

استطلاع آراء المدرسين والمدراء حول الاستبقاء

كرمه الحسن

الملخص : تم استطلاع آراء مدرسي ومدراء بعض المدارس حول الاستبقاء أو إعادة الطالب لصفة ، وقد شمل هذا الاستطلاع كافة مراحل الدراسة من صف الروضة حتى الصف الثالث عشر ، وتكونت عينة الدراسة من ٨٣٣ مدرس ومدير مدرسة مثلت واقع المجتمع الدراسي في لبنان ، طبق عليهم استبياننا لمعرفة آرائهم حول هذا الإجراء ، والأسباب التي تقف وراء الاستبقاء ، كذلك خصائص الطلبة الذين تم استبقائهم ، ولمن يعود حق اتخاذ هذا القرار . وقد أظهرت النتائج أن الغالبية العظمى من المدرسين ومدراء المدارس يؤيدون الاستبقاء ويعتبرون أن اتخاذ القرار بشأنه يجب أن يكون بناء على قرار مشترك بين المدرس ومدير المدرسة علي حد سواء ، وحول الخصائص التي يستند إليها قرار الاستبقاء ، وجد أن " الضعف في التركيز " يأتي في المرتبة الأولى يعقبه " قلة الاهتمام " ثم بطئ الاستيعاب " أما عن أسباب الاستبقاء ، فأكثر الاستجابات وضعت ضعف المجموع العام كسبب أول ، يليه غياب المهارات الأساسية ، ثم كثرة غياب الطالب . ويتطرق هذا البحث أيضا إلي التباين في وجهات نظر مدرسي ومدراء المدارس وذلك بحسب المتغيرات المتعلقة بالخلفية ، مثل فئة المدرسة والموقع الجغرافي ، وسنوات الخبرة ، ومواد التعليم ، والصفوف التي تدرس ، وكذلك لغة التدريس .

A Survey of Teachers' and Principals' Views on Grade Retention Karma El Hassan*

Abstract: This study surveyed teachers' and principals' views on grade retention in grades K-13. 833 teachers and principals, a sample representative of the school population in Lebanon, were asked to fill out a questionnaire on their opinion of the practice, the reasons for retention, the characteristics of the retained and on who should make the retention decision. The results revealed those teachers and principals overwhelmingly supported grade retention and believed that the retention decision should be made jointly by teachers and principals. With respect to the characteristics of the retained, "low concentration" was the characteristic most often marked, followed by "low motivation" and "low intelligence". As to the reasons for retention, "overall academic weakness" was the reason most often cited, followed by "lack of basic skills" and "excessive absences". Differences between the views of the teachers and the principals and the effect of background variables like type of school, geographic location, years of experience, subjects and grades taught, and language of instruction were also investigated.

The practice of grade retention as an answer to low student achievement has witnessed resurgence in recent years. This is the case despite the fact that the literature has little evidence in support of retention as a pedagogically sound strategy (Holmes, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Meisels & Leaw, 1993; Shepard & Smith, 1989). More often, available evidence indicates that broad retention practices accomplish little of what they are intended to do in terms of academic gains, personal or social growth or improvement in attitude towards school (Dawson, Rafoth & Carey, 1990). Likewise, kindergarten retention does not prove to be beneficial to students (Holmes & Mathews, 1984; May & Welch, 1984; Thomas et al., 1992). Moreover, retention has been associated with an increased risk of dropping out of school (Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Mann, 1987).

The popularity of grade retention can be attributed to a number of reasons. Practitioners and the public believe that it is effective. It is believed that retaining students gives them a chance to build a foundation for future academic success, thereby increasing their chances of staying in the school (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). Moreover, the easy implementation of the retention decision and the fact that it does not disrupt the organization of the school and the classroom contribute to its popularity (Labaree, 1984). Retaining rather than promoting students

* Division of Education, American University of Beirut

conveys the message that standards are being upheld and helps to maximize test scores by reducing the number of children who only appear to be unsuccessful (Schultz, 1989). Finally, Shepard & Smith (1990) believe that the policy of nonpromotion persists because "teachers and principals cannot conduct controlled experiments. Without controlled comparisons, retention looks as if it works especially if you believe that it does." (p. 85).

Research on grade retention has focused mostly on short and long term effects of grade retention on achievement (Thomas et al., 1992), on comparing the benefits of early and late retention (Niklason, 1987), and on investigating the role of certain demographic variables on retention (Meisels et al., 1993; Mantzicopoulos, Morrison, Hinshaw & Carte, 1989). Teacher role has been given little attention although it is central to the retention decision. It is the teacher who makes judgements on student abilities, effort and progress and initiates accordingly the retention process (Ashton & Webb, 1988). Teachers' beliefs on education and child development underlie their judgements about students and influence the implementation of policies (Richardson, 1988; Schultz, 1989; Smith, 1989). The small but expanding literature on teachers' conceptions and theories of practice warns against ignoring teachers' beliefs (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991) and calls for understanding these beliefs and providing teachers with procedures that match them.

