Nature of the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem at high schools in the Motheo education district

Khobe Mamello Admirrow
University of the Free State, South Africa
Primary author: m.khobe@gmail.com

Abstract—The practice of progression or social promotion at schools is a concern in the South African education system and worldwide. The practice has raised many theoretical and practical concerns regarding its impact on the progressed learners' self-esteem. This study sought to determine the progress of grade 12 learners' self-esteem at high schools. It was embedded within a postpositivism paradigm as reinforced by a quantitative research methodology, and a face-to-face survey research design was adopted. Fifty (N=50) respondents (females = 29, males = 21) were conveniently and purposefully selected from five high schools in the Motheo Education District. Data were collected through questionnaires. The findings demonstrated that progression negatively impacted the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem and needed to be mitigated at schools. This study recommended that the South African Department of Basic Education should capacitate schools to become centres of care and support for teaching and learning.

Keywords: Self-esteem, School Progression Policy, progressed learners; progression; retention

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

IN 2015, the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) promulgated into law the School Progression Policy, otherwise known as "progression", to limit grade repetition to once within a phase (DBE, 2013). The SPP aimed to prevent learners from dropping out of school unnecessarily, thus allowing every learner to attain an exit qualification (HRSC, 2016). This is a systematic intervention seeking to limit the retention of learners by restricting schools from keeping struggling learners in the school for more than one year in any three-year phase.

Those who are not in favour of progression suggest that learners should be held back in a grade until they have mastered the expected learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills (McMahon, 2018, p. 500). The motivation behind holding learners back is to afford under-achieving learners an extra year to master the competencies expected of the level for the given academic year (Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, & Mafumo, 2017). The Human Sciences Research Council (2016) postulated that progression may frustrate or discourage learners from being identified as progressing and might even drop out. Furthermore, it pressures the teachers who are expected to give progressed learners extra support. Despite affording progressed learners a chance to advance in their school careers, the School Progression Policy also adversely affects their self-esteem (Beere, 2016). Munje and Maarman (2016) reiterated that progression raises many theoretical and practical concerns regarding learners' well-being, the impact of progression on the learners' self-esteem abilities, and the availability of support systems needed to facilitate the learners' coping process.

Mawhinney, Irby, and Roberts (2016) proposed that progression frequently harms learners academically and socioemotionally. They argue that the inability to keep up with the material in the next grade affects the learner's self-esteem; thus, learners may lose interest in school and lack motivation due to learning difficulties. Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, and Mafumo (2017) also contended that progression could frustrate unprepared learners by placing them in a grade in which they are not prepared for the work. Thus, it unfavourably affects the learners' aspirations and self-esteem and pushes teachers to deal with underprepared learners while simultaneously trying to teach those who are prepared.

Those who support progression reject the practice of retention, arguing that it has harmful emotional consequences on learners. They see retention as synonymous with a traumatic experience, which lowers the school learner's confidence (Kader, 2012). According to McMahon (2018), retention, especially repeated retention, increases the likelihood of learners dropping out of school. Lynch (2014) contends that retention has a deleterious effect on the affected learners' social and personal adjustment, including discipline. Learners are known to have increased risks of experiencing health-related problems such as stress, low social confidence, substance abuse, and violence. Kamunda, Abongdia, and Mafumo (2017) further argued that retention does not benefit learners as it results in some behavioural problems associated with over-age for a given grade. If the learner does not progress with his peers, they may incur psychological damage, such as low self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a measure of self-worth based on perceived success and achievements and how peers and family value the person (Saenz, 2011 as cited in Weiten and Hassim, 2016, p. 320). Self-esteem is described as an evaluative or subjective perception of a person about him-/herself (Pilarska, 2016 as cited in Eloff and Swart, 2018). It is a judgment of oneself and an attitude towards the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs of being competent and worthy and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame (Hewitt, 2009 as cited in Shafi et al., 2016, p. 215). It is generally believed that there are many benefits to having a positive view of the self. Learners who have high self-esteem

are presumed to be psychologically happy and healthy, whereas those with low self-esteem are believed to be psychologically distressed (Brande, 1994; Taylor and Brown, 1988; Tennen and Affleck, 1993 as cited in Heatherton and Wyland, 2016, p. 219). High self-esteem has been linked to academic success, positive body image, and adolescent peer group satisfaction. Learners with high self-esteem show more persistence and resilience than those with low self-esteem.

