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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTS GRADE RETENTION HAS ON
STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

By
Tyree Gunter

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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May 6, 2003

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 5/6/03

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ABSTRACT

Tyree Gunter

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTS GRADE RETENTION HAS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

2002/03

Dr. John Klanderman and Dr. Roberta Dihoff
Master of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of this investigation was to examine if grade retention has a positive effect on a child's academic performance, and if females, whether retained or not, improved more academically than males. Language/literacy and mathematic cumulative grades of 58 students in the second and third grade were compared using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results indicated that students who were retained improved more in academic performance than students who were low-achievers but promoted instead and those placed in a transition class. In addition the findings showed that males, whether retained or not, had higher mathematical scores than females, but there was no difference between males and females in performance of language/literacy using a Two-way ANOVA. Despite the increasing popularity of grade retention of low-achieving students, many people disagreed with the practice of retaining students in response to the poor academic performance. Therefore, many school administrators and psychologists have suggested alternatives to retention, such as reducing class sizes, delaying school entry, and employing various classroom assessments to improve student's academic performance. However, more research is the key to its effectiveness.

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Chapter I

The Problem

Need

In education, many children were being considered for grade retention because of poor academic performance on grade level. This has become increasingly popular among educators but not with school administration. Some educators feel it was a productive process and necessary at times to give children more time to mentally, emotionally and socially mature and develop the basic skills needed to achieve at the next grade level. However, others, including many school administrators, feel it lowers a child's social and emotional well-being because they were separated from others of their age group. Most of all with the rates of retention increasing, the cost for the school district can become overwhelming. Although many students were considered for retention, there were times when they were not retained because schools were searching for alternatives to grade retention and promoting the idea of no child left behind. There was a need to build research on the effects of grade retention on academic success because it continues year after year without being proven to be an effective practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate if grade retention had a positive effect on a child academically through research and review concerning elementary grade retention. This research was intended to show that children do benefit from retention because it gives children a chance to master particular skills needed to be academically successful throughout their schooling, possibly even into higher education.

Hypotheses

There were two hypotheses that were tested within this research. Hypothesis 1 was referred to as H1 and hypothesis 2 was referred to as H2 throughout this research. H1 states, “The students who were retained in elementary grades that have not met requirements for promotion have a greater chance of improving academic grades than those who were low achieving students and promoted instead.” H2 states “Female students, whether retained or not, improve greater in academic performance for both subjects than male students.” The variables within the two hypotheses were divided into independent and dependent. The independent variables for H1 consists of three groups identified as the following: group1 – students retained, group 2 – low achieving students who were promoted, and group 3 – students placed in transition. The independent variable for H2 consists of gender identified as the following: group 1- male, and group 2 – female. The dependent variable for both hypotheses was academic performance including language/literacy and mathematics.

Theory

Repeating grades in school has always been an issue of concern that has taken a front seat in education. For a while, educators were encouraged to abandon the idea of social promotion and retain children for poor academic performance. Many educators feel it was helpful to the system as a whole to retain students who do not reach standards. Some statements reported were it gives students a shot at success; retention was more merciful; and it was more devastating for a student to be with peers, frustrated, and failing, than to be held back a year. However, facts do not support retention as a viable strategy. Recent studies suggest that, instead of forcing academically troubled children to

mature, and to achieve competence in later grades, retention makes students feel bad and embarrassed. These feelings cause students to display behavioral problems and eventually drop out of school.

According to Jimerson (2001), in 1995, Jackson provided the first logical, widespread overview of the research evidence on the effects of grade retention. It included thirty studies published between 1911 and 1973. He wanted to examine whether students who were low achievers or those who with socioemotional maladjustments profited from grade retention or promotion to the next grade. Jackson (1975) suggested that it was possible for grade retention to be some benefit for students, but grade promotion appears to have greater benefits on a child's academic and socioemotional success. Results of experimental studies favored the promotion of students, but nonsignificant trends were equally distributed which make Jackson's (1975) conclusion show no reliable evidence in showing that grade retention was more beneficial than grade promotion for students with considerable academic or adjustment problems.

According to Jimerson (2001), after Jackson's review, came Holmes and Matthews (1984) exploring the effects of retention on elementary and junior high school students using achievement and socioemotional outcomes. The study overall showed that retained students had lower academic achievement, poorer personal adjustment, lower self-concept, and viewed school as less favored than promoted students. Holmes and Matthews concluded that educators who retain students do it regardless of evidence indicating that the possibility for negative effects constantly outweighs positive outcomes. Reviews of grade retention published more than a decade ago indicates an absence of evidence supporting the practice of retaining students and this developed a

methodological concern that expands the studies examining grade retention. Grade retention studies that were published recently have shown some methodological improvements.

Definitions

Grade retention – a child who has been in a particular grade level repeating that level instead of being promoted to the next grade level for another full school year.

Mature – to master deficient skills

Social Promotion – passing children to next grade level to keep them with others of their age group.

At-risk – students who may be retained at a grade level because of academic performance or other contributing factors.

