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Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Grade Retention

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The University of Southern Mississippi

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE RETENTION

by

Latrice Shontae Richardson

Abstract of a Dissertation
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of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE RETENTION

by Latrice Shontae Richardson

May 2010

The purpose of this research study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention. Additionally, the study observed demographic data that explored the differences in elementary teachers' perceptions by (a) geographical location, (b) years of experience, (c) grade level assignments, (d) age, (e) level of education, (f) ethnicity, and (g) influences on perceptions.

The participants included 164 elementary teachers from five rural (northern) and five suburban (southern) regions of Mississippi. Since teachers play such a huge role in the classroom, they also play a vital role in grade retention. Teacher decisions can create a successful educational experience for a child. It is believed that teachers often base their attitudes about grade retention on personal experiences rather than other factors such as research.

Quantitative data were collected to examine participating teachers' perceptions of grade retention. Data were collected using the Grade Retention Survey which has been used previously in other studies. The instrument consisted of two sections. The first section contained 35 attitudinal statements regarding grade retention, and the second section consisted of demographic information. Data were triangulated and analyzed using SPSS.

The study concluded that elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention remained neutral. Overall, teachers did not strongly favor grade retention nor did they strongly disagree with the practice. However, teachers did firmly support some statements on retention. Teachers strongly agreed that retaining students in primary grades is less traumatic than in intermediate years and that promotion should be based on students' mastery of grade level requirements. Furthermore, it was noticed that there is not a significant difference between the perceptions of elementary teachers and geographical location, years of experience, grade level assignment, age, and level of education. However, a significant difference was discovered between teachers' perceptions and ethnicity. In conclusion, teachers' most influential factor on their beliefs about grade retention was their experience with retained students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of retention as an educational practice derives from the schoolhouses of the mid-19th century. It was used as a remedial intervention in Massachusetts for students who did not meet educational standards. The rationale for introducing this retention system was to teach a group of students who were similar in age and level of development.

Seasoned educators, classroom teachers, and principals make strong arguments in favor of the effectiveness of this intervention. These arguments are centered without regard to the growing body of evidence that states that the practice of grade retention is not empirically based (Dawson, 1998). As a result of the educators' support for the practice, annual grade retention rates are constantly on the rise.

Grade promotion is the initial goal of every school-age child. However, the task of meeting the requirements for promotion is difficult for some students. Students often experience educational setbacks that usually result in grade retention. Grade retention can occur at any school grade level, kindergarten through 12th. However, there is still much heated debate on whether the timing of the retention makes a difference. It has been estimated that 5% to 10% of students are retained in the United States annually. This is an estimated 2.6 million children retained in schools on a yearly average, costing approximately \$15 billion per school year (Shepard & Smith, 1990).

Accountability is a big issue in the current educational system. State and district accountability systems are increasing and include retention in grades for young students who do not demonstrate adequate achievement levels (Frey, 2005). The No Child Left

Behind Act was enacted in 2001 by President George H. W. Bush. This act was implemented to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind educationally. Therefore, most schools are working extremely hard to ensure appropriate education for all students.

Teachers as well as administrators are aware of the importance of children grasping all of the necessary skills required for promotion. It is also realized that all children learn at different paces while possibly being the same age. It then becomes a question of what needs to be done for students who have not met the required educational standards as mandated by the government. A child's promotion without being academically prepared does not coincide with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In the State of the Union Address of 1997 and 1998, President William Clinton called for the end of social promotion and the retention of students who did not meet promotion standards in all schools across America (Clinton, 1997, 1998). Grade retention is becoming an acceptable practice in communities despite the negative effects that have been documented by research.

Vast amounts of research have been conducted on the usefulness of grade retention. According to Jimerson (2001), simply having a student repeat a grade is unlikely to address the multiple factors influencing poor achievement or adjustments that led to the student being retained. Others found that grade retention accomplished very little of what was intended, which is to intervene with academically challenged students.

Consequently, with opponents arguing that retention is an ineffective strategy for at-risk youths and advocates charging that social promotion amounts to a failure to enforce meaningful academic standards, the courts have become involved in litigation

concerning the issue (Murray & Murray, 2001). Since grade retention is such a controversial issue, the courts usually get involved at some point. Educators, especially school administrators, should be knowledgeable of the legal ramifications of retention and promotion. *Debra P. v. Turlington* (1981) was a federal case in Florida regarding grade retention. The justification for this case was a statewide test that was mandatory for students to pass prior to graduation. It was shown that some of the information on the state test was not taught in all Florida schools. The courts ruled that the test should remain on hold until the state could prove that the material was taught in every school throughout the state.

In many schools across the nation, students are required to pass competency tests before promotion to the next grade. Children who fail these tests are either remediated or retained in the grade. Evidence fails to support the connection between merit promotion and student achievement. Consequently, motivation and promotion policies are likely to be based on social values and psychological orientation (Steiner, 1996).

