Grade Retention Practices and Student Scores: A Case of Private Schools

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INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved, supportive and wonderful husband, Syed Ahmad Zaidi and to my humble and most learned mother, Zahida Saeed Haider, who has taught me the power of patience and perseverance.
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This research study was conducted to explore the grade retention practices in private schools of Karachi. The study focused on the impact of grade retention and investigated its effectiveness in terms of its merits versus demerits. Grade retention means holding a student back in a grade and preventing him from being promoted with his peers (Jimerson, 2001) on the basis of his / her academic achievement in the final examination, especially in two core subjects, that are English and Math. The context of the study was six private schools of Karachi, situated in the low socioeconomic areas, and scorecards of failed students of the selected schools who were in grade six, seven and eight. To achieve the objectives of the study, a mixed method of research was undertaken. The quantitative data consisted of 84 students’ scorecards of two years; therefore, 168 scorecards from 84 failed students, who repeated a class in the same school, were collected. The collected data were examined and calculated through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and were exposed to quantitative analysis. To examine the four hypotheses formulated for the study, paired sample t-test, one sample t-test and two-way MANOVA were conducted. Furthermore, two descriptive statistics tables along with a summary table were generated. The qualitative research was done through semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted interviews of six teachers and three principals after informing the school management of the current study. The interviews were transcribed and decoded, followed by categorization to explore the themes that emerged.

Keywords: academic achievement, grade retention, promotion, student cognition, student score cards, teacher attributions
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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Repeating a grade has been exercised for over a century and considerable research has been conducted regarding this practice. Grade retention practice has been carried out for many years in most of the countries of the world. Grade retention means holding a student back in grade and preventing him from being promoted with his peers (Jimerson, 2001). It is known as failing a class or flunking a class by the students. Retention indicates that a student who has studied for a year in a grade is asked to repeat the same grade in the following years as well (Westbury, 1994). In most cases, the burden of learning is placed on the shoulders of the students, rather than the relationship of learning and teaching as a co-endeavor between teachers and students. Research evidence has revealed that a number of factors contribute to this phenomenon (Reynolds, 1992). Parents consider this issue to be a dilemma and want it to be dealt with fairly by the school authorities and teachers need to share responsibility for their students’ low academic outcome. Jackson (1975) reviewed that even though there was a large body of literature on grade retention, however there is still a confusion regarding the effectiveness of grade retention policy. There are no clear indications as to this policy helps in improvement of student scores.

Due to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 2002 US Act, there is a pressure on schools to deliver good results this act makes the school authorities accountable for the steps they are/are not taking to help each and every student in their school. Thus, the struggling students are made to repeat a whole academic year as they fail to meet the required standards set by the state and their school. Research indicates that 30% to 50% of students have been retained in a grade at least once in their school years (Goldberg, 2004; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). School organizes yearly examinations to assess their students’ academic performances and students try their level best to show that they have learnt the topics taught to them and that they are capable enough to be promoted to the next grade. However, in few cases when some academically weak students fail to perform at the expected level, they are not allowed to be promoted and are eventually retained in the same grade for the following year (Brown, 2007). Studies in the past have shown that the effect of grade retention on students is very negative, whereas promotion to the next grade has a positive effect (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).
1.1. Background

The literature tells us that for a student to go through the stigma of being called a failure, results in students not wanting to continue school and eventually drop out (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002); therefore, teachers and school principals are not very convinced whether grade retention policy aids a student or harms him/her. Teachers face this dilemma when a student lacks behind standard level which is required to pass, to retain or not. The reason they opt for retention is that teachers do not have any alternative, thus grade retention is the practice which is followed. (Witmer, Hoffman & Nottis, 2004). This study examined if there is a positive connection between grade retention practice and improved student scores or not. This research; therefore, is intended to provide a holistic view of the grade retention practices at schools of Karachi. Keeping in view the school systems of Pakistan, the research highlighted gaps in the retention policies and might help schools re-evaluate their grade retention strategies.

The term and concept of grade retention emerged in 1860 (Reynolds, 1992). It evolved to improve school performance by allowing underachieving students more time to develop academic skills (Reynolds, 1992). Retention was generally accepted by teachers, parents and administrators. By the 1930’s, researchers reported negative effects on grade retention (Ayers, 1933). It was reported that grade retention was linked to students dropping out of school.

During the Great Depression of 1930s, however, a system of social promotion rose to prominence. Schools began to consider age and maturity, as well as achievement in deciding whether to promote students or retain them. Improving education in the 1980’s received extraordinary attention because it was linked to economic crisis and the future of U.S. competitiveness in world markets. Ending social promotion seemed to be the most practical way to improve academic standards.

If students did not meet objectives, they should not be promoted. Therefore, students would not arrive in high school or society without knowing how to read or knowing basic mathematics.

The same attitude of the 1980’s prevails to date because of the No Child Left Behind Act. Grade retention is often cited as a means to raise educational standards. Many teachers,
as well as others in educational community, continue to believe that repeating a grade is an effective remedy for students who failed to master basic skills. The reason is that the teachers are held accountable for a student’s success or failure, the researcher believes that teachers should have a clear understanding of what grade retention means for the students and their parents. The significance of the study is that although grade retention is the most common practice in schools all over Pakistan, however, no clear proof is presented about the benefits of grade retention. Therefore, the researcher felt the need to fill this gap and provide findings which will help all the concerned persons, that is, the educators and parents, they will understand, to some extent, what the research has found about grade retention. This clear understanding of the history and merits / demerits of grade retention will allow teachers to make better decisions pertaining to grade retention. The researcher carried out this study in the hope that the educators may also begin to investigate alternatives to grade retention for implementation in school policy, as a result of this study.

Advocates of retention have been met with substantial opposition challenging whether retention actually serves to improve the educational prospects of children. Opponents of grade retention have cited alternative classroom practices that can be used in place of retention (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Holmes, 2006; Nason, 1991; Peterson, 1989; Reynolds, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Tanner & Galis, 1997). They also cite research demonstrating an overall negative effect of retention on academic achievement and school dropout rates (Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Holmes, 1989; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; House, 1989; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001; Roderick, 1994; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). In addition, the position statement on grade retention by the National Association of School Psychologists (2003) was in strong opposition to the use of retention as a policy to achieve higher academic standards, providing a list of more than a dozen alternative intervention strategies to supplant practices of grade retention and social promotion.

1.2. What the Research Manifests?

Jimerson (1973) in his study concluded that grade retention practices are carried on since long time in the educational institutions as a means to propel students’ academic
performance so that they score better marks in the future. This topic is such that a lot of research studies have taken place around the world on grade retention, but in most of them the clear cut results and findings in favour of grade retention are not achieved. For example Jackson (1975) set out to collect findings of forty four studies done on grade retention. Upon going through all of them and reviewing them he concluded that although some benefit is seen in the practice of retaining students for the whole next year after they fail, however, it is not remarkably improved from the result these failed students managed to get in the year they flunked. Thus, Jackson recommended that grade retention is effective as a short term gain perhaps and that also without showing a humongous difference, therefore, teachers and other concerned authorities need to look at other alternatives to help the students’ increase their academic performance. Following the footsteps of Jackson, Holmes and Matthews (1984) also indulged in exploring forty four more studies on grade retention practices, which concluded more or less similar findings that they students who moved onto to another grade were more confident and displayed a positive disposition as compared to the students who were retained.

1.3. What Teachers Think?

All around the world, the needs and innate academic abilities of the students differ. This heterogeneity of the students causes a great deal of difficulty and challenge for the educationists to cater to the individual students and provide them an environment which is conducive, in order for them to achieve their goals. Therefore, the educationists are left perplexed and the immediate and effective solution seems to be grade retention, where students have to remain in the same class for a further one year in the hope that they will improve their grades and meet the class level expectations (Jackson 1975). Grade retention is fairly common in many parts of the world like Spain, Portugal and France. However, it is either not allowed or rarely practiced in Finland, Norway and UK. In Asia this seems to be a common practice. Students fail in classes at the end of final exams and are asked to repeat the grade. It is mostly schools who ask the students to repeat their class, but in many cases the parents also request the school to make their children repeat thinking that it will be easier for them to get good marks in the annual exams.
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1.4. In Search Of the Truth?

Research evidences show that grade retention decision has changed from the past practices. In the past it used to be heavily dependent of the teacher’s evaluation and judgment whether a student deserves to be promoted or retained in the same grade. It was considered that only the teacher would know best and would understand the student needs best, therefore it was left to her to decide and no one had any objections to it either. Thus, in the bygone days, the teacher was the driving force and had the final say. However, like most things, this authority was taken away by the policy makers and especially by the private school owners, thereof, the decision of whether a student should be retained for another year, was made on the basis of the result of the final examination. The reason for this shift was that if the teacher would retain many students, it meant that the school was also burdened because then the provisions and other resources had to be exhausted for the student for an additional year. Hence, the liberty teachers had was curtailed and passing cutoff was defined in order to facilitate the students in achieving passing marks. It was believed that in doing so, the students will also be motivated to try their best and work harder to be able to get the promotion (Eccles, 1978).

1.5. What Next?

The logical way forward is to first and foremost figuring out the root cause of students’ low academic scores. This understanding will enable the teachers and educators to formulate targeted strategies to help the student according to his / her needs. This is indeed a challenge, however, a worth taking one because the debate on grade retention versus promotion is an age old one and neither serves the student if followed blindly. Therefore, it is important to figure out what should be the steps taken to ensure help to students. Alternate intervention plans are considered to be the best option available to help foster confidence in students through targeted and specific plans. Remedial classes would only be helpful if the teacher who is taking them is aware of the specific need of the struggling student who is coming for help. If these specific interventions are not provided throughout the first year, then the likelihood of that student failing increases. Hence, the schools need to spend a little more time brainstorming ideas to facilitate and help
academically struggling students because repeating the same syllabus for the whole next year is found to leave negative impacts rather than positive impacts (Jackson, 1974).

1.6. What’s the Scene in Pakistan?

Pakistan has several national and international commitments to achieve universal primary education and is a signatory of millennium development goals (MDG) thus, aims to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In line with these commitments, in 2002, Ministry of Education in collaboration with provincial departments has taken some initiatives for achieving the target by 2015. In order to reduce the dropout phenomenon at elementary level, the students of first three or four grades (depending on internal policies of provinces) in all public schools are promoted without examinations to next grade at the end of academic session. Although there are some special cases where retention is considered very necessary and allowed such as serious illness or immaturity but no child repeats the early three grades due to slow learning. This initiative was considered as a helping measure for reducing dropout phenomenon, but negative consequences were also seen because, the pupils who have not acquired the desired learning standard for the next grade are also promoted along with better performers. When these poor performers reach grade four, most of them are retained in the same grade, because at the end of primary level, all students of grade five have to appear in final departmental examination for promotion to grade six. This examination increases the pressure especially on low-achieving schools to retain the low scoring children at grade four. If the weak students are also promoted to grade five, there will be greater probability of their failure in the final departmental examination and in turn negatively affect the school result at departmental level. But, the higher authorities do not show any concern about these repeaters that what happens to them in the class rooms throughout the repeated year as a consequence of poor implementation strategies of educational policies. Most of these repeaters drop out from school as a result of continuous insulting behavior and unfair treatment by the teachers and their class fellows.

The national statistics of Elementary Education in Pakistan presented by the Ministry of Education, Islamabad, also revealed that grade retention is the major cause of dropout and other problems related to quality of education at elementary level. The report
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of National Education Census (Govt. of Pakistan, 2005) showed that the dropout rate between grade four to five is 8.5% that is much higher than grade two to four, that are 3.7% and 5.0%. The current practice of promotion policy in education system is said to be one of the possible causes of this high dropout rate at grade four.

1.7. Definitions of Terms

**Grade Retention:** Not promoting a student to the next class due to his/her unsatisfactory grades hoping that repeating a class will improve and meet grade level requirement.

**Promotion:** The practice of passing a student from one grade to another grade on the basis of end of year exam result.

**Social Promotion:** Social promotion is the practice of promoting a student (usually a general education student, rather than a special education student) to the next grade after the current school year, regardless of when or whether they didn't learn the necessary materials or they are often absent, in order to keep them with their peers.

**Low Academic Performance:** Low or weakness of the student's mark under the normal average in a study subject level as a result of a variety of reasons, including those related to the student himself, or those related to family, social and academic environment.

**Student Score:** The end of year term result of the student, which determines if he/she has failed or passed in his final exams.

