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Exploring the effects of rotational models on the implementation of the progression policy with the view to providing curriculum support

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The global outbreak of COVID-19 aggravated inequalities in the basic education sector in South Africa. The pandemic necessitated mechanisms to advance learning while safeguarding against the spread of the life-threatening virus. To pursue teaching and learning, rotational school attendance models were introduced. However, the notion of "no child left behind" remains a concern due to the complexities of the rotations. A progression policy that encourages curriculum support to bridge the content gap was introduced to remedy unnecessary school dropouts that emanated from continuous retention. Progressed learners require catch-up programmes outside of normal school hours. With this study we sought to explore the effects of rotational models on the implementation of the progression policy with the view to providing curriculum support. Using a qualitative research approach, we focused on curriculum support for learners progressed to Grade 12 at 1 secondary school. Purposive sampling was used to select 6 teachers who accommodated 5 or more progressed learners in their classrooms. Data were collected through document analysis and individual semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that rotational learning has resulted in a learner articulation gap. Therefore, there is a need for curriculum support for progressed learners to assist them in coping with mastering new concepts and the curriculum in the new grade. We conclude that teacher professional development is essential for relevant curriculum support of learners. We propose the need to rethink and reimagine the implementation of the progression policy during and after the pandemic to reshape it to address the learner articulation gap.

Keywords: curriculum support; implementation; progressed learners; progression policy; rotational model

Introduction and Background of the Study

In the post-apartheid era, basic education is a right for all children as inscribed in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (RSA, 1996b) and the Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996a). This was followed by several engagements around "sustainable development goals – goal 4, quality education", "education for all" and inclusive education (Kopnina, 2020:287; Miles & Singal, 2010:9). These educational discourses brought about the move to professional development, which aimed to equip teachers with knowledge and skills for application in the classroom setting and to respond to the needs of learners (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2014). However, a great deal of discourse around learner throughput exists due to an imbalance between the number of learners who enter Grade 1 and those who exit after Grade 12 (Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013). School dropout is one of the reasons for this gap (Mouton et al., 2013). This led to the introduction of a progression policy that intended to reduce the rate of unnecessary school dropouts.

Progression policy, grade progression, social promotion, and automatic progression as referred to in various countries all have a similar focus, namely, to avoid continuous retention, which is likely to cause an increase in dropout rates (Lewis, 2005; Mogale & Modipane, 2021; Wright, 2008). The progression policy in South Africa was introduced to ensure consistency and uniformity in applying the *National Policy pertaining to the Programme and Progression Requirements for the National Curriculum Statement Grade R–12* (N4PR) (Department of Basic Education [DBE], RSA, 2022). Progression policy, among others, stipulates curriculum support beyond the normal school timetable for identified learners to bridge the content gap (DBE, RSA, 2015).

Amid challenges with the implementation of the progression policy, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) hit the world in 2020 – to such an extent that industries and government institutions were closed to curb the spread of the virus. Education sectors around the world had to propose ways to save the academic year and to reach learners in various locations. Technology has become predominant in teaching and learning (Kolobe, 2019; Kolobe & Mihai, 2021). This brought about imbalances, as it was easy for some countries to shift to virtual learning, while others were left behind. This division brought about various concerns, particularly on the notion of "no child left behind" in an ongoing debate on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

The DBE's digital interventions involved the introduction of rotational school attendance models and a trimmed curriculum. These interventions were necessary to save the academic year and to ensure that the learners covered the basic content in the curriculum. Curriculum support for progressed learners remains a continuing debate. While the basic education interventions offered learning opportunities and helped to curb the spread of COVID-19, curriculum support for progressed learners remained a grey area. It is against this background that we explored the effects of rotational models on the implementation of the progression policy with the view to recommend curriculum support.