Assumptions

The teachers were providing good teaching strategies and grading fairly to all students. Testing measures were appropriate for this study of retention. The results of the study will indicate retention as being beneficial for improving academic performance.

Limitations

Some limitations would include that there were not generalized results to similar communities, there were other reasons for students being retained besides academics, all students within the school district were not coming from the same socioeconomic status and the socioemotional outcomes of the students varies depending on the students' self-concept and attitude about success.

Overview

In this research, a review of other research that has been done on grade retention in relation to this study was explained. This was accomplished through summaries of the literature. Then reviewed was design of the study including the sample, measures, design, testable hypotheses, analysis, and summary; analysis of results including order of presentation, organization of analysis chapter, restatement of hypotheses, interpretation of results, statements of significance, and summary; then lastly the summary and conclusions including summary, conclusions, discussion, and implication for future research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Today's grade retention rate was high. Therefore, review of research that has been conducted was strongly required to investigate its effectiveness. There were four major sections that were examined concerning grade retention. The sections were divided into variables contributing to grade retention, negative reviews of grade retention, alternatives to grade retention and supporting views of grade retention. These sections will pull together the idea of grade retention.

Contributing Variables to Grade Retention

Variable contributing to grade retention were investigated. According to L. Rodney, Crafter, E. Rodney and Mupier (1999), the Children's Structured Assessment for the Genetics of Alcoholism interview scale was administered to 243 African American boys, which pertains to alcohol use, discipline in the home, and conduct disorder. Results of the analyses revealed that three variables were positively associated with grade retention, which includes number of suspensions from school, conduct disorder, and lack of discipline in the home. African American boys scored lower than any other group on the test. They were retained in grade more often, specifically at the elementary level. The drop out rate was significantly higher than other ethnic groups. They also were suspended or expelled from school at a higher rate. McCoy (1999) investigated the effects of grade retention on school achievement, perceived school competence, and delinquency. The findings suggest that the strongest predictors of retention were early school performance, gender, parental participation in school, and the number of school

moves. Byrd and Weitzman (1994) did a study on predictors of early grade retention among children in the United States. The results of this study were conducted to investigate health and social factors associated with early grade retention in a nationally representative sample of children in the United States, were reported here. Nationally, 7.6% of children repeated kindergarten or first grade. Factors associated with increased risk of grade retention were poverty, confidence interval, male gender, low maternal education, deafness, speech defects, low birth weight, enuresis, and exposure to household smoke. High maternal education and residence with both biological parents at age six years were independently associated with a decrease risk of retention. This was the first study that uses national data to investigate how health and social factors individually and collectively contribute to early grade retention. Worrell (1997) reveals that while research literature on students at risk for school failure has identified many characteristics associated with school failure that include academic, behavior, social-emotional, and school setting, there were five major demographic indicators. These indicators were poverty, family configuration, race/ethnicity, parental education, and limited English proficiency. Another research on contributing variables was done by El-Hassan (1998) in Lebanon on demographic variables. The results revealed well-defined characteristics of retained students. A large percent entered school early, were males from public schools and rural areas. They were middle children from large families, with one third of the families headed by single parents. The parental education and occupation levels were low. Results indicated retention was not independent of these variables. In Blair's (2001) study, she examined risk factors that might assist in early identification of children likely to experience grade retention. The sample was low-income African-

American children. Findings indicated that small size at birth, inadequate developmental stimulation in the home, low IQ, high externalizing behavior, and enrollment in private or church center-based day care were independently associated with increase risk for grade retention. Another study similar to Blair was a study done by Liddell and Rae (2001) on the predicting factors of retention using a sample of 150 rural South African children. Information of children's academic progress from beginning of second grade to beginning of seventh grade was collected for the purpose of this study. Predictor variables included age at school entry, sex of child, nutritional status, academic achievement in grade 1, cognitive test status at grade 2, teacher assessments of children's behavior, and biographical variables such as caregiver education and household size. Children were coded as having a smooth transition-survivor, having been retained at least once-retainee, or as having left the school they were first enrolled-left school. Results showed that early academic achievement was a strong predictor of retention. Results also indicated that rural children's experience of primary school was relatively disrupted. For the ones who remain in the same school, a relatively good predictive model for retention was developed, starting with early (grade 1) academic achievement as well as caregiver's education, and cognitive test scores were important predictors. "As with many other studies, these results add further weight to the notion that doing well in a developing world school had less to do with a child's background or personal qualities than it had to do with the in-school experience itself" (Liddell and Rae, 2001, p425). Ferguson, Jimerson and Dalton (2001) conducted a longitudinal study following a sample of 106 kindergarten students through 11th grade examining the effects of family characteristics, school readiness, socialization, and student demographics on academic achievement, and

behavioral adjustment outcomes. These educational outcomes were contrasted among early grade retainees. The results of this study demonstrate that retained students' initial school readiness, socioeconomic status, mother's level of education, parental value of education, kindergarten personal-social functioning, and chronological were distinctly associated with subsequent academic or behavioral outcomes. The studies that have been done on variables contributing to grade retention should be taken into account when examining the effects of retention.

