyond the standard curriculum. These approaches to differentiated learning show proactive responses to progressed learners' individual needs. Thus, working in small groups based on similar needs, the use of technology to encourage collaborative learning beyond the classroom, and data-driven teaching informed by item analysis showcase varied differentiated instruction to enhance learning outcomes for progressed learners.

Another teacher emphasized inclusivity as a holistic differentiated approach to focus on all learners performing below expectation rather than focusing on a specific group of learners. According to this teacher participant, creating an inclusive environment where progressed learners receive support without being singled out, grants them equitable opportunities to learn. T4 elaborated that:

"I don't focus on additional opportunities designed for progressed learners, but I conduct extra lessons as per the school improvement plan because our learners are not doing well. The lessons are beneficial to all learners and automatically include progressed learners."

The quotes above emphasize situation analysis as a pathway for differentiated learning. Thus, teachers identify learners' challenges in class and design relevant intervention programmes for all learners as a holistic school improvement plan. This entails knowing learners knowledge basis and identifying challenges in specific subjects. This includes learner profiling which enables teachers to understand, acknowledge, and respond to diversity in the classroom to promote conducive learning environments where all learners get equal opportunities. For progressed learners, it is vital that teachers understand their reasons for progression and then offer aligned curriculum support.

5.1.2 Classroom practices

In terms of the actual classroom practices, this study establishes uncertainties on curriculum support for the learners identified for progression. This stems from different interpretations of progressed learners' curriculum support but mainly within the umbrella of Inclusive Education. Teacher participants highlighted the importance of support for progress and learners at risk. T5 emphasised that:

"I utilize the SIAS policy to identify some of the challenges in class so that I align my plans with the needs of the learners. I have an honours degree with a specialization in Inclusive Education and this helps me deal with diverse learners including progressed learners because they also represent intellectual barriers that need to be accommodated, especially when they are progressed with some adjustments in subjects."

It is evident from the assertion above that teachers struggle to offer relevant support to identified learners. This implies that teachers are not ready to respond to individual of progressed learners as it is difficult to reach out to them in the process of learning and teaching. Conversely, participants of this study claimed to have inclusive instructional approaches to accommodate progressed learners. T3 mentions that:

"I offer regular reviews and offer small group instruction. I also teach the identified learners differently. For instance, teaching step by step without skipping over content."

The quotes above revealed that teachers portray limited knowledge of differentiated learning which is rooted in equal learning opportunities. Within the context of this study, differentiated learning is likely to benefit learners through supportive techniques for inclusivity. While teachers are aware of the policy and its expectations, their interpretation of the policy contributes to effective (or not) inclusive instructional practices.

5.2 Professional Development

On the research question, how do these strategies influence inclusive instructional practices, this study revealed that professional development has an impact on teachers' classroom practices, especially in instances where they were not prepared specific group of learners. The results show the following subthemes in relation to professional development:

5.2.1 *Insufficient training*

Teacher participants highlighted a significant gap between policy stipulations (theory) and actual policy implementation. Lack of proper training in new policies appeared to be a major obstacle to effective policy implementation. This then led to teachers' interpretations of the policy and eventually to inconsistencies in curriculum support measures. Teachers require training for a collective understanding of the intention of learner progression. While teachers acknowledge subject advisors' school visits and subject enrichment engagements, participants of this study highlighted the need for developmental workshops where teachers will be equipped with skills and knowledge to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. These engagements are said to allow spaces for discussion, networking, and collaborations where teachers may create communities of practice for meaningful learning. T1 affirmed that:

"I think, there is a broken chain between the district especially, subject advisors. We receive circulars for implementation, but it's sometimes overwhelming that we end up supporting learners as per our interpretation which might not be the department's expectation."

The commentary above indicates that teachers require support to facilitate curriculum support measures for learner progression. When executing the intervention strategies progressed learners are likely to benefit from inclusive instructional practices. This could be attributed to the fact that teachers' platforms for engagements will enhance additional skills to achieve learner progression stipulations, particularly curriculum supports which promote the effective implementation of the policy. In addition, adequate training has the potential to provide a unified understanding of the policy stipulations and necessary strategies for successful implementation.

5.2.2 *Navigating progression policy uncertainties*

From the teachers' narratives, this study established that learners (progressed or not) are subject to similar teaching strategies and assessments that often neglect individual learning needs. While teachers are aware of learners' different learning needs, it becomes difficult to address them because of unclear processes for implementation. T3 mentioned that:

"We get directives from the policy of the department which separate learners according to their performance. We have learners who progressed due to many years in a phase while other learners progressed because of not meeting promotion standards. Sometimes towards the end of the year department sends circulars instructing schools to implement everything documents i.e. department can instruct schools to adjust the marks of learners in several learning areas so those learners progress."

The assertion above is evidence of participants' frustrations for varied reasons from progression which then requires individualized support. Teachers indicate complexities around unclear policy guidelines and last-minute circulars which often mean their interpretations lead to varied outcomes on progressed learners' curriculum support. The identification challenges and uncertainties have implications for intervention strategies and eventually success of the policy itself. Participants acknowledged that categorizing progressed learners and offering

support according to reasons for progression may enhance relevant intervention strategies. However, teachers' lack of knowledge led to holistic support rather than individualized curriculum support. T5 had this to say:

"Offering curriculum support to identified learners is not an issue, in my opinion, the how part of it might be a bit tricky because the policy is relatively new. If the district assists with the process itself because I don't have the knowledge to deal with this specific group of learners. Sometimes it's not clear what to do and how best I can assist them, but I have inclusive approaches in my teaching and accommodate different needs in my class."