Literature Review

COVID-19 regulations forced the world to its knees and many countries saw the need to implement lockdowns (Sayed & Singh, 2020). According to Mohler, Bertozzi, Carter, Short, Sledge, Tita, Uchida and Brantingham (2020), the lockdown was meant to maintain social distancing and reduce the infection rate. Owing to the implementation of the nationwide lockdown in 2020, many activities around the country were halted, which mostly affected the movement of people from one place to another. The education sector was also affected by the lockdown since schools had to close. Moreover, school closure was extended, which increased learning losses and deepened education inequalities. The pandemic caused school closures in over 200 countries around the globe (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The major concern in the education sector was losing the academic year, particularly in 2020, as the health sector was still trying to determine what COVID-19 actually was. Scholars in education shared their works on how to proceed with teaching and learning. Virtual learning through digital applications like Blackboard, Zoom, Teams, Google Classroom, and many other platforms was introduced (Petrie, Aladin, Ranjan, Javangwe, Gilliland, Tuominen & Lasse, 2020). However, many schools, particularly in rural areas, experienced great challenges as virtual learning was not possible.

According to Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021), factors such as online teaching infrastructure, teachers' limited exposure to digital teaching, unconducive learning environments, a lack of equity and academic excellence prohibited digital learning. Murgatroyd (2020) identifies accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, lifelong learning as well as educational policy as challenges for effective virtual teaching and the learning process in the new normal in which the country's readiness for the 4IR (a continuing debate) is questioned. 4IR tools were implemented during the pandemic and technology was embedded in society. The lack of 4IR tools in ordinary schools affected the learning process (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). The DBE had to intervene and devise mechanisms to accommodate all learners, despite their socio-economic backgrounds.

The digital divide in terms of learning in the new normal exposed the inequalities that exist within South Africa, particularly in the education sector. Jansen (2020) mentions three major dimensions of digital inequalities for learning during the pandemic, namely high, medium, and low-tech. High tech entailed the smooth transition from face-to-face to online teaching through virtual platforms; medium tech involved the use of WhatsApp groups with limited devices and unstable internet; while low tech involved the use of radio and television programmes which did not require any digital connection (Jansen, 2020). Soudien (2020:17) highlights that "the logistical challenge of managing learner and student progression in the world's educational systems is a planning nightmare." However, COVID-19 revealed the reality that learners had varied requirements, capacities, and abilities for learning. Complexities around "leaving no child behind" escalated and this notion remained a threat to the flow of quality teaching and learning, of which the promulgation of the progression policy, which intends to minimise unnecessary school dropouts emanating from retention, is an example. This policy intends to progress learners who fail to meet passing requirements to prevent them from remaining in a particular phase for more than 4 years, which implied that a learner could only fail one grade per phase (DBE, RSA, 2022).

The progression policy was promulgated to ensure consistency and uniformity in the application of the N4PR (DBE, RSA, 2022). Among others, the progression policy stipulates that progressed learners should be offered curriculum support outside normal school hours to bridge the content gap (DBE, RSA, 2022). On the other hand, the progression policy was cited among the factors contributing to the decline in Grade 12 results. Moreover, national Grade 12 results are lately presented with the inclusion of progressed learners. This is an area for concern, especially because results seem to be more favourable when presented without the results of progressed learners.

According to a press release by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on 22 July 2021, COVID-19 disruptions affected the teaching and learning process with approximately 54% of learning time lost. The press release also indicated that since April 2021, 400,000 to 500,000 learners dropped out of school (Press Statement by Toby Fricker, Chief of Communication & Partnerships, 2021). Among others, the DBE introduced a rotational school attendance model to ensure that teaching and learning continued. Three schooling models were proposed to ensure that COVID-19 regulations were not neglected. Those were platooning, which entailed separate sets of teachers and learners attending school at a particular time due to limited classroom space; alternating days per week, which implied the grouping of learners or grades to attend on different days; and biweekly rotational attendance, which referred to groups of learners or grades attending in different weeks (DBE, RSA, 2020d). The proposed schooling models suggested that learners in exit grades (Grades 7 and 12) attend school daily and that all subjects in those grades be taught, even if it meant shortening the duration of lesson periods.