Negative Reviews of Grade Retention

Studies show that children view retention as punishment and experience emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness when not promoted. Many researchers have concluded that grade retention did not guarantee major development in achievement. Setenich (1994) conducted a study on the long-term impact of being retained in kindergarten or first grade on seventh and eighth grade students. The results supported the hypothesis that retained students had significantly lower academic achievement and self-esteem scores than the promoted students. Early academic difficulties tend to persist. When children were made to repeat a grade, they perceive retention as failure. Byrnes and Yamamoto (2001) interviewed 71 retained elementary students and teachers about their views on retention. The study was conducted in a school district of 26,000 elementary students in a large city to examine the views of 71 children retained and their classroom teachers. The school district had an overall retention rate of 9.5%. All students were introduced to the topic of retention the same way. The retained students were asked what they felt was the worst thing about not passing. Majority of the comments were negative, which included: "being laughed at and teased (22%), not being with friends (16%), being

punished (14%), being sad (10%), getting bad grades (18%), being embarrassed (4%) and doing the same work (4%)” (Byrnes and Yamamoto, 2001). Most children even found it difficult to think of something good about being retained. Twenty-one percent felt there was nothing good about it. Children seemed to feel anxious about the reactions of their peers and others as failures. Teachers seemed to create a view of retention as punishment by often using threats to students who were lacking in motivation to achieve. The threat of retention did not seem to present itself as a motivating factor for students, but instead creating a degrading feeling in the students. “These works strongly suggest that retention was unlikely to accomplish its intended purposes, yet the practice has again become the frequent solution to low achievement” (Byrnes and Yamamoto, 2001). Byrnes and Yamamoto concluded (2001) that the message students internalize about retention tends to be negative and confusing, and since other research did not speak highly of it other reasonable alternatives should be explored. Pierson and Connell (1992) states, “Although retention did not eliminate academic problems, social promotion may exacerbate them” (Pierson and Connell, 1992). Jimerson (1999), conducted a longitudinal study providing evidence that retained students have a greater probability of poorer educational and employment outcomes during late adolescence. Results found that retained students had lower levels of academic adjustment and received lower employment competence ratings in comparison to a group of low-achieving students. According to Owings and Magliaro (1998), retained students were more likely to drop out, have underprivileged backgrounds, be male and African American, and have less educated parents, which really harm the learner from its negative effects. Shepard and Smith (1990) viewed retention as being ineffective. It did not help students catch up or

prevent school dropouts. In their study, children rated the prospect of flunking a grade as more stressful than wetting in class or being caught stealing. Another study done by Meisels and Liaw (1993) examines retention in K-8th grade using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. Results suggest that the timing of retention was not really associated with ultimate performance. Retention at any point was associated with low academics and personal-social outcomes. Nonretained students demonstrated higher grades, test scores and fewer academic, emotional and behavioral problems than retained students. Retention did not equalize outcomes even when retained students have been in school a yearlonger. These results from a national sample strengthen arguments against retention policies (Meisels and Liaw, 1993). According to Walters and Borgers (1995), most research indicated that retaining students at the elementary school levels did not effectively increase academic achievement among low-achieving students. Eventually, students who have been retained even fall behind their low-achieving peers who had been promoted.

Alternatives to Grade Retention

Findings suggest that intervention approaches other than grade retention were needed to better promote school achievement and adjustment. Prevention targeting social and emotional as well as cognitive aspects of the school adjustment process may prove to be an efficient way of targeting some proportion of prevention resources (Blair, 2001). Remediation and other within-grade instructional efforts have a more positive success rate (Shepard and Smith, 1990). Gloeckler (2001), suggests a process of decision-making activities for promotion or retention decisions similar to those used in special education placement. He provides an alternative procedure that involves assessment, program

planning and placement of a student. Within this alternative procedure, he addresses the questions of “What factors have interfered with this child’s achievement in this grade? and what modifications can be made in the educational program to enable him or her to be successful in school?” (Gloeckler, 2001). In assessment, the teacher provides the most detailed information about the child’s everyday performance and achievement in the classroom, and students have examinations, screenings, analyses, and evaluations. Program planning identifies educational interventions that have the potential for assuring successful learning and productive behavior. Gloeckler (2001) suggested both preventive and alternative educational programs; a full-day kindergarten for at-risk students for improving reading skills; transition rooms for assisting students in achieving necessary learning and behavior skills; repeating an academic subject rather than an entire grade; and using alternative instructional approaches, which these have seemed to be effective in specified areas. After the intervention strategies have been determined, the decision was made to the placement of the child. Gloeckler (2001), concludes, “...if the child’s learning was the purpose of the school, professional educators must question the efficacy of in-grade retention and look to alternative procedures for meeting this goal” (Gloeckler, 2001). According to Darling-Hammond (1998), four complementary alternative strategies include enhancing professional development for teachers, employing redesigned school structures that support more intensive learning, providing targeted supports and services when needed, and employing classroom assessments that better inform teaching. Many researchers believe if some of these alternatives were employed, retention would not be so overbearing for low-achieving students. Another report by Harvey (1994) shows a number of options designed to help students who were not