To better understand why teachers retain students, several studies attempted to identify teachers' views on retention (Byrnes, 1989; Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Smith, 1989; Tomchin & Impara., 1992). Smith found that all teachers supported grade retention but that the rates of retention differed depending on beliefs held by teachers on child development and on school practices. Similarly, Byrnes & Yamamoto surveyed parents, teachers and principals on the following: their opinion of grade retention, alternatives to retention and characteristics of the retained. Differences in opinion between teachers of different levels, teachers, principals and parents from differing socio-economic levels were also investigated. Finally, Tomchin & Impara, using a multidimensional approach, examined teachers' explicit and implicit beliefs about retention in grades K-7, and the factors that influence the retention decision. Responses indicated that teachers at all grade levels believed that retention was an acceptable school practice. Factors like academic performance, maturity, ability, gender and age influenced the retention decision but the importance of factors differed among teachers. The majority of teachers believed that retention was not harmful in grades K-3, but they disagreed on its impact on students in grades 4-7. All these studies revealed that teachers' beliefs were critical in the retention decision.

In Lebanon, grade retention is a problem (Antun & Abu Rjaili, 1975) that has recently reached serious proportions. A 1994 survey identified a 19% annual

retention rate for grades KG-13 (El-Hassan, 1996). Teachers and principals are resorting to this practice in the hope of raising standards lost during the civil war years (1975-1989) when automatic promotion was prevalent. Research on grade retention practices in Lebanon is very scarce and outdated. The only serious effort in the last twenty years has been El-Hassan's 1994 survey on grade retention practices in public and private schools in Lebanon and on the academic, demographic and home variables that related to retention (El-Hassan, 1996, 1998). However, no research was done on teachers' and principals' views on grade retention although this is a very important question to consider if effective solutions to the problem are to be proposed and implemented. Accordingly, this study will address three research questions. First, it will survey teachers' and principals' views on the following points found relevant to the questions: their opinion on the practice, the most salient characteristics of the retainers, the most important reasons for retention and finally who should make the retention decision. Second, and as the literature has reported differences in opinion on these questions between teachers and principals, the existence and type of these differences will be examined. Third, the effect of certain variables that have proven to affect teachers and principals beliefs on grade retention will be investigated. These variables include years of experience, grades (elementary, intermediate, secondary) and subjects taught (math, science, language arts and social studies), language of instruction (English, French, both English and French), type of school (public, private, private-free) and geographic location (5 districts or mohafazat).

Sample

Data were collected from a sample of 833 principals and teachers coming from 265 schools representative of the school population in Lebanon. The school sample was randomly selected and was stratified by type (public, private, private-free), geographic location (5 districts or mohafazat) and size. From each selected school, the principal and three randomly selected teachers from different levels (elementary, intermediate, and secondary) were asked to fill out a questionnaire prepared for this study. The final list of respondents consisted of 192 principal's (23%) and 641 teachers (77%). Some schools did not have all three levels, in which case one or two teachers participated. The distribution of the sample of teachers ($n=641$) by educational level was as follows: 47% elementary, 40% intermediate and 13% secondary. They had varying degrees of teaching experience ranging from one year to over 20 years with an average of 12 years ($sd= 7.65$). Fifty one percent came from public schools while 37% and 12% came from private and private free schools respectively. With respect to subjects taught, 56% of them taught language arts and social studies, while 17% and 11% were math and science teachers respectively. Thirteen percent of the participants

held administrative positions only without any teaching. For most of the sample (66%), French was the foreign language of instruction used while 25% used English and 9% used both languages.

Instrument and Procedure

In the development of the Teachers and Principals Questionnaire and to insure content validity, the research literature was surveyed for similar instruments, for characteristics of the retained, and for the reported reasons for retention (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Shepard & Smith., 1989). Items relevant to the research questions addressed were selected, and the final form of the survey included two parts. Part I of the Questionnaire elicited demographic information, including type of school, geographic location, foreign language of instruction, years of experience and grades and subjects taught. Part II had a 5-choice (strongly agree, agree, can't decide, disagree, strongly disagree) likert scale item requesting respondents' opinion on the statement "students should be retained if they could not complete grade requirements". In addition, teachers and principals were given a list of reasons for retention (lack of basic skills, immaturity, overall academic weakness, excessive absenteeism, poor work habits) and characteristics of the retained (developmentally immature, low self-concept, low motivation, learning disabled, shy and unassertive, low intelligence, behaviorally problematic, low concentration, emotionally unstable) and they were asked to choose the three most important reasons and most salient characteristics and rank them in order of importance from highest to lowest. Finally, teachers and principals had to give their opinion on who should make the retention decision (teachers, principals, parents, students, teachers and principals, teachers and principals and parents, all of the above mentioned).

In order to ensure reliability of administration, the following procedures were used. The field investigators were trained in conducting the interviews and in filling out the questionnaires. During the interview, the investigators first explained the purpose of the research, and then they filled out the demographic information and finally asked the questions related to opinion. If needed, each question was elaborated upon by explaining the terms and operationalizing the variables according to a prepared script. Where interviews could not be arranged, the investigators prepared written instructions and explanations similar to the ones in the interview and the subjects filled out the questionnaires at home and handed them over the next day.

Analysis

Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to report teachers' and principals' responses to the questions, while the Mann Whitney U-test was used to test for significant differences between principals and teachers on these responses.