**Student Scorecard:** The end of year term result record of the student.

**Principal:** The employee of a private school, appointed as a head to run the institution.

**Teacher:** The employee of a private school, appointed to plan and teach students in the classroom.

**Socioeconomic status (SES):** It is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation.

**Private School:** A school supported by a private organization or private individuals rather than by the state. It is supported by payment of fees.
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i. **Low Socioeconomic Private School:** Schools whose monthly tuition fee is between Rs 1500 to 5000.

ii. **Mediocre private school:** Schools whose monthly tuition fee is between Rs 6000 to 18000

iii. **Elite Private School:** Schools whose monthly tuition fee is between Rs 19000 to 35000

1.8. **Problem Statement**

Students who are retained in the same class due to low academic performance do not show better result even after repeating the same class for a year.

This exploratory research is intended to add to the existing studies on grade retention as based on the literature review, the researcher could not find any study with reference to Pakistan related to the problem posed. Studies may have taken place, but probably not recorded. This study facilitated the researcher to understand the reasons why students are retained in classes and whether or not these practices are helpful for the students. Through this study, the researcher was able to assess if the exists any gap between the grade retention practices and students’ academic outcomes. Taking into consideration the problem, the following questions and hypothesis emerged.

1.9. **Research Questions**

1. To what extent grade retention practices are effective in enabling students to achieve better scores?

2. What are the criteria for the teacher to decide whether to retain a student or to promote him?

3. What role does gender play in student performance?

4. How do the principals perceive their grade retention policy with relation to student academic performance?

1.10. **Hypotheses**

**H1:** Repetition of same class does not have impact on students’ performance

**H1.1:** In English subject
GRADE RETENTION PRACTICES AND STUDENT SCORES

**H1.2:** In mathematics subject

**H2:** Students’ performance does not differ by their different grades (including VI, VII, and VIII)

**H3:** Students’ performance does not differ by their different genders (including Male and Female)

1.11. **Variable Description**

1.11.1. **Dependent Variables (DV s)**
- First Year Students’ Performance in English subject
- Repeated Year Students’ Performance in English subject
- First Year Students’ Performance in Mathematics subject
- Repeated Year Students’ Performance in Mathematics subject

1.11.2. **Independent Variables (IVs)**
- Different Genders of Students
- Different Grades of Students

1.12. **Methodology**

This study focused on the mixed research design. The study began with collecting quantitative data from six private schools in Karachi. Data of at 84 failed students were collected and tested (see appendix-1). In this research study data were from 84 students’ scorecards of two years because not many students fail in a class thus, researcher collected 168 scorecards from 84 failed students who repeated a class in the same school. The qualitative research was done through interviews. The researcher conducted interviews of six teachers (see appendix- 2) and three principals (see appendix-3) after informing the school management of the current study and transcribed and decodes the interviews before categorizing the themes that emerged.

1.13. **Sample Size**
The sample for this study was randomly purposive and consisted of 84 students from six private schools located in different areas of Karachi. The researcher conducted interviews of six teachers and three principals after informing the school management of the study.

1.14. Document Analysis

Data were collected on the basis of the result/score cards of two years of the same students who were asked to repeat the class, with their scores showing their performance in both years. A formal approval from private school managements was sought through a letter and the researcher acquired the consent from the selected private schools of Karachi.

1.15. Tools

In order to test the quantitative data collected through the scorecards of the failed students, paired sample t-test, one sample t-test and two-way MANOVA were used. In addition to these, descriptive tables were also generated. The interviews of teachers were semi-structured and open-ended because exploratory research method involves least structured tool (Creswell, 2008). Upon receiving all expected data from the private schools of Karachi, it were examined and calculated through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17 and were exposed to quantitative analysis. To examine the four hypotheses formulated for the study, paired sample t-test, one sample t-test and two-way MANOVA were conducted. The researcher further generated two descriptive statistics tables along with a summary table.

1.16. Thesis Organization

This research study thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the topic of the research, the background of the topic, which is discussed in two parts: the view around the world and the scene in Pakistan. Chapter two gives an in depth insight into the literature and theories on the research topic. After reviewing the literature and identifying the gap, the researcher has developed a conceptual framework which guided the research.
Chapter three elucidates the research methodology. It includes the theoretical underpinnings of the research design, and methods of data collection. This chapter concludes with ethical considerations and the implications of the study. Chapter four presents the findings of the study and discusses the results. Finally, chapter five concludes the study with future recommendations for teachers and educators to overcome the issue of grade retention.
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CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1. Overview
The previous chapter introduced the topic of the research and provided background information. It also included research questions and hypotheses along with a brief description of the methodology selected for the study. This chapter will review the literature available on grade retention around the world and also explore the various theories with regards to student cognition and development. The chapter also explores the creation of the conceptual framework designed by the researcher after looking into different theories by Vygotsky and Piaget along with attribution and achievement theories by Weiner, Ebel and Frisbie respectively.

2.2. Review of Literature
In the educational context, particularly with regards to student academic performance, the importance of grade retention practices cannot be ignored as repeating a class for another whole year can have lifelong implications on the students’ achievements. This is more significant in Pakistan because grade retention is incredibly common and is, in majority of the cases, the only resolve to tackle the issue of student low academic score, which is a measure of academic performance in the end of year final exams. The literature on grade retention is vast and it frequently looks into Piaget’s as well as Vygotsky’s overarching theories of cognition, because despite major differences, both of their theories have similarities too. The reason that these theories showed up in numerous researches is that the main focus and concern of Piaget and Vygotsky is children’s mental development. However, for this research on grade retention practices in private schools of Pakistan, simply taking the cognition theories was not enough. Therefore, in order to gain sufficient insight into the study topic, the researcher found that the theories of cognition further branches out into other various theories regarding academic performance of students. This discovery led the researcher to explore the theoretical underpinnings of student achievement, student perception of self and teachers attributing characteristics to students based on their academic performances. Furthermore, during the process of searching and reviewing literature, it became evident that there were two other theories which dealt with
student performance and students psychological behaviors in terms of motivation to excel and exhibit perfect exam scores and display their achievement with pride. In the end, the researcher explored and considered the following two theories: attribution theory by Weiner (1974) and achievement theory by Ebel and Frisbie (1986). The developers of both of these theories derived their inspiration from Piaget and that’s why they fall under the umbrella of Piaget’s theory of cognition. The researcher selected these two theories as they fulfilled the objective of the study, however, in order to fulfill the purpose and objective of the research study completely, both theories were adapted to develop a conceptual framework to guide the existing research in a focused manner towards the desired direction and thus in the end obtain maximum holistic findings. This chapter looks into the rationale for selection of theories and the reason to adapt and merge the theoretical frameworks to form a customized conceptual framework.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frame (see table -1 below) was developed by adapting existent theories, in the light of the research purpose, after going through the available literature on the topic. Thus, the conceptual framework guided the research study. For the study, two theories, namely theory of attribution and theory of achievement were explored, selected and finally adapted according to the purpose of the study. The researcher replaced cost as a factor with principal’s role as a factor, in the achievement theory (as shown in table –1 below) as this study inquired the role of principals in making the policy of grade retention. Thus, cost as a factor in achievement theory was dropped and replaced, as it was not relevant to this study. Similarly, in the attribution theory, the principals’ perceptions were added to suit the study. Nothing was dropped from the original theoretical framework because this theory already talked about self and teacher perceptions, which suited the purpose of this research.
The diagram above demonstrates the scope and extent of the study. It depicts that within the context of cognition, as defined by Piaget, there lie the theories of attribution and achievement. The close connection between the theory of attribution and the theory of achievement is evident by the fact that both theories have teachers, students as integral participants. Moreover, the adaptation of the framework for this particular study, by including principal as another important player in the study, depicts a clear cut purpose and demonstrates the roadmap followed by the researcher for this study. Therefore, the conceptual framework presented above, laid the boundaries of the research study. Hence, it is indispensable to present the review of literature, not only on the topic of grade retention but also on the two key theories of attribution by Weiner and of achievement by Ebel and Frisbie, which the researcher had selected for the research study. It is hoped that through the in depth review of the related literature on the above mentioned essential areas of this study, will enable the readers to comprehend the scope and rationale of the research study undertaken by the researcher.
2.4. Grade Retention and the Historical Global Belief about It

There are a vast number of published researches on grade retention, most of them focusing on elementary grades. It has been observed that despite the bulk of research done, it is still complicated to establish that retaining students is the solution to make them improve their grades. Jackson (1975) looked at 44 such studies and yet he came to the conclusion that it is very difficult to determine whether grade repetition was a good step. He further elaborated that the topic of grade retention is fraught with various factors, and that is why clear cut result and absolute findings are weighed down by those many factors. Therefore, Jackson discusses and mentions that it is not straightforward to just say that educators should continue with the practice of asking students who have achieved low grades in their first year, to simply repeat that same class and the magic will begin, making the students perform better in the next year after repeating the class. Holmes and Matthews (1984) conducted a research after 10 years of Jackson’s research. Their findings also concluded insufficient backing to the claim that repeating grades improves students. The research by Holmes and Matthews, in fact, demonstrated that the students who were promoted displayed higher academic performance and achieved better grades as compared to students who were asked to repeat the class because their scorecards did not display improved performance in the subsequent examinations after repeating the class.

Furthermore, these researches also indicated that students who were promoted demonstrated positive attitudes and had a better image and perception of themselves than the students who were retained. Literature on grade retention further highlighted the research done by Jimerson (2001) who after 17 years, consolidated the historical research along with cautiously including other studies conducted between the years 1990 to 1999, from these studies, Jimerson extracted and culled the results to select the related findings on grade retention. According to Jimmerson, this mammoth task revealed no significant differences between failed students who were asked to repeat the class and promoted students who moved on to the next class. It was interesting to note that the studies which demonstrated a difference between the failed students who had repeated the class and the promoted students who had moved forward to the next class, those studies presented positive effect in the promoted students and not in the failed students. The failed students,
who repeated the class they failed in, displayed low confidence and negative outlook than the students who got promoted (Jimmerson, 2001).

2.5. Grade Retention and Recent Studies

Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) investigated the policy of Chicago Public Schools with regards to promotion which requires the students to accomplish a definite score stated in the policy otherwise they have to repeat the class for another year. They focused on those students who were in grade three, grade six and grade eight. These studies held the most significance for this research because this study also looked into the data from grade six and grade eight along with grade seven. The findings of the research by Roderick and Nagaoka, displayed that in the repeated year the students in third grade faced difficulty and in fact were placed in remedial classes more often than the students who were promoted. Furthermore, these students did not show improvement even after two years over the students who were promoted. Similarly, the students who repeated sixth grade had low self perception and low self esteem, therefore, they were more prone to display low achievement as compared to their peers who moved on to the next grade (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). In addition to Roderick and Nagaoka’s research, Jacob and Lefgren (2007) used the data of grade eight students which was collected by the Roderick and Nagaoka and came to a conclusion that the likelihood of failed students of grade eight dropping out of school was significantly higher than that of their peers who got promoted.

There is dearth of research in this regard in Pakistani context; hence, this study was undertaken by the researcher. Although there is a large body of research on grade retention but the preponderance of evidence indicated that the failed students who repeated the class. Research also mentions that it is a difficult task to record the various experiences which students face which might manifest in their performance academically. Jimerson argues that the process and practice of final exams as a measure of judging knowledge is flawed because then the blame of poor result and low grades on the student scorecard is solely is laid on the students and in this way the school is not culpable for it, therefore the school does not share any responsibility.

2.6. Research on Predictors of Grade Retention
GRADE RETENTION PRACTICES AND STUDENT SCORES

Further research on grade retention also revealed that the common reason for students to repeat their class for the next whole year is their low academic performances in school subjects, particularly English and Math scores. The majority schools base their decision on the basis of these two subjects as they are considered to be the backbone of all learning and are often a pre requisite for getting promoted. Moreover, research also indicated that students hailing from low socio economic areas are more prone to failing in the final examinations and as a result end up repeating a class for the next whole year (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). This study also collected data from private schools situated in the low socio economic areas of Karachi. Research suggested that stress is also one of the strong predictors of students’ low academic scores in English and Math (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2008).

2.7. Retention and Drop-Out Rates

The research studying grade retention and dropping out of high school is not quite clear. A review of the literature has shown that grade retention is the strongest predictor of high school drop-out status. Jimerson (2002) indicated that the research also showed students who were retained in two grades were 90% more likely to drop out of high school. Jimerson (2002) suggests an emphasis on accountability of schools to check what policies they follow for retaining students. He reiterates that competition among private schools in terms of producing better result also puts pressure on students and more students are asked to repeat the class. This scenario is of concern because this unprecedented pressure has led to increased retention rates in order for schools to demonstrate a commitment to standards and good results, rather than consideration of the long-term beneficial outcomes for students, particularly given that retention is strongly associated with high school dropout.