meeting grade-level standards. One option was to enroll students into a smaller class. Therefore a study on whether class size remediates achievement scores of kindergarteners and first graders once they have been retained was conducted using the Project STAR database. The study found that there was no significant difference among retainees at either eighth grade level between or among classes. Also, class size did not remediate poor academic achievement (Harvey, 1994). The last alternative reviewed was delaying school entry to reduce later grade retentions. This study was done by May and Kundert (1995) with a sample of 3,238 students who was enrolled in grades 1 through 12; from this a subsample of 279 children who had delayed school entry was identified. Their records were examined for future retentions or special education services. It was found that students who delayed school entry were most often male and placed in special education programs in significantly higher proportions than nondelayed entry students. No significant effect of delayed entry was noted for retention. From the review of literature, there seems to be minimal evidence supporting the alternatives to grade retention were more effective than actual retention.

Grade Retention Support

Negative effects of grade retention should not become an argument for social promotion (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Statistics show that 3 out of 10 children seem to gain more from retention than from promotion (Koons, 1997). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 1989) grade retention was less likely to yield negative effects on students with positive self-concepts, good peer relationships, and adequate catch-up skills. Counselors must be aware of these studies if they were to be effective advocates in helping all children to develop to their best potential (Walters

and Borgers, 1995). They need to provide services that will help children learn to cope with any negative side effects of the retention process (Campbell and Bowman, 1993). For instance, encourage children to begin exploring their feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about their retention, reframe any negative beliefs about retention into positive ones, and look at past successes and future accomplishments. Marcon (1994) did a follow-up to an in-depth study to the District of Columbia's early learning programs and their impact. This study provided data on the transition of previously studied children from primary education to upper elementary grades. Results indicated that most children in both groups were making generally average progress, even with an unusual high rate of retention and a disturbingly high level of maladaptive behavior; attending Pre-K or Head Start programs had a positive effect on later school performance, but this was more significant for those children who had not been previously retained in grade. Another study done by Pomplun (1988) measured self-concept, motivation, teacher, student, and parent attitudes; and reading, language, and mathematics achievement to compare primary, intermediate, and secondary retainees with borderline and regular students. The school required guidelines for retaining students who lacked minimal skills. The students were grouped into three levels by grade, which consisted of primary, intermediate and secondary. These groups were broken down into three levels that included retained, borderline, and regular students. The Self-concept and Motivation Inventory was used to measure self-concept and motivation. The Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills were norm-referenced group achievement tests measuring skills in reading, language, and mathematics. The data collected was over two years and showed significant academic improvements for primary and intermediate retainees, but not for secondary retainees. At

the primary level the retained group showed increases in every achievement area. The self-concept scores from each level indicated no significant effects at the primary level. The primary group also indicated motivation increases in comparison to the borderline group. Overall, the results supported the effectiveness of retention at the primary level. Researchers supportive of retention have concluded that children with delayed maturation can be predicted to fail academically (Campbell and Bowman, 1993). The literature reports that retention can be beneficial for some children if certain conditions were met (Katz, 1984). If retention cannot be avoided, it was imperative that counselors target these children for early intervention (Campbell and Bowman, 1993). According to Medway and Rose (1984), four factors seem to be the most influential in determining whether retention will prove to be helpful to the child. First, the child whose intelligence was not lower than standard deviation below the mean for a specific intelligence test used will benefit more from retention. Second, the child had made some academic progress during the first year of the grade. Third, the child was emotionally adjusted and developing appropriate social skills, self-concept, and maturity. Fourth, the child's parents work along with the school to help the child. Johnson (1990) found no significant differences in academic achievement between retained and recommended-for-retention groups in the study on the effects of early grade retention of fourth graders. Both did have significantly lower scores than did the normal group. The group of professionals that support retention most were teachers. Teachers often believe retention was appropriate in some circumstances. When President Clinton (1999) called for an end to social promotion, many educational professionals interpreted this as a directive to retain

low-achieving students (Jimerson, 2001). Now the idea of retention was becoming more complex day after day.

Summary

Throughout this literature review there were many strong points that were addressed concerning grade retention. Much of the literature did not favor grade retention of an under-achieving child as an effective method. In the section variables that contribute to grade retention, the finds suggest the leading predictors for identifying risks for grade retention were ethnicity (the minority), conduct disorder, lack of discipline in the home, early school performance, gender (boys), parental participation in school, poverty, confidence interval, low maternal education, single parent homes and speech defects. The results for the negative effects of grade retention showed how students view retention as punishment. It significantly lowers academic achievement and self-esteem. They also eventually fall behind and receive lower employment competence ratings in comparison to a group of low-achieving peer-students. Since much of the research done showed the negative aspects of grade retention, studies needed to be done to follow-up on alternatives to grade retention that were more effective. Alternatives reviewed were remediation, enhancing professional development for teachers, employing redesigned school structures that support more intensive learning, providing targeted supports and services when needed, employing classroom assessments that better inform teaching, and other within-grade instructional efforts. The last section of support studies for grade retention was limited. One major point suggested was if it was necessary for grade retention, then there should be support from the school counseling program. In addition some students do benefit from retention when parents and the schoolwork together to

help develop appropriate social skills, self-concept, and maturity of the child, and educators give much support to the idea of grade retention when needed. After reviewing the literature, there was a better understanding of how effective grade retention can be in a child's educational development.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Sample

