

**INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' CLASS RETENTION PERCEPTION ON
STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN BUURI SUB COUNTY,
MERU COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the influence of students' perception of class retention on academic achievement in public secondary schools in Buuri sub-county, Meru County, Kenya. Retention decisions in Kenya are arrived at in most instances without consulting the students. The decision-making by the teachers is usually influenced by previous experiences or influence by other teachers (Perrachione, 2008). Thus, at times, the students are forced to repeat without their free will. This usually has a negative effect on the students' social well-being and lead to low esteem in most instances. The study employed descriptive and explanatory study designs. The study population comprised 1263 form four students from 34 public secondary schools within Buuri Sub County, Meru County, Kenya. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling was utilized to pick respondents comprised in the research. A total of 132 students were sampled, which was approximately 10% of the accessible population. Data for the study was collected by use of self-administered and structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, T – test, and Person correlation analyses were utilized for data analysis. The study revealed that there was a positive correlation between students' class retention perception and students' academic achievement. Besides, an independent-sample t-test indicated that the academic scores for students exhibiting positive class retention perception was higher than their counterparts exhibiting negative class retention perception. It was established that when a student perceives class retention is beneficial and not a mode of punishment, it is likely that the said student will work hard to reap the benefits of class retention and hence post high academic scores. Repeaters who perceive class retention as a punishment feel demoralized, loose hope in their academic abilities and as a result their self-esteem is punctured. Consequently, they are passive in the learning process, lack the zeal to seek

academic excellence and hence post low academic scores. It was concluded that students' class retention perception had a significant influence on students' academic achievement. Students who perceived class retention positively received overwhelming support from teachers and classmates, exhibited a high self-drive, and were generally disciplined and these factors contributed to high academic achievement. It is recommended that teachers, parents and other immediate stakeholders of the school should fully support students who have decided to repeat a class on their own volition as such support could positively impact on the students' perception on class retention and thus influence students' academic achievement to the positive.

Keywords: Class Retention, repetition and perception

INTRODUCTION

Background

Recently, research has been extensively done regarding class retention in higher education with little success on whether it influences a student positively or negatively (Mbuva, 2011). When teachers encounter a struggling student, two options are often offered: tutoring the student in their area of weakness or retaining the student in the same class for another year. Grade retention is usually considered a last-resort option, assuming all the other methods to help a student improve academically so as to advance to the next grade have failed. However, immaturity can also be a reason for grade retention. A child's formative years are critical, and developmental preparedness is a primary factor in retention decisions. Making a decision to have a child repeat nursery school or early primary school years is difficult and often contentious (Cannon and Lipscomb, 2011).

According to Mbuva (2011), retention offers a chance for low-achieving students to acquire social/behavioral academic skills as well as the required grade-level before advancing to the next class or grade. Mbuva maintains that promoting children to the next class before they have mastered prerequisite knowledge and expertise sets them up to fail. On the other hand, Viland (2001) claims that grade retention does not increase a student's academic achievement significantly, it may affect a student's social and emotional development negatively by obliterating their self-esteem, and this raises these students' odds of dropping out of school later in life. The latter concerns seem to be most probable and outweigh the potential benefits of grade retention.

Research indicates that grade retention has been practiced for decades, yet its ineffectiveness is quite evident. A question raised now and again is the primary reason for continued failure of students who repeat the same material for an entire year. Teachers and parents still endorse the

decision for grade retention despite the overwhelming evidence not only of its psychological impact but also the poor academic achievement of most students who repeat a school year (Cannon and Lipscomb, 2011).

Grade retention has been a common practice across the globe although studies indicating the academic benefits of retaining a student for another year in the same grade are uncertain. In 1991, California Department of Education voted against grade retention because literature indicated little to no benefit of the practice. The 1991 proposal contradicted the Assembly Bill (AB) 1626 of the United States of America that was passed on 1998, indicating that the school districts should adopt a student's promotion and retention policy to identify learners of low ability who should be retained. The decision on whether to promote a student or not should be based on a student's proficiency levels, grades, and performance on other academic indicators as determined by their respective school district (Cannon and Lipscomb, 2011).