Although there is a large body of literature on the effects of grade retention on academic achievement, research examining the perception of parents towards this decision, is sparse. The bulk of literature demonstrates that principal, teachers, and parents play a major role in the decision of a child being retained and also to some extent; they are the reason behind a child's under achievement (Jimerson, 1997).

2.8. Brief Overview of Piaget’s Theory of Cognition
Piaget's (1973) theory of cognitive development is a wide-ranging theory about the temperament and progress of human intelligence. Piaget's thought is principally recognized as a developmental stage theory. According to Piaget, people’s childhood shapes and forms their development and plays an integral and vigorous part. This theory delves deep into the realms of knowledge. Cognition, in Piaget’s words is about humans acquiring knowledge to construct meanings in order to apply it in their lives and use it as and when required. Piaget believed that biological changes and mutations along with the surrounding environmental occurrences formulate cognitive development (Hummel, 2003). This cognitive development was considered by Piaget, not an absolute end but in fact he believed that it was a process which involved the mental capacity of humans to realign and reorganize according to circumstantial experiences. Therefore, he thought and propagated his idea that children absorb their experiences and use them to construct deeper understanding and awareness of the world they are living in. According to Piaget, the children further use their knowledge along with what they have learnt and experienced from the surroundings to regulate their ideas according to the need of the situation. Thus, in this fashion, the children solve any discrepancies which they encounter in the process of meaning making and mental development (Hummel, 2003).

Following the footsteps of Piaget, Weiner (1974) as well as Ebel and Frisbie (1986) developed their theories of attribution and achievement respectively. These theories of attribution and achievement are derived from Piaget’s theory of cognition and were identified and selected by the researcher because the researcher felt that these theories are closely related to the study topic. This was due to the fact that the study dealt with students’ low academic performance and low achievement of grades in the final year examinations, and the subsequent decision of the school managements and teachers to fail them and ask them to repeat the same class for another year, hence the need for the researcher to look into the theories which deal with the issues of student attributes and achievement.

2.9. Brief Overview of Vygotsky’s Theory of Cognition

Vygotsky was a psychologist who is best known for his immense work with regards to his theory of cognition which primarily deals with childhood development. His idea was that students develop and shape their thinking with the help of social setting and
Vygotsky insisted that language is the first and foremost route and tool to attaining knowledge (Wertsh & James, 1985). Vygotsky explained in his theory of cognition that adults are the knowledge bearers, therefore it is their responsibility that they guide and convey and that knowledge to the children. Furthermore, Vygotsky goes on to explain that intelligence is in reality, the capacity of the children or in the one with lesser knowledge, to be able to learn from the more knowledgeable person, whom he called more knowledgeable other (MKO). He further explains that these MKOs can be parents, other adults, and teachers, guides so much so they can even be other children and their friends or also a computer.

Vygotsky defines his zone of proximal development (ZPD) in three levels. The present level of development is the first level. It depicts what the child can do by himself or herself without MKOs being around. The potential level of development is the second level. It is described as the level when the child utilizes his innate capabilities with the assistance from MKOs. The third and the final level of cognition is when the child is able to go beyond what he can achieve in the present scenarios. He further elaborated that although all three levels help the child gain knowledge, however there remains a gap, which he called ZPD. He informed that the way to bridge that gap of knowledge the MKOs have to adjust their guidance according to the child’s comprehension level. Below is the pictorial manifestation of Vygotsky’s ZPD.

![Vygotsky theory of ZPD](image)

*Figure 2: Vygotsky theory of ZPD*
GRADE RETENTION PRACTICES AND STUDENT SCORES

Scaffolding is yet another very important aspect of support a teacher or MKOs can provide the student with. In order for scaffolding to be an effective tool, the teacher is required to keep adjusting support according to student need and improvement.

2.10. Similarities and Differences in Piaget and Vygotsky

The review of literature on theory of cognitions by Piaget and Vygotsky, made the researcher aware that although there are similarities in both of their theories, however, there were some stark differences as well. Hence, it was felt that the similarities and differences must be understood in order to understand them completely. Therefore, the chart below highlights the major differences in the two seemingly similar theories of cognition and childhood mental development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Piaget</th>
<th>Vygotsky</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Stages, development drives learning, learner centered</td>
<td>Social interactions, Zone of Proximal Development, learning drives development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanisms of Change</strong></td>
<td>Innate development, stages, assimilation, accommodation, equilibration</td>
<td>Scaffolding, social interactions, cultural development, internalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Readiness</strong></td>
<td>Genetic development growth, biological stages, has to be developmentally appropriate</td>
<td>ZPD has to contain the capabilities that are being taught, scaffolding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Student</strong></td>
<td>Actively manipulates objects/ideas, continually invents/reinvents knowledge through interaction with the world</td>
<td>Interact with instructor, peers, and socio-cultural environment to solve problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Teacher and Classroom</strong></td>
<td>Provide environment that encourages students to interact and ask probing questions.</td>
<td>Engage learners in socially-organized activities, provide scaffolding for learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endpoints</strong></td>
<td>Hypothetically everyone can reach the endpoint.</td>
<td>Learning how to think.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3: Google Images*

2.11. Differences between Piaget and Vygotsky

Every child has progression via stages and each child is unique and they learn differently. Piaget suggested that children learn and make meanings to understand and gain knowledge from being immersed in the environment. Whereas, Vygotsky believed that although children learn through their environment and gain knowledge but he said that the
children also require adults or some other source, which has more knowledge, to guide and scaffold the children’s mental and cognitive ability. Thus, it becomes natural that each child learns and develops skills different from others. The four stage development can occur according to child’s individual nature with some will learn faster than others and this phenomenon is a universal observation. Every child has a unique cognitive structure, some skills are learnt early and others take more time to grasp. Recent researchers (James, 2002), also suggest that the assessment of cognitive profile helps to spot and highlight which skills are learnt early and others are learnt late and weaker than others. This allows educationists to plan cognitive guidance and work in weaker skills. While doing so it is suggested to indulge in brain games like coginfit, a scientifically proven tool for the training and cognitive assessment. It is important to remember to consult professionals if parents are worried about cognitive development of a child.

2.12. Attribution Theory

Attribution theory was developed by Weiner (1974). This theory looks at academic success which is reliant on developing a positive view of one’s level of capability and competence in learning. The learning patterns of humans are rooted in the on several family and individual scenarios. These patterns govern people’s perceptions about themselves and also about what people expect from others. Therefore, the theory of attribution involves two subsidiary themes. The first one is that of students self perception and the second one is that of teachers’ expectation of students and as a result teachers attributing characteristics according to how much or how less the students lived up to their perceived expectations. Accordingly to the framework of attribution theory by Weiner, attribution is the cause of two happenings; the first being students self perception and the second being the teacher’s expectation from the student and attributing students’ performance to the measure of expectation. Therefore, the researcher selected Weiner’s theory as it suited the investigation the researcher had set out to examine because Weiner’s attribution theory looked at two reasons which were similar to this research. However, the researcher felt the need to adapt the attribution theory’s framework. In order to adapt it, another element of principal’s perception was included to meet the requirement of the research questions. This adaptation of Weiner’s theoretical framework of attribution, allowed the researcher to
investigate multiple reasons related to students’ academic achievement. This adaptation provided a focused roadmap for the research and guided the study with clarity.

There is a vast body of research on the teachers’ role in retaining a struggling student (Weiner, 2000). The research on teacher attributes describes why it is of vital importance to explore the effectiveness of retention. The main reason for the interest in this area is due to the fact that it has to do with children and their future. The apparently simple act of asking a student to repeat in the same grade for the next whole year, is a sensitive and important matter, as the decision can either make or break the student. The reason for grade retention to be considered a sensitive topic is that there is a stigma attached to it. Hence, cautiousness prevails in determining that whether it is or it is not a valid and effective measure to make students improve their performance and achieve high marks (Weiner, 2000; Reyna & Weiner, 2001). It is further noticed in the literature that the teacher student relationship plays a vital role in helping students academically, especially in the repeated year. The discussion reveals that the teacher deals with retained students with more compassion and therefore, dedicates more time to the student and works hard to facilitate that particular student, in the hope that he / she will be able to catch up and improve his / her exam scores after the repeated year (Witmer, 2001).

2.13. Students’ Self-Perceptions

Attributions can be internal or external; controllable or uncontrollable; stable or unstable. We all have a tendency to attribute our successes to internal factors, but attribute our failures to external forces. How attributions influence affect: students are more likely to feel happy, proud, and satisfied with a success if they believe that the cause of the success was internal. If a student believes a failure is the result of an internal force, they may feel sadness, shame, and guilt. If the cause of a failure is external, students are likely to be angry. How attributions influence cognition: if students attribute success to stable factors, they believe they will always be successful. If failure is attributed to internal factors, students will believe they will always fail. Success and failures attributed to unstable factors may not really impact expectations for future performance. How Attributions influence behavior effort: If attribution of failure is lack of effort, students are more likely to try harder next time. If attribution of failure is innate, uncontrollable, and unstable such
as lack of intelligence students are not likely to put in more effort and will give up easily. Classroom performance Students who make internal attributions are more likely to use effective study strategies. Future choices when students expect success in a particular area, they are more likely to engage in that activity (Witmer, 2001).

The researcher looked deeper into the two subjects, English and Math, which are at the heart of the topic, because students final examination marks in these subjects are considered for the decision of grade retention or not. Thus, English and Math are the most important subjects as performance in these is the major deciding factor of their fate. Self concept is defined as student’s perception about himself or herself regarding capabilities to perform successfully in school. Self perception creates a sense of calmness in the minds of students, especially when they in their pre teens or teens as in this study. Self perception, if it is positive, also boosts healthy image and motivation to do his / her best in order to gain appreciation. This is the tender age of believing in the impossible and at the same time disbelieving in their abilities and powers. This dilemma that the students of grades six, seven, and eight face, makes them powerful as well as vulnerable to slightest negative remark too. Therefore, psychologists like Davis Kean (2005) enlighten us to move forward with restraint and take decisions after analyzing all areas in which the student is struggling. If the teacher feels that the student is failing or is performing poorly in school, then they should proceed with caution and first must try to build a rapport with the teacher. The importance of good and healthy interaction between the teacher and the student must be encouraged by the school management as well. The teachers’, who have taken the decision of a student’s grade retention, tend to have more care and love in them rather than the ones who passed the exams without any trouble. Another very interesting factor emerged from the literature review, which was that assessing student score cards to make the decision of either promoting or failing a student is the core contributing reason.

Studies have shown that although students who struggled in achieving expected marks, still they were able to demonstrate improvement because of positive self perception which enabled them to strive harder and perform better in previously difficult subjects. Thus, self-concept and perception has a correlation with future expectations of academic achievements (Marsh & Hau, 2003; Wiltfang & Scarbecz, 1990).
2.14. Students’ Retention: Teachers’ Attribution

Teachers often form expectations of students’ potential for academic success early in the school year. Teachers tend to underestimate the abilities of: physically unattractive students, immigrant students, minority students, low-income students, students who speak a different dialect, students with behavioral problems. Teachers with high expectations for students create a warmer classroom, have more interaction with students, and provide more positive feedback. Teachers with low expectations offer less interaction, less encouragement, and less challenging assignments. Forming productive expectations & attributions for student performance, teachers must look for strengths in every student. They must consider multiple possible explanations for students’ low achievement and misbehavior. Communicating optimistic and controllable attribution will help the students’ performance. Learning more about students’ backgrounds and home environments is said to be helpful in increasing student performance. Assessing students’ progress regularly and objectively is known to foster motivation in students (Witmer, 2004).

Lack of awareness, on the part of the teachers, with regards to the research, which has been conducted on grade retention practices and its impacts, also becomes a reason for teachers to keep retaining academically struggling students, oblivious of the fact that these decisions are defining the future direction of their students. The importance of teachers and educators, being aware of the research available on grade retention practices, is evident that although that there is some level of improvement among the students who have been retained by the teachers and school but still that effort is also not good enough. The students marginally improved because their improvement was not humungous, they still failed, therefore, the reason the teacher retained the student for, is not met. That is why if the teachers would know about the research, it is hoped that he / she will make an informed decision for their students grade retention.

Dropping out, is a deferred form of exclusion from the regular class, is also predicted by earlier retention (Roderick, 1994; Jimerson et al, 2002). The research available on this topic, reveals that the relationship between grade retention and children’s academic achievement, and the social and emotional cost of grade retention (Kronig et al, 2000). It is interesting to note that despite evidence and support from psychologists that the practice
of repeating a grade is negative connotations and students become very shy and feel embarrassed to deal with it.