The population of this sample came from suburban elementary school in Southern Jersey. The subjects consisted of 58 second and third grade students both female and male. Of these 58 students, 25 were males (code=1 for gender), 33 were females (code=2 for gender). The students did not interact physically in the study, only their cumulative school records were reviewed for this study. Within the students records, present grade, the grade level retained, subjects' grades of language/literacy and mathematics, and gender were considered for research. The sample was divided into three groups, which consisted of the retained group (code=1), the low-achieving promoted group (code=2), and the placed transition group (code=3). From the sample, 24 students were retained on the first or second grade level, 23 students who were low achievers but still promoted, and 11 were the students placed in transition.

Measures

There were two types of variables in this study the independent and dependent. The independent variables were gender and the retained/ promoted/transition students. The dependent variable was the academic performance scores. The measure of central tendency will take the scores, find the mean and compare between groups. The scores were computed from the grades on the cumulative folder. Based on the grading scale, an A=4 points, A-=3.5 points, B+=3.3 points, B=3 points, B-=2.7 points, C+=2.3 points, C=2 points, C-=1.7 points, D+=1.3 points, D=1 point, D-=.7 points, and F=0 points. The

reliability seems to be consistent in these measures. The students were receiving the same materials, such as readings books, phonics books, activity sheets and workbooks, math books, and grade-level integrated and theme skills tests.

Design

This study's design and data analysis was based on the use of academic records of second and third grade students who were retained, low-achievers that were still promoted and those placed in transition. Because of the group selected for the study, the data analysis used for grade-scores was the Kruskal-Wallis. The grade-scores were correlated with retained/promoted/placed and gender. A Two-way ANOVA was completed to do the interaction of the independent variables.

Testable Hypothesis

Students who were retained at the first or second grade level, because they did not meet the requirements for promotion, such as successfully completing grade content, have a greater chance of developing academically than those who were low-achievers but promoted to the next grade level instead or placed in a transition class. The other testable statement focused on gender. Female students, whether retained or not, improve in academic performance, for both areas of language/literacy and mathematics, greater than male students. Expected results will show interaction between retained/promoted/transition students and gender. The Null hypothesis would state no difference would be found in academic performance between retained students and promoted low-achieving students. In addition, no difference was found in academic performance based on gender of students. Lastly, there was no interaction between whether they were retained or promoted and the gender.

Analysis

Analyses included testing for interactions among significant variables. Descriptive statistics represented student gender and subjects of language/literacy and mathematics. Following the descriptive statistics was comparison of the group differences for retained students and promoted low-achievers. Research indicated that students retained for academic/achievement performance were from a particular gender, which represented males. Therefore, in this study difference in gender was investigated. Multivariate analysis for numerical outcome measures (i.e. grades) examined the relationship between retention status and second/third grade student outcomes. Regression analyses were performed for retained versus promoted and transition students. To examine if retention had differential outcomes for different students, interactions between the independent variable and the covariates were reviewed.

Summary

The sample consisted of 58 third and second grade students from a small suburban elementary school in Southern Jersey. Out of the 58 students, 24 students were retained at the first or second grade level, 23 students were low-achievers that were promoted, and 11 were students placed in transition. The students did not have direct contact within the study; only the cumulative academic school records of these students were reviewed for present grade, retained grade (if any), gender, and subject grades. The independent variables were gender and retained/promoted/transition, and the dependent variable was academic performance scores. The grades were computed on a scale of 0-4, with a 0 equivalent to F and 4 equivalent to A. The grades were correlated with the retained/promoted/transition students and gender through a Kruskal-Wallis and Two-way

ANOVA. Hypotheses were based on the relationship between retained students and low-achieving promoted students' academic performance, whether gender had an effect on academic performance and if there was any interaction between the two independent variables. All data and analyses were entirely covered.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Results