Research on teacher's perception in Zambia and Uganda concluded that most teachers perceived retention favorably and as a crucial tool for less academically abled children who needed another opportunity to advance their awareness and improve their preparation for the higher schooling levels. About 80% of teachers in Senegal perceived retention as an 'efficient' strategy. On the other hand, 18% perceived it as 'extremely efficient'. Only 2% of these teachers disapproved retention by regarding it as 'totally inefficient' (Michaelowa, 2003). In 2005, implementation and adoption of the automatic promotion policy occurred in Uganda as an interventionist approach that meant to improve the internal quality and competence of primary school education. This implies that the strategy was and is still targeted at eliminating, if not reducing, repetition of grades, decreasing the number of school dropout cases, and improving pedagogical period and effectiveness, therefore, bettering outcomes of learning. The arguments state the ability of the policy to save cost for both the households and the governments. The strategy succeeds in enhancing internal efficiency through reduction or elimination of student's grade repetition thus increasing survival and improving the rates of school completion through reduced number of dropouts and lessened number of years spent by the low achieving students in school (Clymer, 2013).

Approximately 42% of secondary school students from informal urban settlements in Nairobi County are retained due to poor performance (Ochieng, 2010). According to a study carried out on challenges facing retained students in informal urban settlements, a case of Kibera slum, statistics indicate a decrease in the rate of primary school completion and transition from primary to secondary school. This is an indication of systematic disadvantage to children living in informal urban settlements and rural areas. Irregular student attendance and teacher absenteeism was noted as a major contributor to increased grade retention rate in Kibera Slum. Poor academic

performance was attributed to decreased amount of learning time, forcing most students to fall behind compared to their counterparts in other schools within Nairobi County.

METHODS

This research was conducted in Buuri Sub County located in Meru County, Kenya. The study utilized a mixed method strategy, a combination of qualitative and quantitative method to gather and analyze data. Descriptive and explanatory study designs were adopted. The study focused on 34 public secondary schools within Buuri Sub County, Meru County where the target population was 1263 form four students. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling was utilized to pick respondent comprised in the research total of 132 students were sampled, which was approximately 10% of the accessible population. Data for the study was collected by use of self-administered and structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, T – test, and Person correlation analyses were used to examine the influence of students’ perception of class retention on academic achievement in public secondary schools in Buuri sub-county Meru County.

RESULTS

Students’ Class Retention Perception

Students’ class retention perception was measured using ten items that were subjected to the respondents for examination.

Table 1: Students’ Class Retention Perception

S/N	Class Retention Perception Item	SD		D		A		SA	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
i.	Repeating a class is good in helping weak students perform better	13	10.8	32	26.7	56	46.7	19	15.8
ii.	I would rather change school than repeat class in my current school	39	32.5	51	42.5	30	25.0	0	0.0
iii.	I would feel embarrassed if am asked to repeat a class	50	41.7	40	33.3	30	25.0	0	0.0
iv.	I have friends who complain being harassed by classmates for repeating	41	34.2	49	40.8	30	25.0	0	0.0

v. Forced class repetition will affect a students' academic performance negatively	48	40.0	41	34.2	31	25.8	0	0.0
vi. Students should sometimes be asked to repeat a class	8	6.7	38	31.7	54	45.0	20	16.6
vii. I would accept to repeat a class if asked to	9	7.5	38	31.7	47	39.2	26	21.6
viii. I have no problem with repeaters in my class	7	5.8	38	31.7	56	46.7	19	15.8
ix. Repeaters feel demoralized among peers in the same class	49	40.9	40	33.3	31	25.8	0	0.0
Repeaters are harassed by their peers in class	49	40.9	40	33.3	31	25.8	0	0.0