In addition, chi-square analysis was used to test for dependence between views of teachers coming from different backgrounds (geographic locations, type of schools), teaching different subjects (mathematics, science, language arts and social studies) and grade levels (elementary, intermediate, secondary), using different languages (English, French, both), and with different years of teaching experience. Moreover, the phi coefficient was computed to measure the strength of the association whenever it existed.

Results

Views on Retention

Teachers and principals overwhelmingly accepted retention as a school practice. Eighty nine per cent approved (agreed or strongly agreed) of grade retention for students who could not complete grade requirements. With respect to reasons for retention, Table 1 lists reasons surveyed and the percentage of teachers and principals who marked each as the most important reason (rank 1), second most important reason (rank 2) and third most important reason (rank 3). "Overall academic weakness" was the reason most often cited as the most important reason for retention followed by "lack of basic skills" and "excessive absences from class". "Lack of basic skills" was the reason most often cited as second most important reason and "excessive absences" and "poor work habits" got the highest percentage for third most important reason.

Table(1) : Teachers' and Principals' Ranking of Reasons for Retention

Reason	Most important		2nd most imp		3rd most imp	
	%T	%P	%T	%P	%T	%P
Overall academic weakness	48	51	28	24	13	13
Lack of basic skills	29	32	30	30	18	18
Excessive absences	11	7	22	18	28	28
Emotional immaturity	7	4	7	11	13	15
Poor work habits	5	6	13	17	28	26

Table 2 lists the characteristics of the retained surveyed and the percentage of teachers and principals who marked each characteristic as most frequently observed, second most frequently observed and third most frequently observed. "Low concentration" was the characteristic most often marked by principals and teachers, followed by "low motivation" and "low intelligence". It also got the highest percentage for second and third most frequently observed characteristic. When asked who should make the retention decision, 48% of the respondents chose teachers and principal together, while 21% chose teachers alone and 18% chose all three, teachers and principal and parents. (See Table 3).

Differences Between Teachers and Principals

There were no differences between teachers and principals in their general opinion on grade retention. Eighty-eight percent of the principals and 89% of the teachers favored the practice. Similarly, teachers and principals did not differ in their ranking of the most frequently observed characteristics of retained students. Both of them marked "low concentration" as the characteristic most often observed, and the Mann Whitney U-tests conducted on the ratings did not reveal any significant differences, $U(9,9)=39.5$; $p<.05$. There were also no significant differences between teachers and principals marking the most important causes for retaining students. Both of them checked "overall academic weakness" as the most important cause and "lack of basic skills" and "excessive absences" as second and third causes for retention respectively.

Table 2
Teachers' and Principals' ranking of the Characteristics of the Retained

Characteristic	Most freq. Obs.		2nd. freq. obs.		3rd. freq. obs.	
	%T	%P	%T	%P	%T	%P
Low concentration	25	27	32	27	23	21
Low motivation	20	18	14	16	15	16
Low intelligence	19	16	23	19	10	14
Developmentally immature	14	14	4	5	8	7
Learning disabled	9	15	6	8	9	8
Behavioral problem	5	4	6	12	9	10
Unassertive / shy	2	3	8	6	14	9
Emotionally disturbed	4	1	4	5	9	12
low-self concept	2	4	3	2	3	3

Table 3
Principals and Teachers Views on Retention Decision

Decision made by	Teachers		Principals		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Teacher (t)	151	24	24	13	175	21
Principal (pr)	5	1	5	3	10	1
Parent (pa)	9	1	5	3	14	2
Student (st)	17	3	10	5	27	3
Pr & t	288	46	104	55	392	48
Pr & t & pa	115	18	32	17	147	18
All	46	7	9	5	55	7
Total	631	100	189	100	820	100

$$X_2^2 (6, N=820) = 21.14, p < .002$$

Similarly, Mann Whitney U-tests did not reveal significant differences in the ranking, $U(5,5)=11.5$; $p<.05$. Teachers' and principals' views on who should

make the retention decision were related as revealed by chi-square phi coefficient of 0.16 ($p < .002$). However, the differences between the distributions were not statistically significant, $U(7,7)=23$; $p < .05$. Table 3 reports number and percentage of teachers, principals, and total population who marked each alternative. Twenty four percent of the teachers believed that teachers should make the decision alone, while only 13% of the principals agreed with this. Similarly, 55% of the principals believed that teachers and principals should make the decision, while only 46% of the teachers had the same view.

The teachers' overwhelming support of grade retention (89%) was independent of subjects and levels taught foreign language of instruction used, years of teaching experience, type of school and geographic location as revealed by chi-square analysis. Eighty nine percent of elementary and intermediate teachers and 84% of secondary teachers approved of the practice. Similarly, subject taught (mathematics, science, language arts & social studies) did not affect teachers' opinion. With respect to foreign language used, 93% of teachers who used English favored retention versus 88% and 79% for those who used French alone or taught using both languages ($p = .06$). Years of experience did not significantly affect teachers views on using grade retention with 92-93% of those with 0-10 years of teaching experience favoring retention versus 86-89% for those with more than 10 years of experience. Similarly, type of school did not relate to teachers' support for the practice. Eighty nine percent of public school teachers favored it and 87% and 91% of private and private-free teachers were for the practice. Finally, teachers from different geographic regions had similar views, with 83-92% of them supporting the use of grade retention. Characteristics of the students retained were not independent of certain background variables as revealed by chi-square analysis (see Table 4). Teachers views on what they considered to be the most frequently observed characteristics of the retained were related to the level they taught in ($\phi = .23$, $p < .001$). Table 4 compares the percentages of elementary, intermediate and secondary teachers who marked each characteristic. "Low motivation" and "learning disabled" were characteristics most often observed by secondary teachers, while "low concentration", "low intelligence", and "developmentally immature" were most often selected by elementary and intermediate teachers.