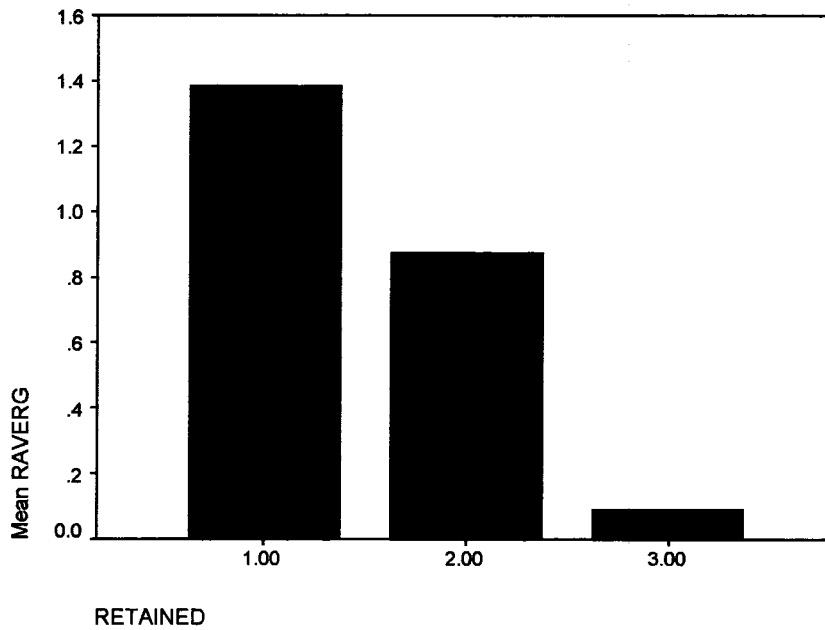
The hypotheses stated the following: H1 – “The students who were retained in elementary grades that have not met requirements for promotion have a greater chance of improving academic grades than those who were low achieving students and promoted instead.” H2 – “Female students who have been retained at grade level improve greater in academic performance than male students who have been retained.” The results indicated for hypothesis 1 that there was significance between the students retained and those not retained. In reference to hypothesis 2, there was only significance between the two genders with the mathematical grades, but not in language/literacy.

To examine the relation between the academic grades of the retained students, the low achieving promoted students, and students placed in transition, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used. According to Kruskal-Wallis, the results indicated significant difference between groups for language/literacy ($\chi^2=23.33$, $p<.0001$) and mathematics ($\chi^2=6.047$, $p<.05$).

First, the language/literacy grade averages were compared among the three groups. As show in Figure 4.1, the results on the bar graph show group 1, the retained group, as having a higher average in performance with their language/literacy grades. Second, the mathematical grade averages were compared among the three groups. As show in Figure 4.2, the results on the bar graph again show group 1 as having a higher average in performance with their mathematical grades. According to the results, the language/literacy and mathematical averages indicate that all students, whether retained

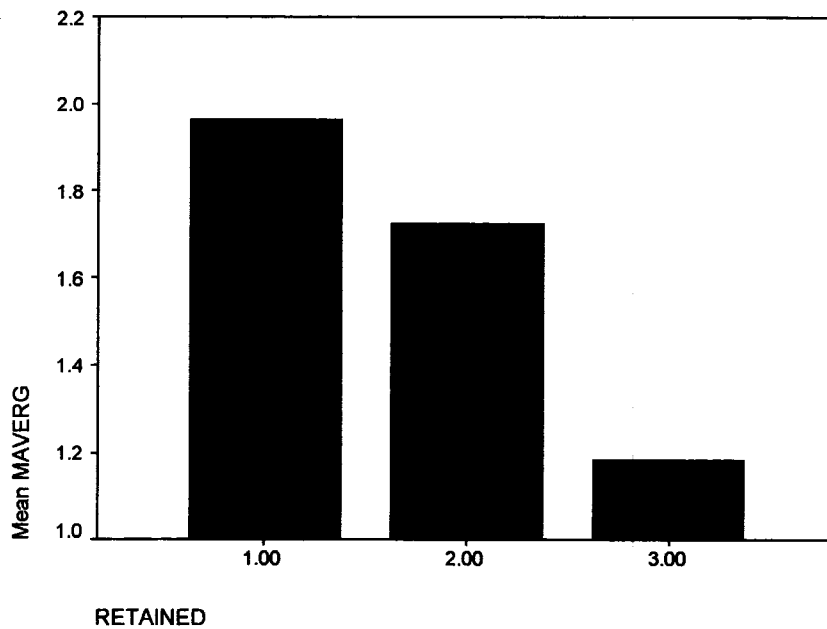
or not, were having difficulties in academic performance because they all fall under the letter grade “C” average.

Figure 4.1 – Graph of Language/Literacy Averages



Retained=1
Promoted=2
Transition=3

Figure 4.2 – Graph of Mathematical Averages



Retained=1
Promoted=2
Transition=3

To examine the relation between the academic grades of female and male students, a Two-way ANOVA was used. The results indicated the main effect of retention ($F(2,52)=19.788, p<.000$) as highly significant with regards to language/literacy averages. There was no significance with the main effect of gender for language/literacy scores. The results also indicated no interaction between retention and gender as shown in figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 - Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: RAVERG (Language/literacy Averages)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	13.537	5	2.707	9.340	.000
Intercept	27.541	1	27.541	95.008	.000
RETAINED	11.472	2	5.736	19.788	.000
GENDER	.477	1	.477	1.644	.205
RETAINED * GENDER	.102	2	5.080E-02	.175	.840
Error	15.074	52	.290		
Total	79.260	58			
Corrected Total	28.611	57			

a R Squared = .473 (Adjusted R Squared = .422)

The results showed significance for the main effects retention ($F(2,52)=5.138, p<.009$) and gender ($F(1,52)=5.088, p<.03$) with mathematical scores as shown in figure 4.4.