Tomchin & Impara’s (1992) describes those effects of retention on students. The rationale behind retention is that extra year in the same grade gives the student more time and extra opportunity to catch up with the peers or in that the extra year the child will gain maturity (Reynolds, 1992). Unfortunately, studies do not conform above beliefs rather show that teachers who believe retention is an efficient practice tend to apply it more than those who do not. The simple fact shows that role of a teacher in grade retention is of utmost importance we need to see what practices and methodology schools adopt while making important decision of grade retention.

2.15. Achievement Theory

Achievement can be defined as students’ overall understanding of particular information and development of specific skills within the school setting (Ebel & Frisbie, 1986).

Eccles’ Expectancy-Value Theory and Model of Achievement Related Choices, is based on over 20 years of research and is the most comprehensive theoretical model of achievement to date. According to the theories, achievement involves the cultural, social, and environmental —fit of schools for students. At school, students progress into wider social contexts from their homes, which influence their cognitive, behavioral, and socio-emotional development (Eccles, Roeser, Wigfield, & Freedman, 1999). Thus, in addition to the school environment, characteristics of a child’s family will influence the child’s intellectual and interpersonal development. Also, students who experience academic and social difficulties may become frustrated, resulting in a negative pattern of adaptation towards school (Eccles, 1999). Thus, academic success is dependent on developing a positive view of one’s level of competence in learning that is based on many family and individual factors. According to this framework, the present investigation examined multiple factors related to achievement and determined which factor, or combination of factors, explain why some students are at risk for poor academic achievement.

2.16. Individual Factors
2.16.1. Academic Motivation

It is important to address McClelland's Human Motivation Theory, for this study, which states that every person has one of three main driving motivators, the first being the needs for achievement, the second being affiliation, and lastly the third of power. These motivators are not inherited rather we develop these. Our culture and life experiences play important part in development of these motivators. Achievers like challenge and then solve problems and achieve their goals. On the other hand those who like affiliation don't like to take risk, and they value relationships very strongly. Others with a strong power act as motivator and like to control others. Based on above we can use the information to lead, admire, and encourage students more effectively. Academic motivation refers to a student’s enjoyment of learning characterized by an orientation toward mastery, curiosity, persistence, and the learning of challenging, difficult, and novel tasks (Gottfried, Gottfried, Cook, & Morris, 2005). Students’ academic motivation has been shown in several studies to predict their achievement in school (Broussard & Garrison, 2004; Gottfried, 2005). In addition to academic motivation, students at risk for poor achievement have been found to experience low self-concept. Self-concept is defined as a multidimensional and dynamic system of self-beliefs (Cole, 2001; Marsh, 1990). These beliefs often refer to an individual’s perceived competence within the domains of academics, physical appearance, athletics, social skills, and family. This self-concept, in combination with academic motivation, is likely to more strongly predict achievement than either factor alone.

2.16.2. Parental Involvement

A family characteristic that has received considerable research attention as a risk factor for poor school achievement is parental involvement. Some types of parental involvement, such as parental attitudes and expectations for achievement, have been found to be related to achievement whereas support with homework may indicate student difficulty with schoolwork (Shumow & Miller, 2001). Also, perhaps parents are indirectly involved in their children’s achievement by increasing their motivation and positive self-concept.

Eccles defined attainment value as the importance of doing well on a given task.
Intrinsic value is the enjoyment one gains from doing the task. When students do tasks that are intrinsically valued, there are important psychological consequences for them, most of which are quite positive (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Utility value or usefulness refers to how a task fits into an individual’s future plans, for instance, taking a math class to fulfill a requirement for a science degree. Cost refers to how the decision to engage in one activity for example doing schoolwork limits access to other activities for example calling friends, assessments of how much effort will be taken to accomplish the activity, and its emotional cost (Heyman, Dweck, & Cain, 1992). The general pattern is for students to have optimistic beliefs and values in the early grades, which decline across the school years. It is important to point out that some children doubt their abilities quite early on (Burhans & Dweck, 1995).

Increased political pressure on schools to demonstrate student achievement has pushed more and more educators to retain failing students in order to implement stricter promotion standards (Ownings & Kaplan, 1996).

Research has shown that retention and social promotion are ineffective solutions for struggling learners (Bowman, 2005; Byrd & Weitzman, 1994; Jimerson, 2001). Social promotion is the practice of keeping students who fail with their age group, because of the social-emotional impact of retention. Research suggests many alternatives to retention such as, early intervention programs as well as summer and afterschool programs (Lincove & Painter, 2006). Professional development and effective early reading instruction are also alternatives suggested in the literature to prevent retention (Bowman, 2005; Lincove & Painter, 2006). However, these alternatives require funding and are not always possible in school systems where budgets are being reduced. School systems that have declining budgets are still forced to retain some struggling learners due to lack of alternatives. From a budgetary standpoint, retention might be short sighted. Retaining a student increases the educational cost for that student by eight percent (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005). The researcher found considerable literature available on grade retention and student achievement, particularly in the US and Europe, which guided the current study. However there is very little information available on the current topic of study in Pakistani context. Thus, the researcher selected theories from educationists and psychologists from developed countries because those match the topic under research.
2.17. Summary

This research study was targeted to discover the impact and effectiveness of grade retention practices in private schools of Karachi, and in this chapter, the researcher reviewed the related literature available, and selected two theories. The theory of attribution and the theory of achievement were reviewed, which demonstrate the students self-perception and motivation along with teacher’s expectation and attribution. Furthermore, the role of principal was added in both the theoretical frameworks. This adaptation of the theoretical frameworks resulted in the development of a conceptual framework. The researcher also provided a brief description of theories of cognition by Piaget and Vygotsky because the two theories selected for this study fall under the umbrella of the broader theories of cognition. This also guided the researcher in the right direction; therefore, this chapter began with the description of the conceptual framework followed by its diagram, which clearly depicted the aim and process of the study. Despite the researcher’s difficulty in finding the literature on grade retention practices from Pakistan, the study moved forward and different models of methodology were identified to conduct the study. Therefore, the study proceeded to explore the best methodologies and it was decided that a mixed methodology will be the most appropriate decision because through mixed method of research, the study will fill the gap of work done in the area of the study along with the fact that the findings and result of a mixed method research will, to a large extent, help in providing a holistic and all round view on the topic. The complete process and rationale for identifying and selecting the methodology for this research is provided in chapter three of the thesis.
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

3.1. Overview

In the previous chapters the researcher introduced the research problem and presented the related body of literature. This section of the research presents the methodological procedures followed by the researcher for this study. It presents the study design, sample size, participants, research questions, hypotheses and data analysis procedures, quantitative as well as qualitative, applied for the study. It is of utmost importance that a researcher chooses the best design and research instruments, suitable to the sample. Therefore, the researcher dug deep into literature to select the perfect match for this study, carefully keeping in mind the research problem and sample. This section also provides a rationale for the sample size along with a rationale for choosing to do a mixed method research.

3.2. Design

This study focused on the mixed research design. Out of the Six Mixed Methods Design Strategies (Creswell, 2003), the researcher selected sequential explanatory design because it suited the research topic and objective perfectly. The process of this design is that quantitative data are collected and analyzed followed by the analysis of qualitative data. Therefore, this process helped the researcher to utilize the qualitative data to help and assist in explaining the findings from quantitative data. The researcher preferred this quantitative qualitative design, for this study because the aim of the study was to explore qualitative data, collected through interviews, also gather data collected from students scorecards, and use both data to aid the researcher to interpret findings in depth and holistically. This allowed the researcher to see whether the practice of grade retention helps in making the students’ performance improve or not. Due to the findings of quantitative analysis of the data from scorecards, it further helped the researcher analyze the themes which emerged from the interviews, such as, whether the perception of principals and teachers about the benefits of grade retention is what they think it is or not. It also made the researcher aware that if the principals and teachers perception of grade retention is because they actually believe it helps or just because they are employees in that school and
they blindly follow the rules set and made in the policy. Thus, this design suited the nature of this research very well and proved to be a perfect match.

3.3. Research Approach

With the aim of mixed method approach in mind, the researcher explored literature to make a suitable decision for selecting the approach. It was found that mixed methodology helps to encompass a more exhaustive information and knowledge of the research problem as well as provide rich datasets. The chances of the findings becoming more reliable and credible are enhanced. The mixed approach adopted for this study was to scrutinize quantitative and qualitative results but with the intent that a minimal amalgamation will be done. The results of both the findings were discussed in separate results sections for each method, and some discussion was done of their mutual implications. Mixed methods research provided broader, and deeper, information. However, as with all methods this also had its limitations. Thus, if mixed method is followed then this limitation can be minimized to some extent. Mixed method is a research inquiry that employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a mixed methods research work for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and partnership (Johnson et. al., 2007). Creswell and Plano Clark, (2011) added that the indispensable premise of mixed method design is that the use of qualitative and quantitative, in rapport, will provide a better understanding of the research problems than the use of either one method alone in a study. The study began with collecting quantitative data from six private schools in Karachi, which were situated in the lower socio economic areas. Data of 84 students were collected and tested. In this research study data were from 84 students’ scorecards because not many students fail in a class. Thus, researcher collected 168 scorecards from at 84 failed students who repeated a class in the same school. The researcher conducted interviews of six teachers and three principals after informing the school management of the current study. The researcher later transcribed and decoded the interviews before categorizing the themes that emerged.
3.4. Sample Size

The sample for this study was randomly purposive and consisted of 84 students who had failed in their final exams, from six private schools located in different areas of Karachi. As part of the quantitative research the researcher collected data of students, boys and girls who were studying in sixth, seventh and eighth grade. The average number of students in each school in the above mentioned classes was, 200. Therefore, from six schools the total average number of students was 1200, out of which, the researcher was able to collect data of 84 students who had failed in their final exams, which the researcher looked at, to meet the objectives of the research. Furthermore, for qualitative research, the researcher conducted interviews of six teachers and three principals, after informing the school management of the current study. All the six teachers were females who have been associated with the teaching profession for a minimum of five years. Five out the six teachers were coordinators, which means that they were responsible for not only teaching but also looking at matters pertaining to lesson planning, lesson designing, materials development, class observations, student profiling, record keeping, timetable scheduling, and approving exam papers for monthly assessments and final examination as well. There was only one teacher who did not have all of these responsibilities, however, she was teaching for the past 12 years in the middle school and was associated with the same institution throughout. The three principals who were interviewed by the researcher were also females who have been associated with the profession of education between 8 to 25 years, mostly in various private school systems in Pakistan.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Quantitative Data

Upon receiving all expected data from the private schools of Karachi, it was examined and calculated through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17 and was exposed to quantitative analysis. To examine the four hypotheses formulated for the study, paired sample t-test, one sample t-test and two-way MANOVA were used. The paired sample t-test, also known as dependent test, was done for the first hypothesis because the researcher wanted to compare the two scorecards of the same student, which
showed his / her academic achievements in the final exams for English and Math subjects, of two years in the same class. Because English and Math were considered to be the criteria for failing a student or promoting a student in the selected schools, as that is the norm overall in private schools, that’s why the researcher only looked at the scores of these two main subjects. A student was considered failed when he / she is not able to gain 50 percent marks in the final exam of English and Math. The total marks allocated for each subject exam were 100 marks. Thus, two scorecards of each student were collected. For example, the scorecard of student A, when he /she appeared in the final exam but failed in the first year and after repeating the same class, the scorecard of the next year was taken. In this both years record was noted to see whether student A improved or not. This was done with 84 students result records for English and Math. As is evident from the above example that the same entity, which are the students, was measured two times, which gave the results in pairs, therefore dependent paired sample t-test was done. On the other hand, the researcher conducted one sample t-tests for second hypothesis to dig deeper into the results of the paired sample t-test. For the third and fourth hypotheses, two-way MANOVA was done because the purpose of the study was to find out whether there was a significant difference between the means of two unrelated entities, which were; the two subjects, English and Math followed by the two genders, boys and girls and finally the three classes, class six, class seven and class eight, successively. Quantitative data were collected on the basis of the result/score cards of two years of the same students who were asked to repeat the class, with their scores showing their performance in both years. Formal approvals from six private school managements were sought through a letter and the researcher acquired the consent from the six private schools of Karachi situated in the low socioeconomic areas.

3.5.2. Qualitative Data

The process of interviews on most occasions went as planned. The interviews with the teachers were scheduled a week before. The time for each interview varied. Three out of six were conducted during recess hours, while two were taken on a weekend at a separate gathering; one was taken after the school hours. The interviews with all six principals were conducted in their offices during school hours. All were done in the first half of the day.
3.6. Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews questions of the teachers and principals were semi-structured and open-ended because exploratory research method involves least structured tool (Creswell, 2008). As qualitative methodologists follow the process of coding and categorizing strategy, the researching observed the same steps. These are considered to be the most important stage while analyzing the data. The researcher very closely examined the transcripts as the first step was to transcribe the interviews, followed by dividing the data into codes, also known as abstract bits. In order to identify abstract bits and recurrent words, the researcher read the transcripts many times before categorizing them. These steps allowed the researcher to focus on the themes which emerged. Through the line by line code, the researcher looked for similar words first, and then clumped them to denote a category. There were a few descriptive codes as well, which were denoted in the process of reading and rereading of the transcripts paragraphs. This was done to help the researcher find the answers to the research question.