Guidelines for the development of school timetables for the reopening of schools during COVID-19 presented key considerations towards the choice of the proposed attendance models (DBE, RSA, 2020c). These were school type, size, and subject offerings; departmental regulations or policies; prioritisation to maximise the amount of time available as well as relative importance and difficulty value of subjects (DBE, RSA, 2022). In such a scenario, curriculum support for progressed learners remained in question because rotational models involved all learners, regardless of academic conditions. It is worth noting that COVID-19 resulted in a multiyear curriculum recovery approach, which entailed the design of annual teaching plans (ATPs) to deviate from the original to a trimmed curriculum recovery (DBE, RSA, 2020b). This implied double learning losses for progressed learners because, due to COVID-19 disruptions, they missed the content of the previous year and only learned a portion of the content in the current year.

The *Admission Policy for Public Ordinary Schools* states that the stakeholders (teachers, learners, and parents) (Department of Education [DoE], RSA, 1998) must support progressed learners. Equally important, the department stipulates the development and implementation of additional learning opportunities outside regular school hours to assist identified learners in closing the content gap. Progressed learners require extensive support to overcome challenges experienced in the previous year while trying to adjust to the current year, especially because there is no progression in Grade 12.

Progression of learners is not only implemented in South Africa, but all over the world. The common reason for progression is to minimise retention which could lead to dropout (Allensworth, 2005). What is lacking is a response to the intervention in this regard. Much as the progression of learners is the intervention itself, its effective implementation and supporting those affected are major areas for concern. Even worse, the outbreak of COVID-19 escalated the already-existing challenges. While the South African education sector was still debating decolonisation of curriculum, transformation, quality teaching, and learning for all (De Grauwe & Carron, 2011; Lugaz, De Grauwe, Baldé, Diakhaté, Dougnon, Moustapha & Udushina, 2010; Musitha & Mafukata, 2018) the sector was forced to focus on COVID-19. For instance, schools' budgets for norms and standards were amended to focus on COVID-19 personal protective equipment (DBE, RSA, 2020b). Hence there was a need to investigate the sector's preparations and readiness to offer curriculum support to progressed learners in the new normal.

Literature points out that curriculum support for progressed learners is offered within inclusive education (Kolobe, 2019; Mogale, Malatji & Mphahlele, 2021). This poses a challenge because the inclusive education phenomenon is complex and has its own guidelines for implementation. Therefore, merging it with the progression policy is likely to yield unanticipated results. While this is the case, Kolobe (2019) recommends an alignment of the curriculum and assessment policy statements with technological tools for swift support to progressed learners. This alignment is important and could be a mechanism to respond to COVID-19 disruptions within the education sector. However, a lack of knowledge in integrating technology in various subjects is likely to affect the learning process (Akcil, Uzunboylu & Kinik, 2021). Being fixated on the traditional method of teaching due to inadequate training could also hamper virtual learning (Ngololo, Howie & Plomp, 2012). Given all circumstances, progressed learners require curriculum support. Therefore, it is important to establish the extent to which such learners received academic support and to think about possibilities for support during and after the pandemic.

Many scholars emphasise the need for equitable access to education during crises. The rotational model has been criticised for exacerbating existing inequalities (Soudien, 2020). Literature highlights that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds face greater challenges in accessing learning resources, which necessitates targeted curriculum support to ensure that no child is left behind (Schleicher, 2020). Vygotsky's social constructivism underscores the importance of collaborative learning environments (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of rotational schooling, educators must adapt pedagogical strategies to foster collaboration and engagement, even when learners are not physically present. This shift calls for innovative curriculum support mechanisms that can facilitate learning continuity.