However, the results indicated no interaction between retention and gender.

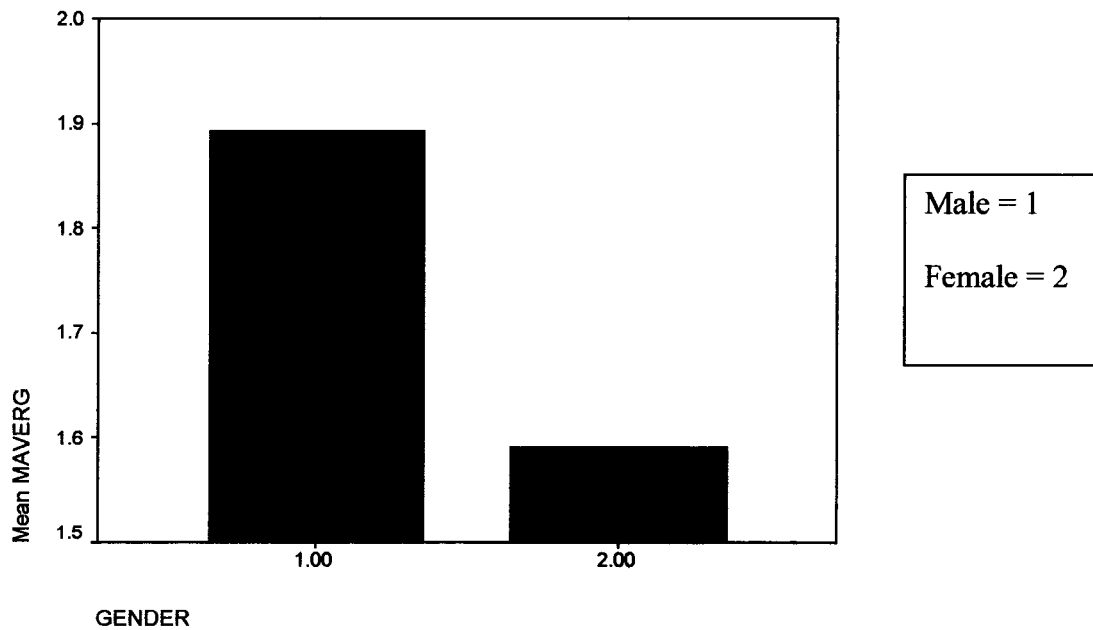
Figure 4.4 - Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: MAVERG (Mathematical Averages)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	7.854	5	1.571	2.580	.037
Intercept	112.918	1	112.918	185.455	.000
RETAINED	6.256	2	3.128	5.138	.009
GENDER	3.098	1	3.098	5.088	.028
RETAINED * GENDER	.136	2	6.800E-02	.112	.895
Error	31.661	52	.609		
Total	211.240	58			
Corrected Total	39.515	57			

a R Squared = .199 (Adjusted R Squared = .122)

The male's (gender 1) mathematical average mean was higher than the females (gender 2) for all three groups. Figure 4.5 displays a bar graph that shows exactly the difference in mathematical grade averages there was between the males and females, but both still achieving below average. However this did not support hypothesis 2, so this hypothesis was rejected.

Figure 4.5 – Graph for Mathematical Averages



In summary, the findings suggested that students who were retained perform better academically than the low-achieving students that were still promoted and the students placed in transition in both language/literacy and mathematical grades. Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. The results also indicate that gender did not have an affect on the performance of students in language/literacy grades, but did seem make a slight difference in the performance of students in mathematical grades. The males tended to do better than the females, whether retained or not, with their mathematical grades. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate through research if grade retention had a positive effect on a child's academic success. Research on the effects of grade retention on academic success has been increasing. Repeating grades in school had always been an issue that had presented itself as a priority in education. The search for an understanding of whether or not this process in the education system was an effective practice for students has taken time to develop.

For a while, educators were encouraged to abandon the idea of social promotion and retain children for poor academic performance. Many educators felt it was helpful to the educational system as a whole to retain students who did not reach a standard. However, research did not support retention as a viable strategy. Recent studies suggested that, instead of forcing academically trouble students to mature and to achieve competence in later grades, retention made students feel indifferent. Therefore, many researchers have taken the position that retention did not have a positive effect on a child's academic performance. Instead, it lowered a child's social and emotional well being and could even lead them to eventually drop out of school. Meisels and Liaw (1993) concluded that retention at any point was associated with low academics and personal-social outcomes. Nonretained students demonstrated higher grades, test scores and fewer academic, emotional and behavioral problems than retained students. Retention did not equalize outcomes even when retained students have been in school a

year longer. However, results of this study did not seem to confirm findings of this research.