The categories were labeled to indicate the analysis represented by the combination of the codes. In the end, the researcher explored and reduced the themes to the least number of categories which were possible. When the researchers carefully considered opinion was that data has been coded, categorized and conceptually ordered satisfactorily, data analysis was stopped.

3.7. Entry Negotiation

In order to conduct the study, the researcher went in person to different schools. Initially the researcher randomly selected private schools in Karachi, however, soon realizes that the elite private schools of the city were not allowing access. Some of them did not even allow the researcher to enter the office or arrange a meeting with the management. Next, the researcher tried sending brief description of the study stating its objectives but to no avail. A few declined through a reply in the email whereas others didn’t even bother to do that. Two elite schools, however, appreciated the effort and wished the researcher luck but apologized to participate because of privacy matters stated in their school policy. This exercise made the researcher realize that, in order to acquire data in the form of scorecards of failed students, perhaps the schools which are located in the
middle class or low socioeconomic areas of Karachi might not have these many reservations and probably would let the researcher conduct this study. As a result, the researcher contacted the above mentioned schools and as expected, received a positive response from six. Therefore, out of a total of 15 schools which the researcher visited in different localities of Karachi, during three months to four months, six schools belonging to low socio economic areas agreed to cooperate and share their students’ scorecards. Out of the six who agreed, two schools had to be convinced by the researcher by holding special meeting with the owner of the schools. Therefore, the researcher had to go back and revisit those two schools again after a week in the first school and after three weeks to the second school. Upon the second visits, both the schools agreed to take part in the research and in fact later on, were the most helpful in providing the data without delay. As the topic of the study on grade retention practices was considered sensitive, it was quite difficult for the researcher to convince the school management. However, once the researcher explained the importance of the research that the research findings will help the schools to conduct best practices for their students, they were excited to take part and requested to share the findings with them. The researcher also discussed briefly the literature available so that the school management has a good idea about the topic. After acquiring the consent from six schools, the researcher received the data of approximately a total of 1200 students, however, the researcher selected the data of 84 students who had failed and repeated the class in the same school. It was difficult to get data of all failed students because the researcher learnt that many of the failed students, whose data of first year was with the school, but the next years data (after repeating the class) was missing because those students had left the school.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Research ethics were taken into consideration while conducting this research. To begin with, permission from the school, to use the student records was obtained (see appendix-4). Furthermore, the researcher explained the objectives of the research, to the participants and asked them to sign a consent form before proceeding with the interviews and data collection (see appendix-5). The permission was obtained from the concerned six private schools before analyzing their perceptions about grade retention practices. As per
the rules provided by The British Education Research Association, BERA, voluntary informed permission was taken from persons who were willing to participate, prior to the research started.

The researcher followed The Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 (National Statement) which consists of a series of Guidelines made in agreement with the National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992 (see appendix-4). It states that qualitative research that explores sensitive topics in depth may involve emotional and other risks to both participant and researcher. Semi structured interviews of participants discuss a set of research questions or topics. This may involve the researcher acting as a mediator for the dialogue. The method of providing consent in qualitative research depends on numerous aspects, comprising of the type of research, its level of sensitivity, its cultural context, and the possible weakness of the participants. In some circumstances, the security of susceptible members may favor an official, written process of consent; in other contexts, an oral process.

3.9. Limitations of Mixed Study

Purposive approach is extremely consenting in the field of quantitative research because it allows the researcher to sift through the collected sample and select only those participants which fit and match the topic of the study. In this way, the researcher is allowed to reject the rest of the sample. This purposive approach is simple yet effective because the selected participants precisely fit the required profile for the study and fulfill the rationale of the research. However, it is subject to prejudice and imprecision.

3.10. Summary

The methodology which the researcher adopted was a mixed study research design to explore the phenomenon of grade retention practices in private schools of Karachi. In order to analyze the quantitative data collected from the scorecards of the 84 students of class six, seven and eight, who have failed and repeated their classes for a year, the researcher conducted a quantitative methodology, known as sequential explanatory. Furthermore, to analyze the qualitative data, which were collected from six teachers and three principals, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This chapter described and
validated the rationale for selecting mixed methodology. In order to provide and reach at a holistic result, purposive approach was taken along with semi structured interviews. In this way the results obtained were more reliable and looked at the study topic with another paradigm. The chapter further explained the research design, sample size, quantitative and qualitative research instruments, entry negotiation, ethical consideration and finally the limitations of the methodology. The results, discussions and recommendations are presented in the two subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Discussion

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study which the mixed methodology design revealed, followed by a discussion on the result with its probable reasons in the light of the context, research participants and the aim of the study. The chapter is divided into two segments, the first segment examines the findings of quantitative data analysis and the second segment looks into the findings derived from qualitative data analysis. Mixed method was selected by the researcher for this study on grade retention practices in private schools of Karachi, because the purpose of the researcher was to look at it from two angles of grade retention practice, the analysis from student scorecards which reveals the examination results of failed students who are asked to repeat the same class for the next year, along with the data through semi structured interviews of the teachers and the principals, who are the key figures in the decision of whether or not to retain the students with low academic achievement in two core subjects, English and Math which is revealed in their final examination scorecard. Therefore, in order to explore the answers for the research questions and four hypotheses, through quantitative and qualitative methodology, the data were analyzed. In addition to the results which this study presents, the researcher also matched it with the literature and discussed how much the findings are similar and to what extent they are dissimilar.

Jimerson (1973) observed that the effects of grade retention on students show negative impact rather than marked improvement, which is the hope of the teachers and principals who believe that providing students more time will enhance their learning capacity and will provide them extra opportunity to gain knowledge. Interestingly, in the literature on grade retention it is very often repeated that even though the results of the failed students change for the better in the next year examination, however, that difference is marginal and not very significant (Witmer et al., 2004). The proponents of grade retention argue that some students, who struggle academically in their class, do require that extra time to grasp concepts and knowledge which is expected from their age group and holding them back is the key to their success (Holmes, 1989).
4.2. Quantitative Method Findings

The researcher collected the quantitative data from six private schools of Karachi. These schools were based in the low socio economic areas. In order to obtain the quantitative results, the study tested four hypotheses. Later on, the researcher sifted through the scorecards of the students of class six, seven and eight. Among the scorecards of all students from the six selected private schools, the researcher sifted through them and identified 84 scorecards of students who had failed in final examinations and were asked to repeat their class for the following year. The researcher collected two scorecards for each failed student, the first scorecard depicting the result of initial year and the other scorecard showed the result of the same student in the repeated year. The researcher then took out the result of English and Math, as these two subjects are the core subjects and every student has to gain 50 percent marks in order to proceed onto the next grade and be eligible for promotion. It was further noted that although there were few students who have failed and their data of first year was available but their repeated year scorecard was not available, therefore the researcher had to drop that data. Upon inquiry the researcher learnt that some students leave the school out of embarrassment that they have performed poorly and failed in their class, so they change school. This also represents the stigma attached to grade retention and the perceptions of others towards failed students.
4.3. Quantitative Findings And Analysis

4.3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1

Gender – Grade Cross tabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>VIII</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Grade</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Grade</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% within Gender</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Grade</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 describes the frequency of participants in terms of both number and percentage based on their different genders (male and female) and grades (grade six, grade seven, and grade eight). From this perspective, 84 students were observed as total sample size (n=84) representing the whole target population, among them 8 female (constituting 9.5% of total sample size) and 12 male (constituting 14.3% of total sample size) were in grade VI, which makes 23.8% of the total sample size. Similarly, 10 female (constituting 11.9% of total sample size) and 18 male (constituting 21.4% of total sample size) were in grade VII, which makes 33.3% of the total sample size, whereas 9 female (constituting 10.7% of total sample size) and 27 male (constituting 32.1% of total sample size) were in grade VII, which makes 42.9% of the total sample size. Furthermore, table 1 also reveals proportion of sample in percentage based on their different genders and grades.
Prior to attempting an analysis on the findings of hypothesis 1, it is interesting to note Table 1 first, which descriptive table, showing the frequency and percentage of gender makeup in the three classes that were considered for collecting the data, that are class VI, VII and VIII. By looking at the table it is evident that the percentage of girls and boys in each class is depicted which tells us that boys were in a higher number than girls. It is good to recall here that this is the data of students who were asked to repeat a class and were retained in their respective years because they were unable to get the passing requirement, which were 50 percent marks in their final examination.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EY1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>40.58</td>
<td>6.032</td>
<td>.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EY2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>48.74</td>
<td>8.975</td>
<td>.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>40.37</td>
<td>6.694</td>
<td>.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>48.79</td>
<td>10.925</td>
<td>1.192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 represents the average performance of students based on two subjects, including English and Mathematics, as well as first and the repeated years. From this perspective, the average performance of students in the first year was 40.58% in English and 40.37% in mathematics. On the other hand, the average performance of students in the repeated year was 48.74% in English and 48.79% in mathematics.

It is interesting to note that although table-2 shows an upward trend in the repeated year in both English and Math, however, the students are still failing the exam. This means that grade retention does work in improving grades but never the less, it still falls short to achieve the desired outcome, which is to help students improve to the level that they at least pass the exams if not achieve remarkable progress. In addition to this, it is rather fascinating to note, by examining table 2, that the enhancement rate in English and Math, both is more or less similar, that is approximately 48.79%, this means that the students who were retained gained marks in the repeated year with similar effect. The reason could be that because the system remains the same, the teachers remain the same, the syllabus and
GRADE RETENTION PRACTICES AND STUDENT SCORES

topics covered remain the same, thus, the students’ improvement still falls short of them getting good enough marks which were hoped and desired to help students to cross over to the next class and catch up with peers. Perhaps they require more concerted efforts to reach the desired outcome of grade retention, which is to see students’ academic performance enhanced to a higher level.

Furthermore, the findings in table 2 also shed light on the average performance of the students in both subjects that are English and Math. Interestingly enough, there wasn’t much difference found in the performance of the students in both subjects. This could have been interpreted and tied to the theme of motivation, discussed in literature review in chapter two, that students lack motivation to perform at their optimal level, irrespective of the repercussions their inaction can have. Students who lack motivation to perform better, do not even try to put in their hundred percent efforts in even in the subject they are interested in or are slightly better at. This scenario is prevalent in literature as well. Hence, the role of the teachers and school becomes vital that they need to make sure, that if they have asked the student to stay back and repeat their grade, they should then also provide extra attention and care to that student, as it is evident that otherwise, the student loses all interest and hope in himself / herself. With positive encouragement and targeted care, these students tend to improve not only academically but also develop a positive outlook and a positive self perception, which eventually results in positive outcomes in academic achievements as well. The dilemma of finding the best teacher for the subject is another issue. There is a dearth of English language teachers in Pakistan, hence, also in Karachi. This problem was also reiterated by the principals who reported that each year they struggle to find a competent teacher who not only has good command over strategies to teach English language, but also has the training regarding it. Similarly, the Math teachers are also not trained very well to help cater to the wide ranging demands and requirements of the specific student present in the class. The principals’ views on the same issue are discussed further in this chapter under the heading qualitative analysis, principals interviews.

H$_1$: Repetition of same class does not have impact on students’ performance

H$_{1.1}$: In English subject

H$_{1.2}$: In mathematics subject
Table 3

Paired Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>95% CID*</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 EY1 - EY2</td>
<td>-8.155</td>
<td>-9.969</td>
<td>-6.340</td>
<td>-8.938</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2 MY1 - MY2</td>
<td>-8.417</td>
<td>-10.318</td>
<td>-6.516</td>
<td>-8.806</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
* Sig. (2-tailed)

Table 3 represents the comparison between the average scores achieved by student in first and repeated years. From this perspective, it reveals the significant difference between the scores achieved in the two years (difference is also mentioned in terms of average in table 2). As a result, it rejects the first null hypothesis that is repetition of same class does not have impact on students’ performance both in English and Mathematics. This is particularly because students achieved significantly higher scores after repeating year in the same class.

Paired sample t-test findings show that there is a significant impact of grade retention because the students’ performance is improved significantly. These findings are also similar to the findings of the literature that the researcher reviewed. Holmes (1976), Jackson (1978), Witmer (1975), reported that the tricky aspect of grade retention is, getting one definite answer, as many a times in the researches, the findings show improvement in grades, however, still the desired outcome is not completely positive, as this practice creates adverse effects more than the gain. The psychologists point out the mental stress and mental health of the students that it is affected negatively on students’ personality and self perception. Therefore, this practice of grade retention becomes a debate with many angles and proponents of argument, those who argue it is the right measure and those who insist it is not the correct way to deal with students who struggle academically.