In contrast, low self-esteem is linked to lower life satisfaction (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005; DuBois et al., 2002; Baumesiter et al. 1994 as cited in Nkyi, 2018, p. 183). High self-esteem has been identified as facilitative. It has been associated with positive outcomes emotionally and academically for learners across the board (Lew and Harklau, 2018, p. 172).

In contrast, low self-esteem is associated with low self-confidence, indecision, and uncertainty (Minev, 2018, p. 120). According to Searcy (2007 as cited in Nkyi, 2018, p. 183), learners who experience low self-esteem in a school setting are likelier to avoid daily reinforcement of their inadequacy. As such, when learners describe their worth, they describe their self-esteem. It is important to note that there is a serious shortage of literature on the self-esteem of progressed learners, and many studies lack in-depth findings on the nature of the self-esteem of progressed learners. The interest of this study thus lies in determining the nature of progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem in the Motheo Education District.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Identity Theory
Background of the theory
Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed the Social Identity Theory in the 1970s. Its most fundamental assumption is that group behaviour is linked to the group's psychological representation or social identity. Hence, the Social Identity Theory focuses less on how individuals operate within social groups but more on how the social groups operate within the minds of individuals (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). In other words, it is expected that the more strongly an individual identifies with a group that advocates a particular behaviour, the more the individual possesses a higher self-esteem level than the group advocates (Guan & So, 2016). As such, identity describes who an individual is, and different aspects influence it. From a social perspective, the formation of an identity is part of a social construction process, and it is in this formation that social groups play an important role (Schoeman, 2015). Identity is thus defined as how individuals perceive themselves, how others perceive them, and the factors contributing to these perceptions (Vandeyar, Vandeyar, & Elufisan, 2014). According to Guan and So (2016), individuals define a sense of the self in terms of social categories. The social aspects of people's lives shape who they are and guide how people think and what they do.

Learners aspire to attain self-esteem, positive self-esteem for that matter, and this aspiration motivates them to behave in ways that create and protect the positivity of their social identity (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Thus, the learner's identity is partly composed of their membership in a variety of social groups; there is a need to feel good about their group and to maintain their self-esteem by adopting strategies that protect the value of the group membership thus showing favouritism and leniency towards other in-group members (Hawley, Hosch, & Bovaird, 2014).

When two groups (for example, progressed and non-progressed learners) compete on an important dimension (such as academic performance) for the losing group, especially those who have high levels of collective self-esteem, the negative comparison outcome (that is, not performing academically) will deviate from their positive view of the in-group (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). In essence, once individuals have categorised themselves as part of a group and identified with it, they tend to compare their group with others. To maintain their self-esteem, their group needs to compare favourably with other groups (Vandeyar,

Vandeyar, & Elufisan, 2014). Learners who identify with a particular group value and emulate the group's attributes. In other words, it is expected that the more strongly the learner identifies with a group that exhibits a particular behaviour, the higher the level of self-esteem following what the group advocates (Guan & So, 2016).

Objectives and assumptions of the theory
The Social Identity Theory proposes that the need for self-esteem motivates group members to protect and enhance the positivity of their group (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). It assumes that learners are motivated to evaluate their own positively and sometimes value them over other groups to maintain and enhance their self-identity (Ayorinde, Nnajieto, & Anyakoha, 2016). It can be regarded as part of the learner's self-image and stems from belonging to a particular group (Schoeman, 2015).