According to the results in Table 1: Item one sought to establish the respondents' opinion on whether repeating a class is good in helping weak students improve their examination's scores. Nearly half of the respondents (46.7%) concurred that repeating a class aids a student's performance, 26.7% gave a differing opinion, and 15.8% firmly supported the statement while 10.8% sternly opposed that repeating a class aids students' academic performance. This result implies that in the opinion of the students interviewed, repeating a class is good in helping weak students perform better since close to two thirds of the respondents upheld this view. Item two sought to examine the respondents' opinion on whether they would rather change school than repeat class in the current school. Majority of the respondents (42.5%) disagreed that they would rather change school than repeat in the current school, 32.5% were strongly opposed to the statement while 25.0% of the respondents concurred that they would rather change school than repeat class in the current school. This result indicates that the students did not find it outrageous to repeat class in their current school as only a quarter indicated that they would rather change school than repeat class in their current school. Item three inquired on whether, the respondents would feel embarrassed if asked to repeat a class. Slightly above two fifths of the respondents (41.7%) strongly disagreed that they would feel embarrassed if asked to repeat a class, a third of the respondents (33.3%) indicated that they would not be embarrassed while a quarter of the respondents concurred that they would be embarrassed if asked to repeat a class. Hence, to most of the students, repeating a class would not be a cause of embarrassment since only a quarter of the respondents specified that they would be embarrassed if asked to repeat a class. This result demonstrates that in general, students had a positive perception on class retention as supported by earlier assertions. Item four sought to establish whether the respondents had friends who were being harassed by their colleagues for repeating a class. Majority of the respondents

(40.8%) disagreed that they had friends who complained of being harassed by classmates for repeating, 34.2% strongly disagreed while a quarter of the respondents (25.0%) testified that they had friends who complained of being harassed for repeating a class. This result suggests that harassment of students who had repeated a class by their classmates was experienced to a moderate extent since a quarter of the respondents upheld this opinion. In regard to item five, the respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether forced class retention would affect a student's academic performance negatively. Two fifths of the respondents (40.0%) strongly disagreed that class forced retention would negatively affect a student's academic performance, 34.2% disagreed while 25.8% asserted that forced class retention would negatively affect a student's academic achievement. Hence, in the opinion of most of the respondents, forced class retention would not affect a student's academic performance negatively since three quarters of the respondents upheld this opinion. Item six of sought to examine the opinion of the respondents on whether students should sometimes be asked to repeat a class. Interestingly, majority of the respondents (45.0%) concurred that students should sometimes be asked to repeat a class, 31.7% disagreed, and 16.6% firmly indicated that students should sometimes be asked to repeat a class while 6.7% strongly disagreed with the idea of asking students to repeat a class. This result indicates that, in the opinion of the respondents, students should sometimes be asked to repeat since nearly two thirds of the respondents upheld this opinion. In respect to item seven, the respondents were asked whether they would accept to repeat a class if requested so. Majority of the respondents (39.2%) attested that they would repeat a class if asked to, 31.7% indicated that they would not concur with the idea of repeating a class if asked to, and 21.6% firmly asserted that they would accept to repeat a class if asked to while 7.5% strongly indicated that they would not accept to repeat a class if asked to. This result signifies that most of the respondents would accept to repeat a class if asked to since close to two thirds of the respondents supported this opinion. The explanation of this finding could be the fact that majority of the respondents had earlier indicated that grade retention was helpful and also the general assertion that students should sometimes be retained. Item eight inquired on whether, the students had problems with repeaters in their class. Nearly half of the respondents (46.7%) indicated that they had no problem with repeaters in their class, 31.7% of the respondents asserted that they encountered problems with repeaters in their class, and 15.8% confidently asserted that they had no problems with repeaters in their class while 5.8% decisively attested that they encountered problems with repeaters in their class. This result implies that, in the opinion of the respondents, the students did not encounter major problems with repeaters in their class since close to two thirds of the respondents upheld this opinion. The explanation of this finding could be the fact that students had positive perception towards class retention, subsequently finding it prudent to integrate with repeaters in their class. Item nine inquired on whether, repeaters felt demoralized among peers in the same class. Two fifths of the respondents (40.9%) strongly disagreed that repeaters felt

demoralized among peers in the same class, a third of the respondents (33.3%) disagreed while 25.8% of the respondents admitted that repeaters felt demoralized among peers in the same class. This result suggests that, in the opinion of the respondents, repeaters felt demoralized among peers in the same class to a moderate extent since only a quarter of the respondents advanced this opinion. Item ten inquired on whether, repeaters were harassed by their peers in class. Two fifths of the respondents (40.9%) strongly disagreed that repeaters were harassed by their peers in class; a third of the respondents (33.3%) disagreed while 25.8% of the respondents admitted that repeaters were harassed by their peers in class. This result suggests that, in the opinion of the respondents, repeaters were harassed by their peers in class to a moderate extent since only a quarter of the respondents advanced this opinion.