As a result of the paired sample t-test (see Table-4), the researcher felt the need to investigate further and thus, conducted a one sample t-test as well. The reason being that because the paired sample t test showed significant difference as a consequence, the null hypothesis was rejected, the researcher wanted to explore the extent of the difference, in
GRADE RETENTION PRACTICES AND STUDENT SCORES

the sense that, the researcher wanted to see that has the difference made the desired outcome met? The findings of the one sample t-test are shown below in table-4, followed by its discussion.

Table 4

One-Sample Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Test Value = 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EY1</td>
<td>-14.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EY2</td>
<td>-1.289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY1</td>
<td>-13.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY2</td>
<td>-1.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sig. (2-tailed)
* Mean Difference
*95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

Although the p-values in the following Table 4 are representing statistically significant difference between both of the years and for both of the subjects but t-values (in the t column) narrating that students are scoring (on average) less than even the passing marks (Test Value = 50) in both years. Nevertheless, the achieved scores in the repeated year are more close to the passing score for both subjects if compared to the first years. This statement is confirmed by the upper values based on the 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference. However, such values fail to display the contribution of repeated years significantly.

This further exploration confirmed, yet again that no matter if the students repeat the class and also improve their grades, the findings point out that still students fail and not gain passing marks. Simply put, it means that grade retention does help students get good in achieving better marks; however, that good is still not good enough.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EY1</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>39.38</td>
<td>6.163</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>39.90</td>
<td>6.557</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>40.33</td>
<td>46.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.610</td>
<td>5.711</td>
<td>6.222</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>4.100</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>5.984</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>4.727</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>5.801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>6.225</td>
<td>6.034</td>
<td>6.032</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>5.984</td>
<td>5.801</td>
<td>5.860</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EY2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.11</td>
<td>48.09</td>
<td>50.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.464</td>
<td>8.745</td>
<td>9.464</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>8.553</td>
<td>7.969</td>
<td>8.502</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>8.752</td>
<td>8.030</td>
<td>8.502</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.41</td>
<td>39.88</td>
<td>49.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.879</td>
<td>7.043</td>
<td>10.343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>6.215</td>
<td>6.062</td>
<td>10.343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>8.592</td>
<td>6.996</td>
<td>10.343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.67</td>
<td>49.13</td>
<td>49.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.925</td>
<td>10.343</td>
<td>10.749</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>11.086</td>
<td>10.343</td>
<td>10.749</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>9.925</td>
<td>10.343</td>
<td>10.749</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 is a descriptive table for general purposes, where the researcher wanted to fine tune the data analysis and look at the performance of students, gender wise across the three grades, VI, VII and VIII, and in both subjects, English and Math.

**H2:** Students’ performance does not differ by their different grades (VI, VII, and VIII)

**H3:** Students’ performance does not differ by their different genders (Male and Female)

Having multiple dependent variables, two-way multivariate analysis of variance (two-way MANOVA) was found appropriate test to explore the interaction between different genders and grades of students (IV) on first and repeated year students’ performance in English and Mathematics subjects. From this perspective, Table 5 provides the descriptive statistics of the entire data based on mean values ($\bar{x}$) along with standard deviation (s) of the multiple DVs. These two values $\bar{x}$ and s have been divided by the two groups of sample, including gender and grades (IVs).

**Table 6**

*Multivariate Tests*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Hypothesis df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>.986</td>
<td>1313.642$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>1313.642$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>70.061</td>
<td>1313.642$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>70.061</td>
<td>1313.642$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pillai's Trace</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.536$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
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<td>.536$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.536$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.536$^b$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>75.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pillai's Trace</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>1.755</td>
<td>8.000</td>
<td>152.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>1.791$^b$</td>
<td>8.000</td>
<td>150.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>1.826</td>
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<td>148.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>3.456$^c$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>76.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pillai's Trace</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.913</td>
<td>8.000</td>
<td>152.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender * Grade</td>
<td>Wilks' Lambda</td>
<td>.909</td>
<td>.919$^b$</td>
<td>8.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hotelling's Trace</td>
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<td>.924</td>
<td>8.000</td>
<td>148.000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Roy's Largest Root</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>1.800$^c$</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>76.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Design: Intercept + Gender + Grade + Gender * Grade
b. Exact statistic
c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

Table 6 provides the outcome of two-way MANOVA test, which will lead the null hypothesis 2 and 3 to be either rejected or failed to reject. Therefore, Wilks' Lambda
(denoted as \( \Lambda \)) measures the difference between \( \bar{x} \) of two groups for the specified combination of DVs. The fundamental purpose of \( \Lambda \) is to measure the variance in percentage in DVs which is not explained by the difference in levels of the IVs. Therefore, the more ideal value is zero, which explains no variance not explained by the IVs. It can be stated in other words that the close the value to the zero, the more the variable will contribute the model. Nevertheless, in the present case, the sig value in the Wilks' Lambda row (when Gender and Grades are combined) is .503, which is more close to 1 rather than 0.

Table 6 provides the discriminant analysis via some other tests including Pillai's Trace, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy’s Largest Root; nevertheless, all of them are narrating similar results. As a result, it is safe to state that there is no significant interactional effect between different grades and genders of students on the combined Dvs, \( F(503, 150) = .919, p = .503; \) Wilks' \( \Lambda = .909 \). Therefore, both of the null hypotheses (\( H_2 \) and \( H_3 \)) are failed to reject.

The findings of the two hypotheses (\( H_2 \) and \( H_3 \)) which deal with the performance of the retained students does not differ, by gender or by grade, presented that, indeed this is the case. These results are aligned with the literature, reviewed by the researcher, during the course of the study. This explains that the age group students are in these grades, VI, VII and VII, they tend to behave in a similar fashion. Psychologists, Spencer, Steele and Quinn (1999) also refer to this age as the pre teens or early teens; they further consolidate the point that most children falling in this age bracket are not very different in performing things and behaving, irrespective of their gender. It is further interesting to note that psychologists have opined that the gender gap is shortening in the modern times, because more and more mixing of genders is taking place from an early childhood (Hyde, 2005).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Sig value</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( H_1 )</td>
<td>Repetition of same class does not have impact on students’ performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( H_{1.1} )</td>
<td>In English</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( H_{1.2} )</td>
<td>In mathematics</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students’ performance does not differ by their different grades (VI, VII, and VIII) .083 Failed to reject
Students’ performance does not differ by their different genders (Male and Female) .710 Failed to reject

Table 7 provides the summary of all hypotheses used in the presented research, along with their sig values and status, either rejected or failed to reject. It is thus, apparent here that the first hypothesis which had two parts H$_1$.1 and H$_1$.2 which show the impact of grade retention on students performance after repeating a grade in the two core subjects, English and Math, has a significant effect. This means that the impact of repeating a grade is significant, however when we further delved into it in table 2, it became evident that even with this significant impact on the subjects, the students, both male and female, still did not achieve the passing marks criteria which is 50 percent marks. Therefore, it was concluded that despite grade retention showing improvement in student scores, it is still not able to achieve the purpose of grade retention, which is to make students perform better and displaying a remarkable jump in marks. The findings of hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 were focused on grade wise students’ performance as well as students’ performance by gender, as shown in the summary table. It is evident from the result that both hypotheses were failed to reject and suggested that grade level and gender do not affect the performance of students, and that the performance does not differ because of grade level or gender.

4.4. Qualitative Data Analysis

The purpose of the study was to find out whether grade retention practices are an effective measure of improvement in student academic achievement. Therefore, in the light of the research questions, the researcher carried out exploratory qualitative research through conducting individual interviews of the two integral people, teachers and principals (see appendix 2 and 3), responsible for the decision of retaining or promoting students, after reviewing their final examination results of the two core subjects, English and Math. The researcher interviewed six teachers and three principals of the private schools of Karachi, situated in the low socio economic areas, from whom the quantitative data were collected. The qualitative discussion is divided into two segments; the first one
GRADE RETENTION PRACTICES AND STUDENT SCORES

based on the themes that emerged from analyzing teachers’ interviews and the second based on themes that emerged after categorization of principals’ interviews. The researcher employed code switching on some occasions, where the teachers responded in Urdu rather than English. However theses occasions were not very often. Hence, the researcher did not have much difficulty in interpreting their responses as they were mostly in English.

4.5. Teachers’ interviews

There were three themes which emerged after coding and categorization, those were; teachers’ attribution, lack of student motivation and students background.

Teacher attribution: One of the resonant themes which emerged was teachers’ attribution of their student. This theme emerged after analyzing the interviews of six teachers who had retained their students of grades, six, seven and eight. The theme depicted the teachers’ attribution towards their students with regards to their academic performances and behaviours. The findings of qualitative data analysis signal the view shared in the literature review of this research study. In agreement with the notion shared by the bulk of researches, such as Eccles (1995), who explored the accuracy of teacher’s expectations from their students, the this theme also revealed the contribution of teacher attribution as a decisive factor in the grade retention decision. Eccles also argued that different teachers have different expectations and therefore the reliability of their decision is not tangible. This theme was also found in the theory of attribution and the literature reviewed by the researcher. Attribution was the underpinning of grade retention practices also presented in this study’s conceptual framework. Thus, the questions of the semi structured interviews conducted with the teachers, put forth the findings that most of the times students fail and are not able to produce desired level of academic performance because teachers label different negative attributes to students; such as, they do not study, or lack motivation. Jimerson (2003) had identified similar results where teachers heavily put the onus of performance outcomes on the students, whereas in reality teachers providing struggling students the necessary time and resources is the way forward and not only grade retention. For example one teacher commented:
“The student who failed in my class was a very naughty boy. He always hit his friends and do naughty stuff. Zahir hae he failed. I told him many times that he will not pass if he will continue these habits”

The teachers’ attribution plays a vital role in the self perception of the struggling student, hence, better results were found in students who were promoted as compared to the not so better results of students who did not get promoted. One of the key themes which emerged from the teacher interviews was that of attribution, which is concurrent with the literature on grade retention also mentioned in chapter two of this thesis.

*Lack of student motivation*: the researcher observed a pattern in teachers’ responses, that they would start answering with a degree of openness about the topic, however, soon began to stick to their notion of grade retention practices. This ambiguity revealed that although teachers vouch for the grade retention practices as a valid and effective process to improve academic performance of a struggling student, yet they were themselves not very clear of the amount and level of this practice’s effectiveness for the failed student. Therefore, this theme emerged that students are themselves responsible for their failure as they are not serious towards their studies due to lack of interest. As on teacher commented:

“The students these days don’t want to work hard at all. They just want us to pass them and they come to school but don’t want to study. One of my student said she will get married so why she should bother that much.”

This depicts that there are various factors which mar the students’ motivation to learn and study, such as female students getting married early. It is interesting to keep in mind that the schools from which the interviews were held were situated in the low socio economic areas. That is why girls getting married were one factor, females are considered a burden on the family, so parents marry them off as and when a suitable proposal comes forward. Hence, it is concluded that grade retention is not based solely on the basis of poor academic performance, there are various other factors involved too such as teachers view and attribution of the student. The literature on motivation also talks about intrinsic and extrinsic, and usually the students who lack intrinsic motivation are the ones who struggle in their school years academically. The factors like girls getting married at early age are also responsible for students’ attention; focus and eventually motivation to achieve good
result are diminished. The underlying factor for lack of motivation in students was manifested by the remarks of the teachers, who stated that:

"Girls cry a lot, they don't come to school because they feel embarrassed."

Another teacher remarked that:

"Sometimes these students stop trying hard because if they try and make mistakes, their class fellows laugh at them and make fun of them then they obviously feel ashamed and embarrassed."

Thus, it is evident from this theme that the struggling students are under a lot of stress to perform better in exams, because the students, who struggle in their academic performance, get teased by their age level peers and this makes the low achieving students frustrated and sometimes even depressed, therefore, their motivation to succeed and perform up to par declines. Theorists have long defined the human nature that students start to depict and display behaviour and habits which their teachers or elders expect them to achieve. Labeling students as smart, dumb, naught and genius, in fact destroys their self perception.