Table 4
Teachers' Views on Characteristics of Retained by Level, Foreign Language Used, Subjects Taught, School Type, Geographic Region and Years of Experience.

Characteristic	Level			Foreign language used					Subjects	
	Elem.	Inter.	Sec.	English	French	Both	Math	Sciences	Soc. Studies / Lang. arts	Adm.
Low concentration	25%	28%	19%	29%	25%	19%	30%	30%	23%	26%
Low motivation	17	21	24	19	21	12	18	21	20	21
Low intelligence	20	19	15	21	17	18	16	14	21	15
Develop. Immature	18	11	11	9	16	15	16	12	14	12
Learning disabled	7	9	20	8	10	18	8	12	9	16
Behavioral problem	4	5	5	7	4	4	3	2	5	4
Unassertive / shy	3	2		2	2	6	1	1	3	4
Emotionally disturbed	5	4		3	4	1	6	2	3	1
Low self-concept	2	2	5	2	2	6	2	5	2	3

$\chi^2 (16, N = 707) = 38.24, p < .001$ $\chi^2 (16, N = 833) = 34.65, p < .004$

Table 4 (Cont'd)

School type				Geographic region				Years of experience				
Private	Public	Private Free	Beirut	Mount Lebanon	South	North	Bekaa	< 5	5 < 10	10 < 15	15 < 20	> 20
23%	30%	20%	22%	27%	26%	26%	19%	30%	22%	26%	24%	25%
26	13	14	8	17	21	24	27	17	19	22	19	21
16	18	27	21	18	22	17	12	19	20	20	17	18
13	15	19	18	15	12	12	17	13	16	19	13	13
11	12	3	17	8	9	12	10	9	6	7	12	13
4	5	4	2	4	5	4	7	3	7	3	5	4
1	3	6	1	4	1	1	3	5	2	1	3	1
3	2	7	6	4	1	2	4	4	5	1	4	3
2	3	2	5	3	4	1	1	2	5	3	3	2

$\chi^2 (32, N = 810) = 54.82, p < .007$ $\chi^2 (16, N = 833) = 53.79, p < .000.$

$\chi^2 (32, N = 833) = 47.11, p < .04$

Years of teaching experience did not relate to teachers' opinion on characteristics of the retained. Foreign language of instruction used and subjects taught did relate to the teachers' ranking of characteristics of the retained ($\phi = .20; p < .004$) and ($\phi = .32; p < .007$) respectively. As reported in Table 4, teachers using different languages differed in their ranking of the qualities of "developmentally immature", "low concentration" and "low intelligence". Similarly, math and

science teachers disagreed with social studies and language arts teachers on the importance of "low intelligence" and "low concentration". Finally, the teachers' views on characteristics of the retained were not independent of school type ($\phi = .25$; $p < .000$) and geographic location ($\phi = .24$; $p < .04$) [see Table 4]. "Low motivation" was the characteristic most often observed by private school teachers (26%), while "low concentration" was the one most often marked by teachers in public schools (30%). With respect to geographic location, "low motivation" was often marked by teachers outside Beirut area (the capital), while "learning disabled" was marked in Beirut but less often than in the other areas. As revealed by chi-square analysis, the reasons given for retaining students were related to certain background variables of the teachers like type of school ($\phi = .14$; $p < .03$), foreign language of instruction used ($\phi = .15$; $p < .02$), and subjects taught ($\phi = .19$; $p < .03$) and not related to other variables like geographic region, years of experience and educational level taught. Table 5 reports the percentage of teachers from different backgrounds that selected each reason. With respect to language of instruction used, different emphasis was given by teachers using English or French language to "general academic weakness", "emotional immaturity" and "excessive absences" with teachers using French giving more weight (25%) to non-academic reasons than teachers using English (13%). Similarly, when compared with language arts teachers, a higher percentage of math and science teachers selected "general academic weakness" as most important reason. With respect to type of school, the greatest differences were between the private-free and the other two types of schools.

With respect to who should make the retention decision, teachers' views were independent of school type, subjects and grades taught, and years of teaching experience. Teachers of different grade levels teaching

Table 5
Reasons for Retention by Level, Foreign Language Used, Subjects Taught, Type of School, Geographic Location and Years of Experience.