Students' Class Retention Perception: Summary

The study revealed that, in the opinion of most of the respondents, repeating a class is good in helping weak students perform better, students did not find it outrageous to repeat class, repeating a class would not humiliate a student, harassment of students who had repeated a class by their classmates was experienced to a moderate extent, and forced class retention would not affect a student's academic performance negatively. Besides, most of the respondents believed that students should sometimes be asked to repeat, students would accept to repeat a class if asked to, students did not encounter major problems with repeaters in their class, some repeaters felt demoralized among peers in the same, and some repeaters were harassed by their peers in class.

Reviewing high correlations among responses from the ten items led the researcher to use one summated scale in looking at students' class retention perception. The answers from the ten questions were summed to create a students' class retention perception scale. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was .783; hence the internal consistence of the items related to students' class retention perception was good. The range of students' class retention perception scale was 10 to 50. The students' class retention perception scale was further transformed into two categories; positive students' class retention category and negative students' class retention perception, based on the scores on the continuous students' class retention perception scale. This categorization aided cross tabulations that was subsequently done in comparing students' class retention perception among different groups.

Students' Class Retention Perception Category

The table 2 introduces the view on how the students perceived class retention in terms of positive and negative.

Table 2: Students' Class Retention Perception Category

	Frequency	Percent
Negative	57	47.5
Positive	63	52.5
Total	120	100.0

It was established that majority of the respondents (52.5%) had a positive perception on class retention while 47.5% had a negative perception on class retention. This result signifies that the proportion of students' respondents who supported class retention was higher than their counterparts who did not support class retention. Hence, in the opinion of most of the respondents, class retention was helpful since more than half of the respondents were in the category that believed that class retention was good.

Class Retention Perception and Academic Achievement Correlations Analysis

The study sought to examine the influence of students' class retention perception on students' academic achievement in Buuri Sub County. A Pearson product-moment correlation was done to examine the relationship between students' class retention perception and students' academic achievement.

Table 3: Class Retention Perception and academic achievement Correlation

		Academic Achievement	Class Retention Perception
Academic Achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.766
	P – Value		.000
	N	120	120
Class Retention Perception	Pearson Correlation	.766	1
	P – Value	.000	
	N	120	120

Results in Table 3 indicate that there was a positive correlation between students' class retention perception and students' academic achievement, Pearson's $r(120) = .766, p < .001$

Class Retention Perception and Academic Achievement Comparison Analysis

A T-test was performed to examine the difference in academic scores between students exhibiting positive class retention perception and students' presenting negative class retention perception.

Table 4: Class Retention Perception and Academic Achievement Comparison Analysis

	CRP Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Academic Achievement	Negative	57	20.8	6.1	0.8
	Positive	63	28	4	0.5

It was established that the mean students' academic score of students exhibiting positive class retention perception was 28.0 (SD = 4.0) while that of their counterparts exhibiting negative class retention perception was 20.8 (SD = 6.1). This means that academic scores for students exhibiting positive class retention perception was higher than their counterparts exhibiting negative class retention perception as illustrated in table 4.

Table 5: Class Retention Perception and Academic achievement Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	T	df	P Value	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Academic achievement	Equal variances assumed	25.14	.000	-7.66	118	.000	-7.18	0.94
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.51	94.4	.000	-7.18	0.96

An independent-samples t-test indicated that students' academic scores were significantly higher for students with positive class retention perception ($M = 28.0$, $SD = 4.0$) than for their counterparts with negative class retention perception ($M = 20.8$, $SD = 6.1$), $t(118) = 7.66$, $p < .001$ (Results displayed in Table 5). Hence, the study established a significant relationship between students' class retention perception and students' academic achievement in Buuri Sub County.