Student’s background The third and the last theme of this segment which is based on teachers interviews, is students background. Through analysis of the teachers’ responses, it was evident that teachers strongly believed that students’ background plays a major role in defining and shaping their academic endeavors and their academic outcomes. They said that the students come from humble backgrounds where even their parents are not very well educated. Most of the students parents themselves were drop outs from schools or colleges because they had to earn a living and support their families. Although the teachers were of the opinion that the students in their school do not drop out because they have to go and work to provide financial support to their families, however, they put up with a lot in school and are not able to focus in their studies and achieve expected grade level marks. A teacher acknowledged that breaking the news to students and their parents regarding the decision of retaining the student is a challenge because the immediate reaction of the student and parents is that in order to save their child from facing embarrassment in school, they feel that they will remove the child from the current school and put their child in another one. However, this is not always the case, as one teacher described that:
"Initially when we tell parents their child has failed and now he will have to repeat the class, then they try to convince us that please promote my child this year and inshaAllah next year we will work hard with him and send him to tuitions. But when we tell them that the student will do even worse than this year if he is promoted, it will not be good for him, then they look at the option of shifting the school and leaving the school, but you see, not all of them can afford to take away their children because then they have to pay the admission fee of the new school, and also the student has to give admission test of the new school, in which sometimes they fail, so that’s why they don’t go and stay in this school.”

Therefore, the qualitative analysis of the semi structured interviews of the teacher provided an in depth understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the themes that emerged, such as; the importance of the power to support a family and the age old need for economic stability. These themes are evident in the literature too, that the researcher reviewed for this study.

4.6. Principal interviews

The findings and analysis of the themes which were highlighted by the researcher as a consequence of coding and categorizing interviews of the principals, is discussed below. The two themes that emerged from the principals’ interviews were; the blame game and grade repetition: a sound policy? Furthermore, it is important to note that the researcher found interviewing the principals and getting them to talk tougher than interviewing the teachers. The principals of the private schools were tight lipped on many occasions and either dodged the probing questions or gave diplomatic clichéd replies. None the less, the researcher was able to dig out their genuine opinions and views on grade retention practices, rather than just reiterating the defined school policy by the organization they were working for.

The blame game The theme of blame game was a recurring one because all three principals who were interviewed put the onus of students’ low academic performance on the parents. This was in contrast to what the teachers had believed, because the teachers were talking with the perspective of the students’ attitudes in the class rooms while studying, and they were more aware of the students’ personalities because they are in close
contact with the students, unlike the principals. Moreover, it is important to note that the teachers were more open as they had a deeper understanding of their student as well as they were not apprehensive to speak their mind, as opposed to the principals, who has inhibitions and were on a safe guard mode, so as to not get in trouble by letting out too much. For example one of the principal answered to a question regarding school’s efforts in helping the struggling student perform better and achieve the required marks, she responded:

“Well, our school does whatever is required and we work very hard, but the parents do not cooperate with us. They don’t pay any attention to their kids and when we fail them they make a fuss.”

The view of the principals that parents do not perform their share of responsibility, in helping their child with studies at home is concurrent with the literature available on grade retention and which has been reviewed by the researcher in chapter two of the thesis. Therefore, the theme of blaming the other for the lack of desired outcomes is in most cases the cause of underlying belief of safeguarding one’s own self. The theoretical underpinnings were evident through the remarks of the principals, which signify that self evaluation is challenging as compared to holding others responsible for the failure. The researcher probed the matter further by asking questions such as, what steps does the school take, apart from the obvious retention practices, to which the responses were mostly focused on teacher development initiatives and provision of resource materials in the school, rather than concrete steps and targeted actions, which are specific to the students needs. Upon inquiring about these learner and student centered alternatives to grade retention, the school principals irately retorted that:

“The teachers don’t have that much time to dedicate so much time for one student. They have to deal with all students equally. The whole year they work hard, but they don’t have a magic wand to make the weak students gain better results. Even though, we have remedial classes in our school for English and Math, but they are also not enough. The parents have to work hard with these children at home, not just send them to school.”

Another principal responded in this way:
“We even make our teachers attend workshops to learn different methods and strategies to teach every type of child. Our aim is to help every student of our school and that is why we spend money even to buy teacher resource books to help them. But you see all our effort is wasted if the parents do not teach their children at home. See, the students have to study at home to get good marks and parents think that once they are sending kids to school that is enough. Some families send their kids to tuitions after school, now this is a bigger problem because at tuitions they learn differently and get confused. Parents don’t understand and just want easy solution and blame the school”

These views were reiterated by another principal who shared that in their school they hold in house teacher training workshops held twice a year. She further elaborated that:

“We offer the weak students bridge classes for subjects they are weak in. What else can we do? The effort our school does is remarkable but the students do not get the same kind of support at home. The environment at home is very disturbed and some students parents are not that educated to teach them in these middle school level topics of English and Math.”

The question regarding how important is the class environment and student teacher relationship in helping the students achieve and display improvements in academic performance, the responses were in agreement that it is indeed very important and vital for the teacher and student interaction to be based on positive grounds. However, it was probed further by the researcher to find out how this relationship can be developed, to which the principals responses revealed a positive response where they specifically stated that in order for this relationship to bear fruitful outcomes, and for this teacher student relation to be strong and effective, the role of the teacher has to be very crucial. The teachers have to proactively reach out to struggling students and be available for them to provide help and clarify their weaker areas.

The principals viewed this rapport between the teacher and the students as an effective tool which usually yields positive outcomes. This notion is also concurrent with the quantitative findings that there is improvement in students’ performance after repetition, so it can be hoped that this happens because of the better development of the
teacher student relationship as a result of student spending one more year with the same teacher. Further to the importance of teacher student relationship, it was reported by the principals that schools, specially these private schools face the problem of high teacher turnover rate. It is a challenge for the school to retain teachers in their school because there are various options available to teachers. Whenever, they receive a better offer from any other school, they take that opportunity for better financial prospects. Therefore, it becomes a mammoth task for the school managements to sustain the quality and smooth running of the school system. In addition to this, the turnover affects all the students in general; however, it affects the struggling students the most, in particular. As mentioned and disused above, this teacher turnover adversely affects the teacher student rapport which took so much time to build and with the new teacher coming in, it becomes difficult for the students to develop a positive relationship because of the fact that the students who have low academic performance tend to be shy and embarrassed in front of fresher faces and new people. These students do not open up immediately to take help and recoil in themselves; therefore, they also develop lack of motivation. Similarly, the teachers who have just joined take time to adjust and understand the different nature of students along with getting a grip on their new job responsibilities. Even the most experienced teachers who join a new institution require a settling time, to get to know his / her students. It is evident from literature that was reviewed in chapter two of this thesis that the teacher attribution plays an important role in the decision making of grade retention for the academically struggling student. Therefore, the new teacher who joins in a new school tries to acquaint himself / herself, not only with the surroundings but also with the, staff, fellow colleagues and most importantly the students. In order to facilitate the new teacher, the other colleagues introduce students to the teacher and provide him / her with a brief academic history of the students. This might bring in biasness on the part of the teachers previously teaching in the same school, which eventually results in transferring their own pre conceived ideas and attributions with regard to failed students, to the new teacher. Hence, the new teacher absorbs the attributions regarding academically weak students and develops low expectation from those students since the start.

**Legitimacy of grade repetition:** The findings from further probing questions revealed that the principals view on grade retention had only to do with policy. To put it in
simpler words, the principals only said what they felt would be pleasing to their employer. In answering the questions they kept referring to the schools stated policy and spoke from its perspective, rather than their own. Even though it was frustrating for the researcher to convince them to be more specific and comment on the policy, yet the researcher managed to get them relaxed and reiterate that their privacy would be maintained. Therefore, afterwards one of the principal did mention that although she felt grade repetition is practiced widely and across all grades, even starting as early as kindergarten and nursery children, but she does not totally support it. She further elaborated that:

“I believe grade retention should be practiced but only for bigger classes and never in preschool level.”

This aspect of selective grade level retention was supported by the other principals too. The idea was that the schools need to revise their assessment practices in preschool age group students so that they are not judged on the basis of their result. This practice is more suitable and effective for students of middle or high school students. In fact one principal responded with a question that:

“Haven’t you heard and you must have seen too that many students of O’level and A’level classes repeat themselves as a choice because they want to improve their percentages. They sit again and get registered for CIE privately too to get better, and you will be surprised that most of the students who sit for re sits do get better results after reappearing. See, that is why grade retention is practiced all over the world.”

It is interesting to note that this theme is concurrent with the quantitative findings that students who repeat do gain marks. The difference here is though that the quantitative data result showed students improvement in the repeated year, but still they were failing the grade. Therefore, the researcher concluded that perhaps grade retention is a better option for those students who have passed but still wish to further improve their percentage, for example if a student gained 80 percent marks in the first year he appeared but still wanted to achieve better than that and thus, repeated the exam, which resulted in enhanced percentage, which is exactly what the qualitative theme has shown. The motivation factor also plays a very important role here, those students of grades six, seven and eight are not intrinsically motivated and do not yet have a clear cut vision or future direction. In fact
these students are not yet fully able to comprehend the consequences of slack behaviour or the repercussions their non-seriousness towards studies entails. Whereas, on the other hand, O’level and A’level students are mature enough to understand the complexities their carelessness might bring because they are well aware of their future path and know very well what they are looking for and what their goals are. Therefore, they are intrinsically motivated to try hard and even go as far as to repeat the course they feel they can improve their percentages. These students have a clear vision and they keep their end in sight, hence they strive to reach it and want to leave no stone unturned in doing that. Perhaps they repeat because it is a requirement to get entry into a college or university they desire to attend, this gives them the motivation. As a result, no adverse effects or negative impact of grade retention is observed in students of O’level or A’level. Furthermore, it would be helpful to note here that the reason for them not to dread and feel embarrassed to repeat might be because O’level and A’level students only repeat specific course that they wish to, in contrast to school going children who study in classes six, seven and eight, that they have to repeat the whole grade for another year. This means that the student has to repeat not just English and Math in which he failed but also all the rest of the subjects too, which are part of the curriculum, even though he passed in them, and maybe even scored very good marks and passed in them with flying colors. This is concurrent with the findings that grade retention provides a short-term gain but it still is practiced. Thus, these students lose interest and not achieve the desired outcome of repeating the grade, which is not just improvement in marks and percentages but also to achieve a significant upward trend which would show a humongous difference between the academic performances of first year and repeated year. The theme that emerged after the interviews was legitimacy of grade retention which is based on the context of the believe that the students who struggle academically in comparison to their peers who perform up to grade level, also has to do with the level of maturity among students. This pretext of immaturity is also one of the most common predictors of grade retention decision. As one principal responded:

“Some students fail to perform up to their grade level, because their comprehension skills are still not developed and they lack the maturity to deal with complex questions. That is why, because every child grows differently and matures at
different times so we retain such students so that they will improve in the next year, and believe me we have seen that they do get better."

It is evident from the themes which evolved after careful consideration of the qualitative data collected through semi structured interviews of teachers and principals of private schools situated in the low socio economic areas of Karachi, that grade retention practices remain a debatable matter which involves careful considerations from all stakeholders, namely; the students, their parents, and school as an institution. The stigma attached to grade retention is not only for the students but it also leaves a negative impact on the school administration because if the school develops a reputation where students’ failure rate is high then they will not be able to attract new admission, which is the primary goal of most of the private schools. The qualitative analysis explored the theoretical underpinnings of grade retention practices and the themes which emerged suggested that grade retention is seen as an effective means of intervention for the academically struggling student, which is widely provided and propagated by the private schools.

4.7. Summary

Chapter four focused on the data, results and finally analysis and discussion of the results. This chapter was divided into two segments; quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis. It further proceeded to discuss the findings in the light of the hypotheses and research questions, for the purpose of the study which was guided by the conceptual framework. The researcher studied the quantitative results through the visual representation of the t tests and two-way MANOVA which were applied to explore the outcome of the hypothesis.

The researcher further explored the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of grade retention practices in the private schools of Karachi, through the process of coding, categorizing till the themes emerged. The in depth probing through semi structured interviews provided the researcher with interesting and exciting findings. It is a universal habit that people find it difficult to accept change and are not readily willing to give up their set norms and hold on tight to traditional practices. This tussle in the humans is the basis of every research that a researcher tries to explore the realities behind fixed notions with the sole purpose of exploring with biasness. The researcher, after having found the
result of the study, proceeded onto the next eminent step that is concluding the research study by providing recommendations for future direction and further studies. These suggestions are mentioned in detail in the next chapter that is chapter five of the research thesis.
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Overview
The previous chapter presented the research findings along with a detailed discussion on the results. It was evident that grade retention practices in private schools of Karachi, are indeed an important area to be explored. The dearth of research on this topic in Pakistan is a cause for concern for the researcher; therefore the researcher conducted this study to fill this huge gap, on the contrary, it must be reiterated here, that grade retention has been studied and researched since decades, in the developed counties. There may have been studies conducted in Pakistan, however, the researcher was not successful in finding the related studies. The research started with the research problem in mind which was, students who are retained in the same class due to low academic performance do not show better result even after repeating the same class for a year. It was guided by the following research questions and hypotheses.