Research indicates that catch-up programmes are essential for progressed learners who may have fallen behind due to the rotational model (Miller, 2021). These programmes should be designed to provide targeted support that addresses specific content gaps. Evidence suggests that after-school tutoring and summer schools can effectively mitigate learning losses (Ekmekci & Serrano, 2022). On the other hand, the use of online facilities plays a critical role in supporting progressed learners. The transition to digital platforms has been pivotal during the pandemic. Studies show that leveraging online resources can enhance curriculum support, particularly for learners who do not attend school regularly (Wang & Si, 2023). However, issues of access and digital

literacy remain critical barriers that need to be addressed.

The professional development of educators also plays a critical role to equip them with the necessary tools to support learners. The effectiveness of curriculum support heavily relies on teachers' preparedness. Continuous professional development is essential for equipping educators with the skills to implement the progression policy effectively (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). Research highlights the importance of training educators to employ diverse teaching strategies that cater to varied learning needs in a rotational model. The implementation of curriculum support within the rotational model is hindered by structural inequities. The literature illustrates that schools in low-income areas often lack the necessary resources, such as adequate infrastructure and materials, to provide effective support (Spaull, 2013). This exacerbates the challenges faced by progressed learners.

The progression policy itself may present ambiguities that complicate its implementation. Researchers argue that if the policy lacks clear guidelines on how to support progressed learners, educators may struggle to apply it effectively (Hoadley, 2020). Clear communication and training on the objectives with the policy are crucial for successful implementation. The literature emphasises the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in curriculum support. Schools that engage with parents and communities in supporting learners have seen positive outcomes (Epstein, 2001). This collaboration can enhance resource availability and create a supportive learning environment (Malatji, MJ, Mavuso & Malatji, 2018). Adapting the curriculum to be more flexible and responsive to learners' needs is critical. Studies suggest that integrating project-based learning and interdisciplinary approaches can help maintain engagement and relevance during the rotational model (Beane, 1997).

Research shows that the rotational model, particularly the weekly rotation of in-class learning, proved to be an effective approach to curb the spread of COVID-19 in schools (Brom, Diviák, Drbohlav, Korbel, Levínsky, Neruda, Suchopárová, Šlerka, Šmíd, Trnka & Vidnerová, 2021). However, there was no indication or evidence for the effectiveness of teaching and learning, which raised concerns about curriculum support to progressed learners, given that ATPs were developed due to limited time for teaching and learning (DBE, RSA, 2020a). We sought to explore the effects of rotational models on the implementation of the progression policy with the view to providing curriculum support. This article was taken from a doctoral thesis in which a suitable curriculum support model for progressed learners was proposed. Furthermore, it highlights challenges as well as good practices that emerged in the process, given the current learning conditions.

The challenges posed by the school rotational model necessitated innovative and inclusive curriculum support strategies to implement the progression policy effectively. While significant opportunities existed for enhancing learning through targeted programmes, online resources, professional development, structural inequities, and policy ambiguities needed to be addressed to ensure equitable access to education. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that assess the long-term impacts of these curriculum support strategies on learner outcomes.

Research Question

- What are the possibilities for curriculum support during the school rotational model on the implementation of the progression policy?

Research Objective

- To explore possibilities for curriculum support during the school rotational model on the implementation of the progression policy.

Theoretical Framework

We used Archer's (1995) realist social theory as a lens to explore curriculum support for progressed learners during the COVID-19 pandemic, using structure, culture, and agency as theoretical lenses. According to KS Malatji, Soundy, Kafidze and Chiloane (2022:114), "structure refers to all building materials and resources. Resources may include textbooks, charts, maps, audiovisual, and electronic instructional materials, such as computers, radio, voice recorders, television, and video recorders." The realist social theory considers structural matters as one of the fundamental aspects supporting progressed learners. In other words, for a school to successfully apply learner progression, structural requirements using Archer's (1995) theoretical lens must be fulfilled. In this case, the school should have resources such as textbooks, charts, a computer laboratory, and human resources to support progressed learners to succeed in the next grade. Archer (1995) talks about school buildings or structures as another structural aspect that yields either a positive or negative learning environment, which may have a huge impact on progressed learners.