Reason	Level			Foreign language used		Subjects		Sciences	Soc. Studies /lang. arts	Adm.
	Elem.	Int.	Sec.	English	French	Both	Math			
General academic Weakness	43%	51%	57%	57%	45%	53%	52%	56%	46%	53%
Lack of basic skills	30	28	28	30	30	28	27	27	29	35
Excessive absences	12	11	5	7	12	8	8	10	12	7
Emotional immaturity	9	5	4	2	8	4	7	5	7	3
Poor work habits	6	5	5	4	5	8	6	2	6	2

Table 5 (Cont'd)

School Type		Geographic region		Mount Lebanon	South	North	Bekaa	Years of experience				
Private	Public	Private free	Beirut					< 5	5 < 10	10 < 15	15 < 20	> 20
51%	51%	32%	51%	48%	48%	49%	48%	48%	40%	56%	50%	50%
28	31	35	34	29	34	25	32	32	36	30	28	26
10	9	14	8	11	5	14	9	11	9	7	11	11
6	5	12	5	5	6	8	9	3	12	5	7	6
5	4	7	2	7	7	4	3	5	3	3	5	7

$X^2 (16, N = 807) = 28.40, p < .03$

$X^2 (8, N = 830) = 16.72, p < .03$

Table 6

Retention Decisions by Level, Foreign Language Used, Subjects Taught, Type of School, Geographic Location and Years of Experience.

Decision made by	Level			Foreign language used		Subjects			Soc. Studies / lang. arts	Adm.
	Elem.	Int.	Sec.	English	French	Both	Math	Sciences		
Teacher (t)	23%	25%	19%	21%	21%	23%	19%	27%	24%	14%
Principal (pr)	1	1	2	1	1	4	2		1	3
Parent (pa)	2	2		2	2		4		1	5
Student (St.)	3	3	2	2	4	3	2	1	4	6
Pr & t	47	43	56	56	44	56	45	42	47	54
Pr & t & pa	19	18	13	10	22	9	19	19	18	14
All	5	10	8	9	6	5	9	11	6	5

$X^2 (12, N = 820) = 34.31, p < .001$

Table 6 (Cont'd)

Private	Public	Private free	Beirut	Geographic region				Years of experience				
				Mount Lebanon	South	North	Bekaa	< 5	5 < 10	10 < 15	15 < 20	> 20
25%	17%	21%	17%	18%	23%	21%	32%	26%	22%	18%	22%	20%
1	1	1		2	1	2		1	3		1	1
2	1	3		1	1	4	1	3	3	2		1
3	4	4	1	3	1	7	3	1	5	2	6	3
47	48	50	57	51	51	41	42	44	38	50	48	52
16	20	21	22	18	18	19	12	18	19	22	16	17
7	9	1	2	8	6	6	10	7	9	7	7	5

$X^2 (24, N = 820) = 44.58, p < .001$

different subjects in different types of schools and with unequal years of teaching experience did not show dissimilar views on who should have the final say on retention. However, chi-square analysis revealed that foreign language of instruction used ($\phi = .20$; $p < .001$) and geographic location ($\phi = .23$; $p < .007$) related to teachers' views on this issue as shown in Table 6. A higher percentage of the teachers using English thought the decision should be made collectively by both teachers and principals. Teachers coming from different regions had differing views. For example, nearly one third of the teachers from Bekaa (a more rural area) believed that teachers alone should make the decision, while only 17% of the teachers from Beirut, the capital, supported the idea.

Discussion

In this study, the participating teachers and principals overwhelmingly (89%) supported the practice of grade retention. Practitioners from different backgrounds (public and private schools, geographic locations) teaching different grade levels and subjects and with differing years of experience did not significantly differ in their beliefs in this practice. The results are in agreement with other research findings (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Frymier & Gansneder, 1989; Gallup, 1978; Tomchin & Impara, 1992). In all of the above-cited studies and irrespective of teacher beliefs, all practitioners supported the use of grade retention. In the Frymier & Gansneder study, nearly two-thirds of the principals and half of the teachers supported the practice, while in the Byrnes & Yamamoto survey 74% of the principals and 65% of the teachers supported it. Tomchin & Impara reported that a majority of the teachers (82%) indicated that retention can be a positive step, and the practice of grade retention was accepted more in lower (K-3) than in upper grades (4-7). The reasons behind the popularity of this practice among practitioners vary and range from upholding standards to ease and convenience of implementation. Tomchin & Impara attribute teachers' belief in positive outcomes of retention to the limited or distorted information available to them, and to their concentration on short-term effects of retention and ignoring or not knowing the long-term effects.

"Overall academic weakness" was considered by a large percentage of teachers and principals (49%) as most appropriate reason for retaining students, while " lack of basic skills" and " excessive absences" and " poor work habits" were supported next. These findings indicate that academic failure in general or in basic skills are used as the basis for making promotion or non-promotion decisions. They also indicate that other factors not directly related to academic skills, like attendance and work habits, affect these retention decisions. Similarly, Tomchin & Impara (1992) report that academic performance was the most important factor that teachers consider when making retention decisions, while Byrnes (1989) found that " lack of basic skills" was the most widely