The Social Identity Theory pays attention to the group in the individual. It assumes that an individual's self-esteem is defined by their belonging to the social groups, as groups give individuals a sense of belonging to the social world. The world is divided into "them" and "us"; "progressed" and "not progressed". Individuals see the group to which they belong (in-group) as being different from the other (out-group) (Vandeyar, Vandeyar & Elufisan, 2014). It further states that as people categorise others into these groups, they also develop varied attitudes toward them. Learners often have a negative attitude towards other learners categorized into out-groups, seeing them as inferior outsiders (Ayorinde, Nnajieto, & Anyakoha, 2016). The Social Identity Theory has three facets: cognitive (recognition of belonging to a group), evaluative (the value attached to belonging to a group), and emotional (attitudes towards insiders and outsiders) (Schoeman, 2015).

Relevancy to the study
The theory is relevant to the study insofar as it fosters an understanding that the groups in which the learners find themselves (for instance, progressed learners) have an impression and bearing on the psyche of the learners. Suppose a learner identifies with a group that believes in and promotes a certain behaviour (for example, non-participation in class and excluding oneself because of being progressed). In that case, the learner will attain high self-esteem. Furthermore, it is relevant to understand the learners' identity as constructed by the social processes, that is, how they distinguish themselves, how they are observed and distinguished by other learners and teachers, and how learners inadvertently define themselves according to the social categories (thus, progressed learners, slow learners, non-performers) they find themselves, which guides their thinking and actions.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to determine the progress of grade 12 learners' self-esteem at schools in the Motheo Education District.

IV. METHODS

Approach and Design
This study adopted a quantitative approach through a postpositivism paradigm. According to Cresswell and Cresswell (2018), the knowledge established in this paradigm must first exist in the real world and be based on careful measurement. Hence, studying individuals' behaviours and attitudes is significant and needs numeric observation measures. Data, evidence, and rational considerations shape knowledge. A major argument for postpositivism is that, in practice, the researcher collects data on instruments based on measures completed by the respondents or observations recorded by the researcher.

Based on the purpose of the study, the non-experimental design was used to determine the nature of progressed grade 12 learners at high schools. The researcher visited the respondents, asked them questions, and recorded the answers. The advantage of the face-to-face survey is

that (a) it has the highest response rate, (2) short and long questionnaires can be used, (c) the interviewer can assist with issues that are not clear to the respondent, and (d) respondents do not necessarily need to be literate (Maree, 2019). Additionally, with the face-to-face survey, there is a greater opportunity to control the environment surrounding the survey, particularly regarding privacy, noise, and external distractions. The potential for trust, rapport, and cooperation between the interviewer and the respondent is strong in face-to-face encounters. It is also helpful in that (a) it gathers data on a one-shot basis; hence, it is economical and efficient, and (b) it provides descriptive information (Cohen et al., 2018).

Respondents

The population consisted of the progressed grade 12 learners from the five selected schools in the Motheo Education District. Following the nature of this study, this task related to the units at both the broader and narrower levels (Yin, 2016, p. 93). As such, the selection of the sampling techniques in this study comprised non-probability sampling. The non-probability sampling engaged convenience and purposeful strategies to select respondents. Maree (2019, p. 219) states that these sampling techniques have their advantages when (a) time is limited, (b) financial resources are limited, and (c) the population is difficult to access. The progressed grade 12 learners were preparing for exams at the time of data collection, and the researcher relied on the available respondents within the purposefully selected sample. The quantitative sample thus comprised fifty (N=50) respondents (29 females and 21 males) from the five selected schools in the Motheo Education District. The respondents were between 18 and 25 years old, enrolled at a chosen school, and resided within the Motheo District in the Free State Province, South Africa.

Data Collection instruments

This study employed a questionnaire of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale that was deemed suitable for determining the nature of the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem at schools in the Motheo Education District. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), a questionnaire is a set of structured questions extensively used for collecting survey information, providing structured and often numerical data, and can be administered even in the researcher's absence. Comparatively, such data are straightforward to analyse. Questionnaires benefit from standardised responses to various topics from a constituted sample. They can be affordable, reliable, valid, quick, and easy to complete. This questionnaire involved two sections. The first consisted of the demographic details of respondents. It dealt with the age, gender, school, ethnicity, and culture of respondents. The second section measured self-esteem, and it involved ten items (e.g., "on the whole, I am satisfied by myself", "I wish I could have more respect for myself").