DISCUSSION

Retention decisions in Kenya are arrived at in most instances without consulting the students. The decision-making by the teachers is usually influenced by previous experiences or influence by other teachers (Perrachione, 2008). Thus, at times, the students are forced to repeat without their free will. This usually has a negative effect on the students' social well-being and lead to low esteem in most instances. The teachers do not notice the negative impacts of class retention as a result of their beliefs and also short-term effects of class retention which are evident to teachers in most instances (William, Lee, Harrison, and Black, 2010). However, in this study it was found that students were not forced to repeat a class. They requested to repeat a class in order to secure a position in the university during the national examination.

It was also established that when a student perceives class retention is beneficial and not a mode of punishment, it is likely that the said student will work hard to reap the benefits of class retention and hence post high academic scores. Repeaters who perceive class retention as a punishment feel demoralized, loose hope in their academic abilities and as a result their self-esteem is punctured. Consequently, they are passive in the learning process, lack the zeal to seek academic excellence and hence post low academic scores. Similarly, non-repeaters who perceive class retention negatively are anxious that they may be recommended for repeating, lack concentration in learning and as a result register dismal academic score. A repeater who perceives class retention positively frequently asks for extra work from teachers and in the long run establishes a cordial working relationship with the teachers and by extension the school administration. Consequently, his self-esteem is boosted and hence the student is able to actively participate in class discussions, respond positively to teachers' questions and thus effective learning takes place. Similarly, when a non-repeater perceives class retention positively, he is able to relate well with the repeaters and hence benefit academically from class discussions and other academic interactions with the repeaters.

The study established that retention causes delay in transition from high school to high level where the students want to repeat until they score an university threshold hence delaying in performance. This is in agreement with the findings of Odhiambo and Consolata (2015) who sought to examine the in-school elements that influenced student access to secondary school

after the completion of primary school in Narok district. The study involved 143 simple randomly selected primary and secondary school students in the district, revealing that forced repetition in this educational phase was rampant. However, this was not a solution to poor performance as the scholars found numerous undesired characteristics in these schools that may be responsible for poor academic performance. They include little or no support for slow learners, non-existent or biased teacher-student relationships, poor KCPE performances, little emphasis in co-curriculum activity, understaffing, and inadequate facilities as the major barriers to access to secondary education

The results are consistent with the research findings in the reviewed literature that have indicated that class retention aids weak students improve their academic scores. Nangithia (2016) indicated that when the decision of repeating a class is initiated by the concerned student, the repeater is likely to post higher academic scores. He argued that, if retention is voluntary, the student's self-esteem will improve as the student would be keen on posting higher scores, subsequently impacting positively of academic scores. These findings also supports the finding of Mbuvi (2011) who argued that grade retention offers a chance for low-achieving students to acquire behavioral academic skills as well as grade-level before advancing to the next grade. When the retention decision is voluntary, the students make every effort to improve on their previous score. In some instances, these students ask for opportunities to talk to their classmates during the class meetings, and during such talks, their classmates get inspired to work hard. Such students volunteer during lesson time to handle problems on the chalkboard, hence internalizing subject concepts very well. Subsequently, these students attain confidence in their abilities and hence attain high academic grades.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that students' class retention perception had a significant influence on students' academic achievement. Students who perceived class retention positively received overwhelming support from teachers and classmates, exhibited a high self-drive, and were generally disciplined and these factors contributed to high academic achievement. In the event of voluntary class retention, the student is likely to have his own set targets to be attained by repeating a class. In such a case, the student's self-esteem is boosted as he is optimistic that his new set of goals will be achieved. On the other hand students who repeat class against their will are constantly in conflict with teachers and at times are ridiculed by peers. Consequently, such repeaters develop hate for the school system, lose confidence in their abilities and as a result, their self-esteem is adversely affected. Moreover, students who perceived class retention negatively developed hatred for school, perceived class retention as a punishment, and engaged in indiscipline matters. Subsequently, such students registered low academic scores. Therefore, the relationship

between students' class retention perception and students' academic achievement was significant. It is recommended that teachers, parents and other immediate stakeholders of the school should fully support students who have decided to repeat a class on their own volition as such support could positively impact on the students' perception on class retention and thus influence students' academic achievement to the positive.

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