supported reason by teachers and principals. This study found no significant differences between teachers and principals in their evaluation of most important reasons for retention, which is in contrast to the Byrnes & Yamamoto (1986) study where significant differences were reported between teachers, principals and parents on this question with principals being more supportive of academic failure (57%) and excessive absences (69%) than teachers (37% and 39% respectively). However, a number of background variables investigated in this study did relate to the choice of reason for retention. Teachers coming from different types of schools, especially those coming from private-free schools, held differing viewpoints; they gave more weight to "lack of basic skills" and to some non-academic variables than to academic weakness. Subject taught was not independent of retention decision. Teachers teaching language arts and social studies were more supportive of non-academic reasons like emotional immaturity and excessive absences than teachers who were in administrative posts. Finally, foreign languages of instruction used did relate to retention decision. This can be expected as the language used (French or English) signify a kind of educational philosophy, which reflects itself in school policies like retention. The same rationale can be applied to the differences found between teachers teaching different subjects. Science and math teachers are expected to have different sets of beliefs and practices than language arts or social studies teachers. Although elementary and secondary teachers showed some differences in their selection of reasons for retention especially with respect to "general academic weakness" (43% Vs 57%), "excessive absences" (12% Vs 5%) and "emotional immaturity" (9% Vs 4%), reasons for retention proved to be statistically independent of level taught. This is in contrast to the research findings of Dawson et al. (1990), where differences in retention decisions were reported between kindergarten / lower elementary teachers (basic readiness, social-emotional maturity), upper elementary teachers (standardized test results) and secondary teachers (cut-off scores on basic skills tests). Similarly, Byrnes & Yamamoto report significant differences between groups of primary and upper elementary teachers. Primary teachers were found more apt to retain a child for academic failure related to basic skills than for factors such as behaviour, absenteeism and work habits, which were increasingly important in teachers' assessment of older students. Finally, years of experience and geographic location were independent of the reasons selected. The former finding was not expected, as one would presume that the more experienced teachers would have different reasons for retaining students than the less experienced teachers. Byrnes & Yamamoto reported that years of experience related to principals' retention decision, with a higher percentage of more experienced principals (80%) choosing immaturity as a reason for retaining than the less experienced administrators (30%). The non-significant finding of this study could have been due to the fact that years of experience were grouped into

five levels of 5 years each (less than five years, 5<10, 10<15, 15<20, and more than twenty). If only two levels had been used (less experienced, more experienced), then maybe more significant differences would have been obtained.

With respect to characteristics of the retained, the picture of the typical Lebanese child referred for retaining emerges as one with a low concentration span, not motivated to work and with a fairly low level of intelligence. These characteristics are somehow different from the ones reported in the Byrnes (1989) study, where developmentally immature, low self-esteem and low motivation were the three most frequently marked characteristics (in order). The difference in findings could be attributed to differences in samples surveyed. The present study involves grades K-13, while the Byrnes study was based on the responses of elementary teachers and principals and as such developmental immaturity would be considered of more importance. Another possible explanation could lie in cultural differences in activity level between Lebanese and American children. A 1985 study on the Conners Teachers Rating Scale (CTRS), a measure of hyperactivity and concentration in children, in Lebanon reported higher norms for Lebanese children when compared with same grade Americans (El-Hassan, 1985). As such, low concentration is viewed by Lebanese teachers as an acute problem and accordingly selected as the most important characteristic of the retained.

Teachers' and principals' consistency in characterizing retained students reported in this study is also confirmed in the Byrnes survey. However, in the Byrnes' study, only one characteristic, low-self esteem, showed a significant rank correlation difference. Sixty percent of the principals Vs 34% of the teachers marked this response. With the exception of years of experience, all teacher and principal variables investigated related to characteristics of the retained. The highest association was with subjects taught ($\phi = .32$) and school type ($\phi = .25$). For private school teachers, "low motivation" was the most frequently observed characteristic, while for public school teachers it was "low concentration". This can be explained by the fact that public school students come from low socio-economic levels which are reported to exhibit higher levels of low concentration than children from upper socio-economic levels (El-Hassan, 1985). With respect to educational level, elementary teachers marked low concentration, low intelligence and developmentally immature, while secondary teachers marked low motivation, learning disabled and low concentration. This outcome is expected as elementary students suffer from developmental immaturity and concentration problems more than upper class students do. This finding is also supported by Byrnes & Yamamoto (1986) study, where lower elementary teachers marked developmental immaturity more frequently than upper elementary teachers, 55% Vs 44% ($P < .03$), while the latter group marked low motivation and low self-esteem more frequently. As to geographic regions, low motivation was marked less frequently by teachers and principals in the most urban area, Beirut, when

compared with more rural areas (8% Vs 21-27%), while learning disabled was marked more often (17% Vs 9-12%). The reason could be that children in the more urban areas, due to parental influence and higher educational level, are more motivated. Another explanation could be that respondents in more urban areas were more familiar with the term "learning disability" and therefore marked it more often. The significant association between subject matter taught, foreign languages used in instruction and teachers' ranking of the characteristics of the retained could be explained by the fact that subjects taught and foreign languages used reflect differing philosophies, pedagogues, practices, and beliefs in what is critical to teaching and learning, and therefore responses significantly differed.