This study employed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Likert), which was helpful in that it provided an ordinal measurement of the respondents' attitudes, thoughts, and opinions. The Likert scale was a convenient instrument in this case, where the researcher wanted to measure the construct of self-esteem. This was accomplished by asking a series of Likert scale-based questions and then calculating the total score of each respondent in the analysis phase (Maree, 2019). The scale consisted of 10 items, which were scored as follows: 'Very Much Disagree' = 1, 'Disagree' = 2, 'Neutral' = 3, 'Agree' = 4, and "Very Much Agree" = 5.

The scale ranged from 10 to 50, with 50 representing the highest score possible, and it had high reliability as assessed by test-retest correlations and Cronbach's alpha of 0,623.

Data analysis

The data analysis and interpretation were represented in statistical results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allowed the researcher to collect numeric information from the questionnaire to answer the study's research questions. A questionnaire was used to quantify the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem in the Motheo Education District. The survey results were analysed using descriptive

statistics (Pierre, 2016). The quantitative data were analysed through the SPSS version 26. This study used descriptive statistics for measurement using central measures of tendency (mean). Statistics summarise data into a visual overview, percentages, or pictures. Thus, descriptive statistics are vital in interpreting the results of quantitative data (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

According to Cohen et al. (2018), descriptive statistics are explicit, describing and presenting data in frequencies and percentages. No attempt is made to infer or predict population parameters; they are concerned with enumeration and organisation. Descriptive statistics make neither predictions nor inferences; as such, they report what has been found in various ways. Descriptive statistics were thus used because they represented the descriptive data and the percentages. These percentages were calculated by dividing the frequency in the category by the total number of participants and multiplying by 100%. Microsoft Excel was used to organise data in variables, enabling the data to be represented graphically through percentages and the tendency of distribution (Maree, 2019).

Ethical considerations

Cohen et al. (2011) assert that the researcher's responsibility in upholding ethical principles is to adhere to guidelines that protect the institutions they hail from, themselves, and the respondents in the study. The ethical considerations that need to be anticipated are extensive and apply to all stages of the research. As such, it is worthwhile to address them as they relate to the different stages of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher adhered to the guidelines that ensured this study placed no one at risk. Permission to conduct the research was sought from all the relevant parties, including the University's Ethics Committee, the Free State Department of Education, the schools, the parents, and the learners involved in the study.

This study ensured that respondents understood and signed e-consent forms for participation. Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and would not affect them directly or indirectly. They had the right to decline participation outright or withdraw consent at any stage. This study employed pseudonyms instead of their real details. This ensured that the study would not unnecessarily take up their time or make them incur a loss of resources and expose them to risk arising from their participation. This study was committed to guaranteeing the respondents' anonymity and privacy. The anonymity and confidentiality of data-identifying respondents were strictly maintained at every research stage.

V. RESULTS

Demographic results of respondents

The demographic characteristics of the 50 respondents are exhibited in Table 1. In terms of gender, the results show that there were more females (58.0%) than males (42.0%). The results of the descriptive statistics indicate that the mean of male respondents is 67.81 with an SD = 9.816, and the mean of female respondents is 69.79 with SD = 10.516 (see Table 2). Regarding the age variable, demographic data suggest that the minimum age of the learners was 18, and the maximum age of the respondents was 25 years. The results of the descriptive statistics demonstrate that the mean age was 20.10 with the SD = 1.68 (see Table 3).