The second theoretical lens, as presented by Archer (1995), is culture. Culture can be regarded as day-to-day practices in a school environment. Many aspects influence school culture. The combination of characteristics such as teacher personalities, learners, practices within the school, and the school leadership, encompass school culture (Malatji, KS et al., 2022:114). Societal cultural values affect school culture, and the community where the school is located also has a

major influence. The learners' family background may affect school culture as well. With this study we investigated the culture of hard work from the teachers' as well as the learners' perspectives. Therefore, if the teachers and learners work together improve learning and teaching, such a culture is likely to yield positive results (success of progressed learners).

Agency is the last theoretical lens from Archer's realist social theory. Agents are the people in the socio-cultural system (in this article, the school) into which they enter, and who operate within a particular structural and/or cultural system. Archer (1995) argues that the agential role of teachers in supporting progressed learners is likely to be affected by the structure as well as the culture of the school. Therefore, a relationship exists between these three theoretical lenses. In the context of this study, agency (teachers) determines the success of the progressed learners in the next grade.

Methodology

We employed a qualitative research approach placed within an interpretivism paradigm (Creswell, 2013; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The focus was to explore the effects of rotational models on the implementation of the progression policy with the view to provide curriculum support. Teachers' views and opinions were used to provide insights into possibilities for curriculum support as well as to rethink policy implementation during and beyond the pandemic. Therefore, we adopted a descriptive case-study design (Yin, 2014). A descriptive case study strives to describe, analyse, and interpret a particular phenomenon. The purpose is not to understand a broad social issue, but merely to describe the case being studied. In this context, the case is that of the effects of rotational models on the implementation of the progression policy.

The population for the study consisted of teachers in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase. In this article we report on a part of the findings for a doctoral degree with the focus on one of the five schools selected for data collection. The one school was selected due to its eligibility to offer curriculum support to progressed learners, for example, its internet connectivity during COVID-19. Participants were purposively selected as their subjects were directly affected by progression of learners. Six Grade 12 teachers who accommodated five or more progressed learners in their classes were sampled and willing to participate in the study (Creswell, 2013). The school serves a rural community and is classified as quintile 3 (a no-fee) school according to the categories presented in the *Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding* (DoE, RSA, 2008). The particular school chose the rotational model of alternating days per week.

Document analysis and semi-structured interviews were used to probe Grade 12 teachers' insights into curriculum support for progressed learners. The documents consulted included the school policy on progression, a documented plan for intervention, and the progressed learner database. Principals assisted with the identification of teachers who fit the scope and purpose of the study. Thereafter, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted.

We adopted a thematic approach to analyse data. This approach permits researchers to navigate across databases and focus on specific features in data coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To answer the research question, data were arranged, reduced, and described. The data analysis process involved getting familiar with the data, generating codes, searching, and reviewing themes, defining, naming, and producing reports. Teachers were coded numerically as T (Teacher) 1 to 6 in no specific order (Govil, 2013). In essence, thematic analysis is a systematic approach to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within qualitative data. A detailed description of the thematic analysis process, including how themes were identified, coded, and validated is presented hereafter.

- **Familiarisation with the data**

Reading and re-reading. We began by immersing ourselves in the data by reading transcripts, notes, or other data sources multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. In this initial stage, we made notes on initial thoughts, recurring ideas, or notable quotes that stood out.

- **Generating initial codes**

This stage is also known as the coding process. At this stage, we systematically coded the data by identifying segments of text that related to specific concepts or ideas. Open coding was used to assign labels to data segments without preconceived categories. These accommodated the emergence of unexpected themes. Thereafter, ATLAS.ti was used to organise and manage codes efficiently.

By following these comprehensive steps in the thematic analysis process, we ensured that our findings were robust, credible, and reflective of the participants' experiences. This methodological rigor is essential for drawing meaningful conclusions from qualitative data.