Research has shown that there were many variables contributing to grade retention. This research had identified the type of student that should be referred for retention. Majority of the findings collectively suggested gender (mostly males), behavior conduct in school, birth defects, parents' educational level (high school dropouts), poverty and race/ethnicity (African Americans and Hispanics) were factors that contributed to retention. Variables contributing to grade retention was researched by Byrd and Weitzman (1994). The results of this study were conducted to investigate health and social factors associated with early grade retention, as well as predictors of retention, in a nationally representative sample of children in the United States.

Nationally, 7.6% of children repeated kindergarten or first grade. Factors associated with increased risk of grade retention were poverty, male gender, low maternal education, deafness, speech defects, low birth weight, enuresis, and exposure to household smoke. High maternal education and residence with both biological parents at age six years were independently associated with a decreased risk of retention. This was the first study that uses national data to investigate how health and social factors individually and collectively contributed to early grade retention. In this study, the number of male retentions consisted of 9, and females consisted of 15, which gave a total of 24 retained students. The study's results did not support the finding that mostly males were retained and academically performed considerably below the females.

In place of retention, alternatives were preferred to better promote academic performance. Some alternatives found in research included enhancing professional

development of teachers, reducing class sizes, delaying school entry, and employing various classroom assessments. Therefore a study on whether class size remediates achievement scores of kindergarteners and first graders once they have been retained was conducted using the Project STAR database. The study found that there were no significant differences among retained students at either eighth grade level between or among classes. Also, class size did not remediate poor academic achievement (Harvey, 1994). None of the other alternatives have been proven more effective than actual retention. Therefore, researchers suggested if retention cannot be avoided, it was important that group counseling was set up to work with these children on early intervention programs that would provide emotional support to protect a student's self-esteem issues, if any.

Discussion

This study investigated the possibility that retained students had a better chance of improving their academic performance, because they were given more time to mature, than those students who were achieving below average but still promoted. The results showed significance between retention and academic performance. It indicated that it may help to some degree, but not as much as many educators would hope because means remained consistent at or below average. Students still struggled with maintaining and performing above average. They continued to work at an average pace or even below average expectancy. The results also indicated that gender did not affect the academic performance of students concerning language/literacy grades. This could have produced different results if the sample size was larger. However it did show some indication that boys performed better on mathematical concepts than girls, which rejected hypothesis 2.

This was expected for mathematics because the findings supported other research that had been done on mathematic performance differences in gender. The research that was most supportive to this study was done by Pomplun (1988). He measured self-concept, motivation, teacher, student, and parent attitudes; and reading, language, and mathematics achievement to compare primary, intermediate, and secondary retainees with borderline and regular students. The students were grouped into three levels by grade, which consisted of primary, intermediate and secondary. These groups were broken down into three levels that included retained, borderline, and regular students. The data collected was over two years and showed significant academic improvements for primary and intermediate retainees, but not for secondary retainees. At the primary level the retained group showed increases in every achievement area. The self-concept scores from each level indicated no significant effects at the primary level. The primary group also indicated motivation increases in comparison to the borderline group. Overall, the results supported the effectiveness of retention at the primary level. Therefore, if retention occurs during the elementary years it tended to be more beneficial than in later schooling, which supported this research of elementary grade retention for improving academic performance.

Conclusions

As stated before, there is a need to build research on the effects of grade retention on academic success because it continues year after year without being proven to be an effective practice. Grade retention seemed to be the answer to low student motivation and achievement. The message that children internalized about the experience was negative and confusing. In addition, the long-term effects did not support retention.

Therefore, most of the findings of this research did not support the majority of literature review for achievement of students retained. However, the results of this study did not address social-emotional factors.

The majority of the literature reviewed was in favor of alternatives instead of retention because of the negative effects it had on a student's academic performance and social-emotional behavior. The negative aspects of retention seemed to be limited to the social and emotional outcomes of retained students, which were relevant, but it seemed more important to focus on a student's improved academic performance in this study. The academic performance was what the students were being evaluated on and the determination of whether they would be promoted to the next grade level and able to meet the academic requirements. It was very obvious that a careful approach needs to be taken for each case that is referred for academic retention to decide if other alternatives are more beneficial.

Implications for Future Research

Variables for socioeconomic status and ethnicity or race were not reviewed in this research. By looking at this variable within the same school district could provide a better understanding of the position as a contributing factor for students being retained and allow for early interventions to take place for students at-risk. Something that could have been modified for the purpose of this study was having a larger sample size by not limiting the study to one elementary school but reviewing records of other elementary schools in the county. Grade retention has brought the attention on a student's performance in reading, language, and mathematics grades; and the teacher and student attitudes, but it has not done much research on comparing the student's self-concept or

motivation with academic performance. Future research could address the social and emotional adjustment of students who were retained and compare academic performance. If behavioral problems were found to be high among the retained students, then a support group led by counselors would be a recommendation as a behavioral modification and rebuilding students' self-concept and attitudes about success. Since the review of literature had a position of alternatives to retention, another opportunity for future research would be to compare alternative strategies that have been implemented in school districts to other districts that have high percentages of retention to investigate if one is more effective than the other. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of retention on a student's academic performance.

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