Regarding the school variable, the data displayed in Table 4.1 suggest that ten respondents were from School A (10 = 20%), nine were from School B (9 = 18%), eighteen were from School C (18 = 36%); ten were from School D (10 =20%) and three were from School E (3 = 6%). Concerning the culture variable, the data suggest that twenty-three respondents were Basotho (23 = 46%); twelve were Xhosa (12 = 24%); seven were Coloured (7 = 14%); seven were Tswana (7 = 14%), and one was Swati (1 = 2%). The descriptive statistics indicated that the mean of the Sotho culture was 67.57 with SD = 11.297; the mean for the Xhosa culture was 71.17 with SD = 7.259; the mean for the Coloured culture

was 63.43 with SD = 9.502; the mean for the Tswana culture is 75.14 with SD = 9.856, and the mean for the Swati culture is 70.00. The total mean for the culture variable is 68.96 with SD = 10.200 (see Table 4).

Concerning the ethnicity variable, the data in Table 4.1 suggest that forty-four respondents were African Blacks (44 = 88%) and six were Coloured (6 = 12%). The descriptive statistics indicate that the mean of African Blacks was 69.91 with SD = 10.014, and the mean for the Coloured was 62.00 with SD = 9.550 (see Table 5).

About the residential area variable, the data suggest that thirty-three respondents lived in urban areas (33 = 66.0%), and seventeen respondents were from rural areas (17 = 34.0%). The descriptive statistics indicate that the mean of the urban area was 67.88 with SD = 10.629, and the mean of the rural area was 71.06 with SD = 9.250 (see Table 6).

Table 1 Demographic results of respondents

Group	Subgroups	N	Percentage (%)
	A	10	20.0
	B	9	18.0
School	C	18	36.0
	D	10	20.0
	E	3	6.0
Gender	Male	21	42.0
	Female	29	58.0
Ethnicity	African	44	88.0
	Coloured	6	12.0
Residential Area	Urban	33	66.0
	Rural	17	34.0
	Sotho	23	46.0
	Xhosa	12	24.0
Culture	Coloured	7	14.0
	Tswana	7	14.0
	Swati	1	2.0
Total		50	100

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation results of respondents' gender

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	67,81	9,816	2,142
Female	69,79	10,561	1,961

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation results of respondents' age

Age	Age	Percentage of the total score
Mean	20,10	68,96
Median	20,00	70,00
Std. Deviation	1,68	10,20

Table 4 Mean and Standard Deviation results of respondents' culture

Culture	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error
Sotho	23	67,57	11,297	2,356
Xhosa	12	71,17	7,259	2,096
Coloured	7	63,43	9,502	3,591
Tswana	7	75,14	9,856	3,725
Swati	1	70,00		
Total	50	68,96	10,200	1,442

Table 5 Mean and Standard Deviation of Deviation of Respondents' Ethnicity

Ethnicity		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Percentage of total score	African	44	69,91	10,014	1,510
	Coloured	6	62,00	9,550	3,899

Table 6 Mean and Standard Deviation results of respondents' residential areas

Residential Areas		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Percentage of total score	Urban	33	67,88	10,629	1,850
	Rural	17	71,06	9,250	2,243

Reliability results of the Self-esteem questionnaire

The questionnaire results using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale administered to the 50 respondents are exhibited in Table 7. The scale ranges from 10 to 50, 50 representing the highest possible score. The scale has ten items that were administered to the 50 respondents. The respondent's responses were as follows; 1 = Very much disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree, and 5 = Very much agree. The scale registered a Cronbach's Alpha reliability score of 0.623. The results from Table 7 depict the respondents' self-esteem per item.