With regard to ethical considerations, ethical clearance for the study was given by the Tshwane University of Technology. Participants also volunteered to participate, and they were guaranteed confidentiality of the information they provided, and the right to withdraw without prejudice.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented to answer the question, What are the possibilities for curriculum support during the school rotational model on the implementation of the progression policy?

Possibilities for Curriculum Support

Participants in this study highlighted that curriculum support for progression was possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, teachers had to be prepared and continuously supported to ensure that learners were not left behind in the situation. They also voiced the need for adequate training and support towards effective implementation. While teachers mentioned the need to be trained to implement the progression policy, COVID-19 escalated the response to the long overdue 4IR. Regular training and support on the use of technological devices are likely to enable teachers to offer the necessary curriculum support, irrespective of the identified learners' location. Teachers mentioned that possibilities for curriculum support to progressed learners depended on their training and support. Moreover, thorough preparation to administer intervention strategies was also vital.

> *Extra lessons preferably Saturday … Outsourcing will be done timely so that learners can be taught from a unique perspective or angle mostly on topics that they have not yet mastered* (Document analysis).
>
> *We need to be trained when new things come, proper training and workshops are important because we can ask questions were needed. Due to COVID everything is virtual, so we are not able to outsource, we no longer have cluster meetings, so we are losing that social connection*. (T3)
>
> *… in my view, these learners must be categorised according to their progressed model and be supported like that. Those who progressed due to age are treated differently from those whose marks were adjusted and so forth* (T4).

Teacher development programmes seemed to be a major concern. Teachers seemed to not understand what adequate curriculum support entailed. While it is the subject educator's responsibility to identify learners who are struggling and to produce remedial programmes, proper training and support for policy implementation is vital. Teacher participants were of the view that their state of readiness had a significant impact on the progressed learners' ability to bridge the content gap. Therefore, they had to devise strategies to assist identified learners.

Challenges and Good Practices

We found the learner-teacher ratio was the major obstacle to reaching out to all learners, which was then compounded by also having to focus on progressed learners. While that was the case, teachers were of the view that they were doing everything in their power to ensure that progressed learners received curriculum support. Teachers raised concerns that COVID-19 protocols exposed the realities they faced daily. Hence, confusion and frustration arose on how to navigate curriculum support amidst the pandemic. For instance, the issue of the teacher-learner ratio had brought extra work for teachers who had extra classes to teach.

> *I don't have a remedial programme specifically for the QPS* [quick phonic screener], *what I do is I organise extra classes for learners who might have challenges, sometimes I'm guided by tests or informal activities we do then I look at how best I can assist them*. (T1)
>
> *It was better prior COVID regarding support, now it's not easy because the periods are reduced and when we call them for extra lessons it's not really for support or maybe revision but curriculum coverage. So, I encourage them to watch or listen to the lessons broadcasted by the SABC* [South African Broadcasting Corporation]. (T3)
>
> *The educator's plan for intervention was clearly articulated; all learners who do not respond well to tasks given are given remedial work* (T2).

The findings indicate that teachers lacked adequate knowledge of many virtual platforms to reach progressed learners. Teachers' intervention strategies responded to face-to-face contact, and not to digital platforms. Teachers' willingness to explore digital learning platforms was significant in this regard. COVID-19 protocols shifted face-to-face interactions. The participants in this study were concerned about the limited time for contact with learners, which was likely to affect offering curriculum support to the progressed learners.

The data revealed that a practical response to progressed learners' curriculum support involved reviewing available intervention strategies and their ability to respond to current learning conditions. Teachers were concerned about the focus on COVID-19, and not really on the process of teaching and learning or even academic support. Teachers highlighted that the pandemic hit while they were still navigating curriculum support.