Nearly half (48%) the teachers and principals surveyed thought that the retention decision should be made jointly by both teachers and principals. This consensus reflects the importance of the decision as it requires both teachers' knowledge of the child's academic strengths and weaknesses and the principals' responsibility for decisions made in their schools. Despite this agreement, differences existed between teachers and principals on the extent of their support for this choice. A higher percentage of principals, 55% Vs 46, supported a retention decision made by principals and teachers together, while a higher percentage of teachers, 24% Vs 13%, thought that the decision should be made by teachers alone. This difference in opinion is also reported by Byrnes & Yamamoto (1986) but to a much greater extent. In that study, each group of educators thought that the decision should be left to each of them alone. Sixty six percent of the teachers thought they should have the final say in the retention decision while 54% of the principals' thought that it should be left to them. Only 13% of the teachers and 11% of the principals thought that the decision should be done jointly by teachers and principals. Similarly, Rafoth & Carey (1991) reported that 63-78% of retention decisions in kindergarten and elementary were based (mainly or partly) on teacher recommendations. The differences between the results reported in this study and those reported in reviewed research on this question could be due to differences in educational systems followed, teacher-principal relationships or other factors, probably cultural, which need to be investigated.

The agreement on the need for both teachers and principals in retention decision was not related to most of the variables investigated in this study. Only foreign language of instruction used and geographic location significantly related to this question. The impact of teaching in a school following the French or Anglo-Saxon orientation on teachers' beliefs was already explained in an earlier section. As for geographic location, the more rural areas tended to have confidence in the professional judgement of teachers. A lower percentage in the more rural areas (42% Vs 57%) believed in a joint decision, while a higher percentage (32% Vs 17%) supported a decision made by teachers alone. Byrnes

(1989) stated that socio-economic status related to parents' opinion on who should have the final say in retention decision. Similarly, socio-economic level may have contributed to the difference between urban and rural responses on who should make the retention decision. This however needs to be investigated.

Summary and Recommendations

This study has surveyed teachers' and principals' viewpoints on certain aspects of grade retention. The results revealed an overwhelming support of the practice of grade retention, the characteristics of the retained (low concentration, low motivation, low intelligence) and the reasons cited by teachers and principals for retaining students (overall academic weakness, lack of basic skills, excessive absences). There was agreement between teachers and principals on the most frequently observed characteristics of the retained (low concentration) and on the reasons most often given for retaining students (overall academic weakness). When asked who should make the retention decision, both supported a decision jointly taken by teachers and principals though the extent of the support differed between them. On some of the questions surveyed, teachers' beliefs were influenced by a number of factors like educational level and subjects taught, school type, geographic location, and foreign language of instruction used. In some aspects, the results were in agreement with research findings but in others, there were some outcomes particular to the Lebanese situation. These need to be further investigated in addition to parents and child's views on retention. Teachers' decisions are made within a context reflecting student, home, school and teacher characteristics. To effect change in retention practices, one needs to understand the beliefs held by the parties concerned and the interaction among these parties. This study has attempted to unravel the beliefs of teachers and principals, which underlie the extensive resorting to retention practice in Lebanon. Knowing these beliefs, their correlates and their effects will be the first step in devising policies that will eventually alter retention practices. No change can be effected without working on these beliefs trying to change them through staff development programs that (a) orient practitioners to the research evidence on the theory and implications of grade retention, and (b) familiarize them with effective alternative strategies.

References

- 1- Ashton, P.T., & Webb, R.B. (1988). **Making a difference: Teachers' sense of efficacy and student achievement**. New York : Longman.
- 2- Antun, J. & Abu Rjaili, K. (1975). **Aidat al Nizam altarbawi fi Lubnan**. [Returns of the Lebanese educational system]. Beirut: Center for Educational Research and Development.
- 3- Byrnes, D.A. (1989). Attitudes of students, parents, and educators toward repeating a grade. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), **Flunking Grades: Research and policies on retention**, (pp.109- 131). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 4- Byrnes, D.A & Yamamoto, K. (1986). Views on grade retention. **Journal of Research and Development in Education**, 20 (1), 14-20.
- 5- Dawson, M.M., Rafoth, M.A., & Carey, K.T. (1990). Best practices in assisting with promotion and retention decisions. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), **Best practices in school psychology**, vol. 2 (pp. 137-146). Washington, DC: NASP.
- 6- El-Hassan, K. (1985). **Greater Beirut norms for the Connors Teachers Rating Scale**. Unpublished master's thesis, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 7- El-Hassan, K. (1996). Grade retention practices in public and private schools in Lebanon. **Prospects**, 26(1), 197-206.
- 8- El-Hassan, K. (1998). Relation of academic history and demographic variables to grade retention. **Journal of Educational Research**, 91(5), 279-288.
- 9- Frymier, J., & Gansneder, B. (1989). The Phi Delta Kappa study of students at risk. **Phi Delta Kappan**, 71(2), 142-146.
- 10- Grissom, J.B., & Shepard, LA. (1989). Repeating and dropping out of school. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), **Flunking Grades: Research and policies on retention**, (pp.34-63). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 11- Gallup, G.H. (1978). The tenth annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. **Phi Delta Kappan**, 60, 33-45.
- 12- Holmes, C.T. (1989). Grade retention effects: A meta-analysis of research studies. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), **Flunking Relation of academic history and deGrades: Research and policies on retention**, (pp.34-63). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 13- Holmes, C.T., & Mathews, K.M. (1984). The effects of Nonpromotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta analysis. **Review of Educational Research**, 54, 225-236.
- 14- Jackson, G.B. (1975). The research evidence on the effects of grade retention. **Review of Educational Research**, 45, 613-635.