To what extent grade retention practices are effective in enabling students to achieve better scores?
What are the criteria for the teacher to decide whether to retain a student or to promote him?
What role does gender play in student performance?
How do the principals perceive their grade retention policy with relation to student academic performance?

H1: Repetition of same class does not have impact on students’ performance
   H1.1: In English subject
   H1.2: In mathematics subject

H2: Students’ performance does not differ by their different grades (VI, VII, and VIII)

H3: Students’ performance does not differ by their different genders (Male and Female)

This research highlighted the significance of the different statistical test performed on the quantitative data which were collected through failed students’ two years scorecards. This was followed by a description of the statistical analysis and finally a thorough discussion on the possible reasons for the result. Similarly, the researcher further moved
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on to present the qualitative analysis and result findings, through an in depth investigation of the interview findings by considering the theoretical underpinnings of the themes that emerged.

5.2. Conclusion

This research was conceived, proposed, planned, conducted and concluded after careful analysis of the findings of quantitative data along with the in depth analysis of the qualitative data, in the hope that it will hold its significance for educators and teachers, who would benefit in formulating and eventually implementing the best practices in their schools, in order to achieve the primary aim of helping and facilitating student growth and learning processes.

This research study has been guided by the research questions and the conceptual framework, developed after extensive reading on various theories regarding grade retention and its impact on student’s performances after repeating the grade for the next whole year. The premise of the proponents of grade retention is based on the notion that students who demonstrate low academic performance require extra time to catch up with their peers; therefore, they hope that if the students repeat and go through the taught concepts again, they would gain better marks and display enhanced academic performance. This belief was proven to be true to some extent, because statistical analysis of the scorecards suggested that there is a significant change in the marks of the students in the repeated year. The students tend to gain marks, never the less; they still fall short of the passing mark cutoff, hence end up getting failed again and that is the precise reason why opponents of grade retention argue that if this practice is not producing the desired outcome, that is of students passing the grade after repeating, then grade retention is not as effective. This research also concluded that the intention of retention remains unmet, on most cases, in fact the negative impact on the students’ self perception and psychology, outweigh the benefits of holding back a student to repeat the same grade in order to improve academically. Hence, the challenging of the norms is met with resistance. This was also evident from the qualitative findings that teachers and principals were hesitant in admitting that grade retention is not the most effective approach to improving student academic performance, however, they did believe that only grade retention should not be the sole method but rather other ways
to help the student achieve higher academic achievement must be adopted by the school. It was highlighted that grade retention does help solve the problem of low academic achievement but it does so for a short time period, therefore, grade retention is not a practice to be considered if long term benefit is desired. Grade retention can be a quick fix but not a lasting one. In fact the findings also revealed that the negative effects of the psychological impact are far more important than just getting better academically. Grade retention perhaps is helpful for the higher level classes, like O’level and A’level, where the students are intrinsically motivated to perform better because their entry to the institutions, like colleges and universities, depend on the mark percentage they gain. The issue of embarrassment, as seen in the findings of this study in the students of class six, seven and eight is higher than the students’ who opt for retention themselves. The reason is because the students who opted for retention themselves usually do not fail their previous exams, in fact they are high achievers and want to repeat to further improve their percentage, so therefore, their repetition is for a totally different purpose whereas, the middle school students who were considered for this research are asked to repeat by the teachers and principals because they have failed the final examination of English and Math and their exam scores did not meet the cutoff of fifty percent. Therefore, these students are asked to stay back in their classes and are not promoted to the next class with their peers, in the hope that these academically struggling students might catch up after repeating the same syllabus for one more year. This rationale is true yet still not overwhelmingly convincing to be carried on. The other options of helping the student academically must be adopted and studied further, to see their relevance and effectiveness.

5.3. Recommendations

It deems fit, after the conclusion of every research, that the researcher provides recommendations and suggest possible solutions along with concrete ideas, in the light of the findings, so as to help the concerned people perform better, because the researcher has studied the topic in great detail, and had witnessed different scenarios and touched upon various aspects of the study extensively, therefore he /she is the right person to provide beneficial suggestions, based on facts and informed thought process. Thus, for this research
the same is attempted, as a result of which this chapter has been divided into three parts; first recommendations for teachers followed by recommendations for the principals and lastly recommendations and suggestions for future direction to future researchers, lest they wish to pursue and explore grade retention as a topic for their research endeavour.

5.3.1. Recommendations for teachers

In the light of the research findings on grade retention practices in Karachi, it is recommended that teachers should avoid making a decision to retain a student on the basis of their own expectations from the student and on the grounds of attribution.

The teachers play a vital role in the lives of the students, the impact of teachers on students is ever lasting, and therefore, a teacher needs to cater to the students’ needs, not just academic needs, but also emotional well being, which is directly linked with academic performance. As discussed in chapter four, student self perception is also one of the predictors of low academic achievement in final examination, along with lack of motivation.

It is suggested that teachers are the key players when it comes to motivation. A struggling student finds it difficult to drive his motivation in the positive direction and thus, does not try hard enough and does not give their hundred percent efforts. If the teacher is sensible and has empathy, he/she should encourage students at every minutest achievement, and perhaps if it is done in the presence of peers, then that elevates him/her and works wonders for the student, especially the ones who are in grade six, seven and eight because in these grades most of the students are in their pre teens and early teens. This is the age when students are extremely self conscious and a slight pat on the back in front of their peers goes a long way. This kind of verbal encouragement can spark the thirst to show better result. It is also said that positive feedback and remarks to young adults make them motivated to show and display their best efforts and develop a need to work harder and prove their critics wrong. Hence, a teacher can either make or break a student.

5.3.2. Recommendations for principals

After analyzing the findings, it is suggested that the principals relook at their school’s retention policy carefully, including formative assessment report as well, along
with the summative one, which is already there. Current practice of holding back a struggling student and retaining him / her is actually based on the final examination result which is a summative form of assessment. This can be achieved by maintaining student portfolios and maintaining a record of each student’s performance throughout the year. In this way, the decision with regards to grade retention will be based after the holistic analysis of the student. Furthermore, with regards to the maintenance of student portfolio, in today’s age, it is easy to implement and maintain safe and secure portfolios in the form of e-portfolios, which can be accessed anytime.

Moreover, the principals need to initiate alternative academic enhancement intervention strategies, to facilitate students who struggle academically, in their grades, especially for the subjects they are required to perform at least fifty percent in, to be promoted to the next grade along with their peers. It is important to highlight that these intervention procedures must be developed after careful consideration of their possible implications, first and foremost on the students and secondly on the school’s reputation. In order for the alternate intervention strategies to succeed, the best and most effective method is to first conduct a thorough students’ need assessment before making a final decision.

The findings of the research also exposed level of frustration with which the principals were mentioning the poor role of parents in the lives of the students who demonstrate low academic performance. In order to lower the level of bitterness, it is recommended that principals conduct workshops for parents as well, and keep them in the loop about their child’s academic progress from the start of the academic year. The suggestion given above about the e-portfolios would also be helpful.

Lastly it is recommended that the principals evolve criteria, other than achieving fifty percent marks in the final examination of the two core subjects, that are English and Math, which clearly lays out a guideline for teachers to follow, in order to retain a student. This could even be taken further, by perhaps contacting private school regulatory bodies to sit together with all school heads and formulate the criteria with detailed descriptors, so that there is harmony among all the schools and also this could be sustainable too.

5.3.3. **Recommendations for future researchers**
This research study was focused on the grade retention practices in the private schools of Karachi. Further studies can be carried on exploring the grade retention practices in the public schools of Karachi. Furthermore, a comparative study can be conducted to see the different patterns emerge with regards to the differences and similarities of grade retention practice between private and public schools.

Moreover, future studies can be focused on other grades, in addition to this study’s focus which was grade six, seven and eight. Perhaps exploring O’ level and A’level students’ retention practices as well.

Finally a cross cultural regional study on grade retention will provide a broader picture of how grade retention is impacting students and what measures can be taken to implement alternative strategies to diminish the practice of grade retention.

5.4. Summary

Chapter five presented the synopsis of the entire research and provided recommendations for teachers, principals and for prospective researchers, along with the reason for the recommendations. The recommendations were based on the research findings and themes which emerged after thorough analysis of every aspect of the data on grade retention. All possibilities of future implications were covered to provide a way forward. In addition to recommendations, a summary of the quantitative and qualitative findings was given followed by conclusion of the entire research thesis. The conclusion highlighted the major research outcomes and how might these be useful to teachers, principals and eventually be beneficial for students. This chapter reiterated the aim of the study and its outcome so as to engender learning in our students, as a consequence, it is hoped that enhanced learning environments will produce better results in terms of students academic achievements, hence, minimizing the chances of students scoring low in their grade’s final examinations. This increase in student learning will reduce the cases of grade retention and improve possibilities of promotion. Hence, it is concluded that alternate intervention strategies should be considered and should be given preference over grade retention.
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References


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Interview Guideline (For Teachers)

1. How do you perceive grade retention?
2. In your opinion what is the affect of grade retention and drop out?
3. What psychological effects do you envisage due to grade retention?
   - What is your major frustration about grade retention?
   - Do you feel that the student's self-esteem becomes low because of grade retention
     and do you consider a student’s self-concept when endorsing grade retention?
4. What steps do you take as a teacher to help students who have been retained in your class?
5. In your case, will you retain a student because of age, attendance policy, suspension, or is it founded only on academic attainment?
6. What was the percentage of students who were retained in your classroom last year?
7. Do you feel a student’s gender influences the decision to retain?
8. As a teacher, do you feel teachers are responsible for the low academic performance of his/her student?
9. How do you feel about social promotion?
10. Are you aware of any school who adopts social promotion?

Interview Guideline (For Principals)

1. What is the school policy regarding grade retention?
   - What minimum exam percentage a student is required to achieve in order to be
     promoted to next class?
   - From which grade you start implementing the grade retention policy?
2. What teacher professional development your school provides, to ensure teachers
   are equipped to teach students with varied needs?
3. Are any administrative changes (such as policy on grade retention) made within your school to support more intensive learning environment for students or the policy has remained the same since the very beginning?
   - If yes, what are they?
4. Do you think your school's grade retention policy needs to be reviewed?
   - If yes, why?
5. How do you ensure directed supports and services are in place and available for low performing students?
6. Are you satisfied with the assessment patterns followed in your school?
7. In your opinion, what is the one main cause of any student failing in class?
8. In the light of your school records, are girls more vulnerable to fail or boys, or vice versa?
The Principal / Teacher
Subject: Request for permission to conduct research study in your school
Respected Sir / Madam

I am Adeeba Ahmad, student of M-Phil in Education program from Institute of Business Management Karachi. Area of my research is Education. Thesis is an essential part of the M-Phil program at IoBM. I want to conduct a study titled, “Grade Retention Practices and Student Scores: A Case of Private Schools.” For this purpose six private schools have been requested to participate in the study and your school is one of them. The principal and teachers will be asked to give individual interviews; therefore, it is kindly requested to allow me to carry out research in your school.

The significance of the study is manifold. Firstly the study will provide contextual knowledge about the impact and effectiveness of grade retention practices through the results of the students presented in the scorecards. Secondly, the individual interviews will provide an in depth insight into the causes of grade retention and role of teacher, principal and parents will be explored. Thirdly, results might be helpful for school management to reflect on the existing practices of grade retention.

I hope I will be given permission to undertake the study in your school under your kind authority.

With best wishes
Adeeba Ahmad
Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan
Appendix C

Consent Form

Dear Teacher / Principal
I, Adeeba Ahmad, student of M-Phil in Education program from Institute of Business Management (IoBM) Karachi, am conducting a research titled, “Grade Retention Practices and Student Scores: A Case of Private Schools.”
In this study, informal discussion will be conducted. The discussion will be audio taped in order to preserve data for analysis. The purpose of the discussion is to learn
Your interview data will be used for analysis and may be quoted in the final thesis or future publications: however, confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. Transcripts will be secured in the locked cabinet and all soft data will be destroyed no later than April 2020.
You can withdraw your participation from the research at any stage without any explanation. At any time you can refuse to answer a question or participate in the data collection process, though there is no risk involved in the participation of the study.
I am requesting you for your voluntary participation. If you accept the objectives of the study, kindly sign the informed consent form below.

Signature __________________ Date: __________________
Name: Adeeba Ahmad

I have read and understood the nature, processes, purpose, benefits and my rights during the study. Hereby, I am willing to voluntarily participate in this research.

Signature __________________ Date: __________________
Name: __________________