> *As educators, we help them become progressed learners or promoted learners by employing expanded opportunities as they arise. No strategies documented to utilise for progressed learners* (T4).
>
> *We do not have enough resources that enable us to offer curriculum support beyond the normal school timetable. Our learners cannot afford data; they don't have devices. Those who have might not use them for academic purposes only … Some of us don't even know how to use the online learning platforms.* (T6)

No documented plan existed for intervention in the wake of COVID-19. This bring the school's readiness for virtual learning, which was a challenge, into question. The school had access to the internet and teachers had access to digital devices. However, learners were not allowed to bring their mobile phones to school, contradicting the implementation of 4IR tools. The available intervention plans were possible before COVID-19 but appeared not applicable in the school's chosen rotational model. In this study, teachers ensured that progressed learners received maximum

curriculum support. However, the lack of a documented plan for curriculum support for progressed learners made it difficult for teachers to be consistent with such support (in the wake of COVID-19).

Discussion

To critically discuss and analyse findings, we present the discussion in several sub-themes (see Table 1) that emerged from the data.

Table 1 Description of study objective and sub-themes

Study objective	Sub-themes
To explore possibilities for curriculum support during the school rotational model on the implementation of the progression policy.	Understanding the school rotational mode Curriculum support needs Implementation of the progression policy Challenges and limitations

Understanding the School Rotational Model

The school rotational model typically refers to a system where learners alternate between in-person and remote learning. This model can provide flexibility but also presents challenges in maintaining curriculum continuity. In this study, it was found that the school rotational model had implications such as the learner articulation gap for progressed learners. Mangena and Malatji (2024) argue that the school rotational model has resulted in a learner articulation gap which made it difficult for learners to master the content in the new grade. Mogale and Malatji (2023) are also of the view that progressed learners require extensive support for learners to cope with the curriculum. We found that learners that were progressed were affected by the school rotational model which was implemented during COVID-19. The lack of curriculum support for these progressed learners impacted their learning severely as they were not prepared well for the next grade. In the next section, we discuss the importance of curriculum support for progressed learners.

Curriculum Support Needs

Curriculum support affects both teachers and learners. We found that teachers were not professionally trained to deal with progressed learners, which affected the quality of teaching and learning (Mogale & Malatji, 2023). Curriculum support during the rotational model was crucial to ensure that learners remained engaged and on track. Key findings in this study reveal the following:

- Resource accessibility: Availability of digital resources and learning materials that can be accessed remotely. Schools need to ensure that all learners have equitable access to technology. In this study, the rotational model was rushed without considering challenges that learners may have experienced, which greatly impacted progressed learners.
- Teacher training: Educators may require professional development focused on delivering curriculum in hybrid formats. Effective training can enhance teachers' abilities to adapt lesson plans to both in-person and online contexts. We found that teachers struggled to use technology, which affected the nature and quality of the lessons delivered. The technological pedagogical gaps had a direct impact on progressed learners since they required more attention regarding curriculum support (Mogale & Modipane, 2021).
- Learner engagement strategies: Innovative approaches to keep learners motivated, such as interactive online platforms or collaborative projects, can be pivotal. Innovative engagements assist learners in mastering the content and coping with their studies. We found that teachers were not innovative enough to support progressed learners. Mogale and Malatji (2023) argue that progressed learners may require individual attention for them to cope with the curriculum in the next grade.

Implementation of the Progression Policy

Progression policies dictate how learners advance through the grades and are critical during transitions between learning environments. Findings related to this may include:

- Assessment methods: Adapting assessment strategies to accommodate both in-person and remote learners. This could involve formative assessments that provide real-time feedback rather than traditional exams. We found that progressed learners required more formative assessment for them to reflect on their weaknesses and address them.
- Differentiated instruction: Opportunities for tailored learning experiences that address diverse learner needs. The rotational model can support personalised learning pathways. However, in this study, we found that due to learners experiencing technological challenges, it was difficult to provide them with full support, particularly to those who were progressed to the next grade.
- Monitoring progress: Systems for tracking learner progress must be robust to ensure that those in remote learning are not falling behind. Regular check-ins and progress updates can facilitate this. We found that during COVID-19 educators were chasing time. Therefore, it was difficult to check how individual learners were coping with their studies, which affected progressed learners (Mangena & Malatji, 2024).