Table 7: Self-esteem Results of respondents

Items	label	Very disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Very agree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	N	3	15	9	13	10
	%	6	30	18	26	20
At times I think I am not good at all	N	2	12	13	20	3
	%	4	24	26	40	6
I feel that I have several good qualities	N	2	5	9	24	10
	%	4	10	18	48	20
I can do things as well as most other people	N	2	14	5	17	12
	%	4	28	10	34	24
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	N	5	8	7	22	8
	%	10	16	14	44	16
I certainly feel useless at times.	N	8	8	8	20	6
	%	16	16	16	40	12
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	N	1	8	10	21	10
	%	2	16	20	42	20
I wish I could have more respect for myself	N	2	7	5	16	20
	%	4	14	10	32	40
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	N	8	15	13	12	2
	%	16	30	26	24	4
I take a positive attitude toward myself	N	1	4	8	13	24
	%	2	8	16	26	48

The descriptive results displayed in Table 7 show that most respondents (13, 26%; 10, 20%) agreed that they were satisfied with themselves as progressed learners, while some respondents (3 = 6%; 15 = 30%) disagreed with being satisfied with themselves and only a few respondents (9 = 18.0%) remained neutral on the matter. Regarding the item, "At times I think I am not good at all", most respondents (20, 40.0%; 3, 6%) agreed that they thought they were not good as progressed learners. The remaining respondents (12, 24%; 2,4%) disagreed with being not good. Finally, thirteen respondents (13 = 26%) declared neutral.

The descriptive results suggest that the majority of respondents (24 = 48.0%; 10 = 20%) agreed that they felt like they had several good qualities; 9 respondents (18.0 %) remained neutral, while some respondents (5 = 10.0%; 2, 4%) disagreed with feeling like they had some good qualities as progressed learners. Concerning the item, "I can do things as well as most others". Most of the respondents (12 = 24.0%; 17 = 34%) agreed with the statement, while some of the respondents (14 = 28.0%; 2 = 4%) disagreed, and only a few respondents (5 = 18.0%) remained neutral.

About the item, "I feel I do not have much to be proud of", the majority of the respondents (8 = 16%; 22 = 44%) agreed with the statement, while some of the respondents (8 = 16%; 5 = 10%) disagreed and only a few respondents (7 = 14%) were neutral. The descriptive results suggest that most respondents (6 = 12%; 20 = 40%) agreed they sometimes felt useless as progressed learners. Some respondents (8 =

16%; 8 = 16%) disagreed with the feeling of being useless sometimes, and a few respondents (8 = 16%) responded neutrally.

About item 7, "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others", the bulk of the respondents (10 = 20.0%; 21 = 42%) agreed with the statement, whereas a few respondents (8 = 16%; 1 = 2%) disagreed and some respondents (10 = 20.0%) remained neutral. The results of the descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of the learners (20 = 40%; 16 = 32%) agreed that they wished they could have more respect for themselves as progressed learners, while some respondents (7 = 14%; 2 = 4%) disagreed and a few respondents (5 = 10%) remained neutral.

The descriptive results suggest that the bulk of the respondents, 15 (15 = 30%; 8 = 16%) disagreed with the statement that they were all inclined to feel like they were failures as progressed learners. Some respondents (2 = 4%; 12 = 24%) agreed with the statement, while the remaining (13 = 26.0%) remained neutral. About the item, "I take a positive attitude towards myself", the majority, 24 respondents (24 = 48%; 13 = 26%) agreed with the statement. Only four respondents (4 = 8%; 1 = 2%) disagreed with the statement about having a positive attitude towards themselves as progressed learners, while the remaining respondents (8 = 16%) gave a neutral response.

VI. DISCUSSION

The study determined the nature of the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem at schools in the Motheo Education District. The results show that most respondents agreed they were satisfied with themselves as progressed learners. Some respondents disagreed with the statement about being confident, and only a few remained neutral. This meant that respondents felt comfortable with who and where they were and were satisfied with their progress. These findings corroborate previous studies that highlighted that learners with high self-esteem are presumed happy and healthy (Heatherton & Wyland, 2016). The results also indicated that respondents thought they were not good as progressed learners. This is consistent with the literature, confirming that progression frequently harms learners academically and socioemotionally. It further frustrated unprepared learners as the inability to keep up with the material in the next grade affects the learner's self-esteem (Mawhinney, Irby, & Roberts, 2016; Kumanda, Afungmeyu Abongdia, & Mafumo, 2017).