- 15- Labaree, D.F. (1984). Setting the standard: Alternative policies for student promotion. **Harvard Educational Review**, 54 (1), 67-87.
- 16- Mann, D. (1987). Can we help dropouts? Thinking about the undoable. In G. Natriello (Ed.) **School dropouts: Patterns and policies** (pp 3-19). New York: Teachers' College, Columbia University,
- 17- Mantzicopoulos, P., Morrison, D.C., Hinshaw, S.P. & Carte, E.T. (1989). Nonpromotion in kindergarten: The role of cognitive, perceptual, visual-motor, behavioural, achievement, socio-economic and demographic characteristics. **American Educational Research Journal**, 26, 107-121.
- 18- May, D.C. & Welch, E.L. (1984). The effects of developmental placement and early retention on children's later scores on standardised tests. **Psychology in the Schools**, 21, 381-385.
- 19- Meisels, S.J. & Leaw, F.R. (1993). Failure in grade: Do retained students catch up? **Journal of Educational Research**, 87 (2), 69-77.
- 20- Niklason, L.B. (1987). Do certain groups of children profit from a grade retention. **Psychology in the Schools**, 24, 339-345.
- 21- Rafoth, M.A., & Carey, K.T. (1991). A survey of state-level contracts for school psychology regarding retention / promotion practices: Are we evaluating the risks and benefits? **Psychology in the Schools**, 28, 35- 42.
- 22- Richardson, V. (1988, April). **Teachers' beliefs about at-risk students**. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 312 359).
- 23- Richardson, V., Anders, P., Tidwell, D. & Lloyd, C. (1991). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction. **American Educational Research Journal**, 28 (5), 559-586.
- 24- Schultz, T. (1989). Testing and retention of young children: Moving from controversy to reform. **Phi Delta Kappan**, 71(2), 125-129.
- 25- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1989). Introduction and overview. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), **Flunking Grades: Research and policies on retention**, (pp.1-15). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 26- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1990). Synthesis of research on grade retention. **Educational Leadership**, 48, 84-88.
- 27- Smith, M.L. (1989). Teachers' beliefs about retention. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), **Flunking Grades: Research and policies on retention**, (pp.132-150). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 28- Thomas, A.M., Armistead, L., Kempton, T., Lynch, S., Forehand, R., Nousiainen, S., Neighbours, B., & Tannebaum, L. (1992). Early retention: Are there long-term beneficial effects? **Psychology in the Schools**, 29, 342-347.

- 29- Tomchin, E.M. & Impara, J.C. (1992). Unraveling teachers' beliefs about grade retention. **American Educational Research Journal**, 29(1), 199-223.

أجيز البحث للنشر في ١٩٩٨/١٠/٢١

أعد البحث بعد تعديله في ١٩٩٨/١٢/١٣

ورد البحث للمجلة في ١٩٩٨/٤/١

- 15- Labaree, D.F. (1984). Setting the standard: Alternative policies for student promotion. Harvard Educational Review, 54 (1), 67-87.
- 16- Mann, D. (1987). Can we help dropouts? Thinking about the undoable. In G. Natriello (Ed.) School dropouts: Patterns and policies (pp 3-19). New York: Teachers' College, Columbia University,
- 17- Mantzicopoulos, P., Morrison, D.C., Hinshaw, S.P. & Carte, E.T. (1989). Nonpromotion in kindergarten: The role of cognitive, perceptual, visual-motor, behavioural, achievement, socio-economic and demographic characteristics. American Educational Research Journal, 26, 107-121.
- 18- May, D.C. & Welch, E.L. (1984). The effects of developmental placement and early retention on children's later scores on standardised tests. Psychology in the Schools, 21, 381-385.
- 19- Meisels, S.J. & Leaw, F.R. (1993). Failure in grade: Do retained students catch up? Journal of Educational Research, 87 (2), 69-77.
- 20- Niklason, L.B. (1987). Do certain groups of children profit from a grade retention. Psychology in the Schools, 24, 339-345.
- 21- Rafoth, M.A., & Carey, K.T. (1991). A survey of state-level contracts for school psychology regarding retention / promotion practices: Are we evaluating the risks and benefits? Psychology in the Schools, 28, 35- 42.
- 22- Richardson, V. (1988, April). Teachers' beliefs about at-risk students. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 312 359).
- 23- Richardson, V., Anders, P., Tidwell, D. & Lloyd, C. (1991). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction. American Educational Research Journal, 28 (5), 559-586.
- 24- Schultz, T. (1989). Testing and retention of young children: Moving from controversy to reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 71(2), 125-129.
- 25- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1989). Introduction and overview. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking Grades: Research and policies on retention, (pp.1-15). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 26- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1990). Synthesis of research on grade retention. Educational Leadership, 48, 84-88.
- 27- Smith, M.L. (1989). Teachers' beliefs about retention. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking Grades: Research and policies on retention, (pp.132-150). New York: The Falmer Press.
- 28- Thomas, A.M., Armistead, L., Kempton, T., Lynch, S., Forehand, R., Nousiainen, S., Neighbours, B., & Tannebaum, L. (1992)-Early retention: Are there long-term beneficial effects? Psychology in the Schools, 29, 342-347:

- 29- Tomchin, E.M. & Impara, J.C. (1992). Unraveling teachers' beliefs about grade retention. American Educational Research Journal, 29(1), 199-223.