Challenges and Limitations

While possibilities for effective curriculum support exist, we found certain challenges affecting the implementation of the learner progression policy. The first challenge was around equity issues. Not all learners had equal access to technology or

support at home, which exacerbated educational inequalities. This study was conducted in a rural area where access to technological tools was challenging. The use of the rotational model compromised learners' learning and the implementation of the progression policy (Mogale & Malatji, 2023). The second limitation that emerged was consistency in delivery of lessons. Different teachers implement the curriculum in different ways leading to inconsistencies in learner experiences and learning outcomes. In the context of progress, they require a similar approach to monitor their progress. Therefore, the inconsistency of pedagogical approaches affected progressed learners, which also compromised the quality of teaching and learning (Kgwete & Malatji, 2021). The last challenge that emerged was the buy-in of different stakeholders. For successful implementation of curriculum delivery or changes of curriculum delivery, all the stakeholders (teachers, parents, and learners) need to be on board. MJ Malatji et al. (2018) are of the view that any collaboration among different stakeholders is likely to yield positive results.

Conclusion

The possibilities for curriculum support during the school rotational model on the implementation of the progression policy are both promising and complex. A focus on equitable access, innovative teaching practices, and robust assessment methods can enhance the effectiveness of this model. Progressed learners may require individual attention which calls for a model that builds on the inclusion of progressed learners' individual needs. However, addressing associated challenges is crucial for realising these possibilities. Continued research and adaptation will be necessary to navigate the evolving educational landscape. Based on the analysis, several recommendations can be proposed.

- Investment in technology: Schools should invest in reliable technology and training to support both educators and learners.
- Enhanced communication: Clear communication between teachers, learners, and parents about expectations and resources can help bridge gaps during transitions.
- Feedback loops: Establishing systems for obtaining and integrating feedback from learners and teachers may help to refine curriculum support strategies.

Implication of Social Realist Theory for the Study

The social realist theory focuses on three theoretical lenses, which in this article, are discussed within the context of curriculum support for progressed learners. The first theoretical lens is structure (Archer, 1995). The findings show that structural issues play a significant role in the success or failure of progressed learners. Archer (1995) emphasises the importance of ensuring a conducive learning environment and the availability of relevant teaching and learning resources to complement the curriculum support for progressed learners. The second theoretical lens is culture (Archer, 1995); working together, being hardworking and persistent to ensure the success of progressed learners in the next grade. In the last instance, agency, in the context of this study was about the efforts of teachers and learners to work hard and ensure that progressed learners were supported, and all articulation gaps were addressed (agential power).

Recommendations

We recommend cohesive and inquiry-driven teacher development. Professional learning communities could be an imperative approach to curriculum support. COVID-19 brought opportunities to explore new ways of learning. Therefore, it is vital to rethink and reimagine what could be done in the current situation regarding learners who require additional learning opportunities for their progression. This necessitates the use of various platforms to reach out to learners, particularly in schools that implement the rotational model. There is a need to refocus intervention policies to respond to identified learners' immediate needs. This could be possible if learners at risk are identified early in the year and intervention starts right away. There is a need to strengthen community engagement, particularly parental involvement. MJ Malatji et al. (2018) argue that through parental involvement partnerships are likely to ensure that progressed learners receive individual support and activities that address individual challenges. Therefore, it becomes important for teachers to involve parents in additional or collaborative types of support for learners.

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Authors' Contributions

MLM wrote the abstract, introduction and background, the research questions and the literature review. KSM penned the theoretical framework, methodology, conclusion, and recommendations of the study. Both authors compiled the findings and the discussion.

Notes

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