Similarly, learners with psychological distress tend to have low self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland, 2016, p. 219). Some respondents reported feeling not good at all. This meant that most learners thought of themselves as not good enough as progressed learners.

The results suggested that respondents believed they could perform better as they had various skills. The results demonstrated that progressed learners could perform as well as other learners.

The results indicated that most progressed learners were not proud of themselves and felt they neither achieved much nor made any strides in their academic endeavours. The results further suggested that most of these learners sometimes felt useless as progressed learners. They felt they had no academic abilities or skills. They felt that they could not achieve the expected outcomes. These results further emphasize the views espoused by Guan and So (2016) that learners define their sense of self in terms of social categories. The social aspects of people's lives, like their abilities, shape who they are and guide how people think and what they do.

The results suggested that most learners felt useful and had a sense of self-value similar to their non-progressed counterparts. The results revealed that most learners wished they could have more respect for themselves as progressed learners. This means that most progressed learners expressed a strong desire and hoped to accept their strengths and weaknesses, what they stood for, and their values.

The results are consistent with previous studies in that high self-esteem has been linked to academic success, positive body image, and peer group satisfaction in adolescence. Learners with high self-esteem

show more persistence and resilience (Clay, Vignoles & Dittmar, 2005; DuBois et al., 2002; Baumesiter et al., 1994 as cited in Nkyi, 2018, p. 183). Similarly, learners with high self-esteem exhibit positive outcomes emotionally and academically across the board (Lew & Harklau, 2018).

VII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study concluded that the self-esteem of the progressed grade 12 learners was significantly low in three aspects. Firstly, the progressed learners felt they were not good at times. Occasionally, they experienced self-doubt and did not believe in their self-worth and abilities. Secondly, they thought they did not have much to be proud of, as they were non-achievers and were not proud that they had progressed. They wished they could have more respect for themselves as progressed learners. Significantly, they wished they could accept their strengths, weaknesses, what they stood for, and their values. This meant that the SPP affected the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem, which must be mitigated at schools. These results corroborated previous studies in that learners with low self-esteem exhibit lower life satisfaction (Baumesiter et al., 1994 as cited in Nkyi, 2018, p. 183).

Similarly, low self-esteem is associated with low self-confidence, indecision, and uncertainty about oneself (Minev, 2018, p. 120). According to Searcy, (2007 as cited in Nkyi, 2018, p. 183), learners who experience low self-esteem in a school setting are more likely to avoid daily reinforcement of their inadequacy, strengths, and weaknesses. As such, when learners describe their worth, they describe their self-esteem in doubt, indecision, and even negative terms. More research needs to be conducted through probability sampling, with a more significant sample of progressed learners, for the results of this study to be generalised to reflect the entirety of South Africa.

The study determined the nature of the progressed grade 12 learners' self-esteem at schools in the Motheo Education District and concluded that even though the progressed grade 12 learners exhibited high self-esteem on some items, the majority showed low self-esteem on significant items, such as believing that they were not good at all; they felt that they did not have much to be proud of; and they wished they could have more respect for themselves as progressed learners. This implied that SPP negatively impacted the progressed Grade 12 learners' self-esteem and needed to be mitigated at schools.

These results are important because they highlight the plight of the progressed grade 12 learners at schools. Therefore, this study recommends that the South African Department of Basic Education capacitate schools to become centres of Care and Support for Teaching and Learning. The results of this study imply that schools should show greater sensitivity to the development of progressed learners. This means that schools should start to develop and implement a range of approaches to teaching and learning that can enable them to respond to the diverse needs of the learners. Schools, as centres of care and support, should essentially (a) identify and assess learners to ensure that their basic survival needs, which could otherwise become barriers to their continued stay in schools, are met, (b) build capacity in teachers and learners to cope with and respond effectively to, a range of challenges, (c) promote community and stakeholder participation and partnerships that will assist and strengthen schools, and above all, (d) create learning environments that are inclusive, safe and free from stigma, discrimination, and abuse.

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