The findings indicate that differentiated learning enhances learners' engagement and addresses diverse needs of learners. Participants of this study acknowledge professional development to improve their competencies in putting in practice inclusive instructional practices that accommodate learners identified for progression.

6. Discussion of Findings

This study intended to explore teachers' strategies to offer curriculum support for progressed learners and their implications for inclusive instructional practices. The study revealed differentiated learning as an inclusive instructional strategy that teachers to offer curriculum support. This finding is commensurate with that of Brahmhatt (2020), that teachers' implementation However, varied differentiated mushroomed from uncertainties, frustrations, and lack of knowledge to deal with progressed learners in a diverse classroom. From the findings in the preceding section, it is evident that teachers acknowledge that progressed learners need adequate and relevant curriculum support to bridge the content gap as they move with peers. Many of the teacher participants reported on the different teaching strategies that they develop for progressed or all learners in classrooms to create conducive learning environment. Kolobe and Mihai (2021), reported the integration of ICT through connectivism as a teaching strategy to support learners identified for progression because it improves participation and is more learner-centered. Managing assessment is also another strategy to support progressed learners, yet research revealed flaws in the execution of assessment tasks (Muedi et al., 2022). UDL framework also promotes a conducive learning environment with inclusive instructional strategies. Thus, flexible, and reflective practices reduce barriers and enhance learning experiences for cognitive inclusion (Cook & Rao, 2018; Craig et al., 2022).

Regarding professional development, this study found teachers' professional development as a significant strategy to enhance progressed learners learning. With an assumption that professional development translates to action, teachers may build networks, and collaborations and create learning communities for the benefit of progressed learners. However, participants of the study revealed limited professional development as far as curriculum support learners are concerned. Progressed learners' success depends on support throughout the school year to minimize dropout. Dube and Ndaba (2021) report that learners identified as progressing in rural schools get minimal access to quality education because newly trained teachers chose urban schools to advantage of opportunities

for professional development. Research also shows that teachers are not workshopped to teach progressed learners, yet a progression policy must be implemented (Muedi et al., 2021). This calls for stakeholder involvement where teachers collectively decide on inclusive instructional practices to ensure that progressed learners receive adequate support to bridge the content gap.

The findings of this study suggest teachers' inclusive instructional practices that acknowledge progressed learners' unique learning needs while promoting engagements that foster intellectual growth. The implications of the current study are positioned in emerging trends of learner support to embrace diversity in the learning process. Drawing from the broader concept of Inclusive Education to promote conducive learning environments in a diverse classroom. The study further, contributes to debates on how education policy conceptualization and what people do informs classroom practices.

7. Conclusion

The study of this study concludes that uncertain curriculum support approaches and inadequate capabilities to offer applicable intervention have implications on progressed learners' knowledge and skill levels. The findings align with previous research indicating differentiated learning through the UDL framework as a holistic inclusive strategy for curriculum support. In addition, there is a need to support or rather develop teachers as the end users of the policy, particularly curriculum support. The study suggests an apparent, structured implementation plan that responds to and addresses the actual needs of progressed learners for cognitive inclusion. A shift to a differentiated education system, rather than focusing only on supporting progressed learners through mainstream academic systems. Lastly, continuous professional development should also target identifying learners at risk and not dealing with progressed learners when they are already at risk. This may be done through item analysis where all teachers execute item analysis and develop interventions as they proceed with the teaching and learning process. While learner progression policy aims to remedy continuous learner retention and dropout, the success depends on the practical application of intervention programmes to bridge the content gap. This then implies that teachers also require adequate resources and training and/or professional development to effectively employ the UDL framework to meet individual needs of learners identified for progression.

8. Recommendations

The policy on progression may require revising where progressed learners may have an option to receive support through different skills. Perhaps, learners identified for progression may be enrolled in technical and vocational education looking at reasons that determined progression. Thus, each reason for identification may be vetted at the school level and recommendations for forms of education may be discussed during stakeholders' consultations including financial implications. For instance, learners who progressed due to age cohort may be struggling academically in that skill jobs may be applicable. In instances where learners' Mathematics is condoned extra classes and tutorials may be adequate intervention support. Lastly, an adjustment in a maximum of 3 subjects

may require item analysis to identify content that learners face challenges. This may remedy abstract ideas on curriculum support as stipulated in the guidelines for the implementation of promotion and progression requirements.

9. Suggestions for Future Studies

For future studies, a quantitative approach may be adopted to cover a larger audience which may also suggest other strategies that were not covered by the sample of this study. A comprehensive study may be conducted with subject specialists also known as curriculum advisors to establish the support they afford teachers to deal with progressed learners, especially curriculum support. The Department of Basic Education may also put measures in place, particularly financial support for the need to put learners through technical colleges or even fund external tutors who will support those continuing with academic pathways. Additionally, virtual academic settings that integrate augmented reality features have the potential to enhance educational achievements by promoting social learning benefits (Uludag, 2024), which could be linked to educational policies within the scope of our research.

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