Grade retention is highly supported by many educators, parents, and the community. Many studies have been done on grade retention, but researchers feel the results are not taken into consideration. It is mentioned that short-term effects are examined rather than long-term. Retention may improve a student's academics during the year the student is retained, but the gain usually declines 2 to 3 years after retention (Jimerson, Kerr, & Pletcher, 2005). Most teachers believe that grade retention is an effective intervention for helping students to improve academically (Tanner & Combs, 1993). Such attitudes and perceptions make grade retention a continuous practice. In a study by Shepard and Smith (1988), it was found that most teachers' opinions varied

about grade retention. One perception of teachers from the Shepard and Smith (1988) study was that

An extra year provides time for the children to mature, moves the child from the bottom of his age appropriate class to the top in which he or she is retained, makes the child a leader, prevents later and more painful retention, and prevents deviant behavior later in life. (p. 322)

Drop-out rates are increased for students who have been retained in school. According to Jimerson (1999), it has been demonstrated that students who are retained are more likely to drop out than matched comparison groups of equally low-achieving, but socially-promoted peers. Research also has shown that students who have been retained achieved a lower employment status, were paid less per hour, and received poorer employment competency ratings compared with a group of low-achieving students who were not retained in school.

Other research revealed some demographic characteristics of retained students. Students who are retained are more likely to have mothers with low IQ scores, parents who are not involved in education, behavior and emotional problems, and poor school attendance. Gender and ethnic characteristics of retained students were also examined by previous researchers. It has been suggested that boys are more likely to repeat a grade than are girls. Also, findings have revealed that Black and Hispanic students' retention rates are higher than any other ethnic group.

In a study by Tomchin and Impara (1992), teachers agreed that K-3 retention was not harmful to students, but disagreed about the impact on students in upper grades. Responses from the Teacher Retention Belief Questionnaire (TRBQ) revealed that

teachers at all grade levels believe that retention is an acceptable school practice that motivates students to better perform academically. Teachers are considered extremely important factors in retention decisions.

Grade retention can produce socio-emotional effects on students and should be considered in the decision-making process. Research implied that sixth grade retentions tend to be a very stressful life event. Jimerson (2001) indicated that retained students experience lower self-esteem and lower rates of school attendance relative to promoted peers. In a study by Foster (1993), it was found that grade retention can create self-esteem and socioeconomic problems. Foster interviewed retained students in first, third, and sixth grades and found that most of them felt upset, bad, and embarrassed about grade retention.

The initial goal of all educators is to help students become successful. Along with this goal is also providing possible interventions that will help struggling students become academically successful. Once the need of an individual student or student population is understood, it is important for educators to be familiar with specific interventions that are evidence based (Kratcochwill & Stoiber, 2000). In order to prevent academic failure and reduce grade retention rates and behavioral issues, other strategies must be implemented in the schools. Some interventions for schools include but are not limited to summer school and tutoring, teacher support teams, school-based mental health programs, parental involvement, and comprehensive programs that promote academic development. These possible interventions may become helpful tactics to prevent at-risk students from grade retention.

Theoretical Framework

The Community Theory serves as a theoretical view of grade retention. The founder of this theory, Segiovanni, includes in his book *The Leadership for the Schoolhouse* a basic model of the theory. It consists of four pillars which emphasize the moral authority of idea-based leadership. All four of the pillars are geared toward leadership and learning. However, the pillar that closely relates to the study of grade retention is the fourth pillar. This pillar explains that as educators, decisions concerning a student's academic future should be viewed as the best choice for the student. It states that

As educators, we use our professional judgments, as well as those of our colleagues, to do what we consider is in the best interest of our students to enhance their progress in the realms of academia, community awareness and morality. (Segiovanni, 1996, p. 100)

Additionally, Maslow's motivation theory was used as a theoretical framework for the study. Maslow's needs hierarchy is one of the most used motivational theories. The needs hierarchy provides five basic needs of humans: psychological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. As it relates to the study, it is suggested that achievement is a significant part of humans' self-esteem needs (Maslow, 2003). When educators help students to achieve, it helps satisfy their esteem needs. It also gives a sense of achievement for the teacher and also helps a child to become educationally successful. Therefore, achievement satisfies the esteem needs of both the teacher and student.

Statement of the Problem

Grade retention has been utilized as an intervention for students having academic difficulties. There has been disparity between what current researchers are identifying as good practice for grade retention and what is actually occurring in schools. Regardless of how much research is presented on the effects of grade retention on students, educators believe that it is indeed helpful. Each year, millions of students repeat a grade. According to Hesse (2002), the majority of grade retention occurrences are in primary grades. The study was designed to gather elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine teacher perceptions on grade retention. There have been numerous longitudinal studies conducted on grade retention. The results of the study can serve as an addition to previous research in finding whether grade retention within schools is an effective intervention for students who are struggling academically.

Research Questions

The study examined the perceptions or beliefs of elementary teachers in selected elementary schools regarding grade retention. The following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by geographical location?

3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by years of experience?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by grade assignment?
5. Is there a difference in perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by age?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by level of education?
7. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by ethnicity?
8. What are elementary teachers' strongest influences on perceptions of grade retention?

Rationale of the Problem

No Child Left Behind emphasizes scientific interventions, but the empirical evidence contraindicates grade retention. Research plays a large part in finding whether grade retention is an effective approach to helping at-risk students. Educators are expected to consider contemporary research that supports effective interventions to promote the success of students (Jimerson et al., 2006). However, research is not valued in most schools or by individuals who have authority to make decisions on policies.

Teachers play a key role in deciding whether students are retained in a grade. However, most are not familiar with the research or the practice. The study was conducted to provide knowledge of teachers' views on grade retention as well as to gather

teachers' input on important educational topics. Teachers' beliefs about grade retention often affect whether a child will be referred to repeat a grade (Bowman, 2005).

Justification for the Study

According to Tanner and Galis (1997), teachers are the most important people in the conclusion to retain. The probability of a child being retained is influenced by teachers' attitudes toward retention. These beliefs also influence classroom practices. It is contended that teachers' beliefs about retention might not be based on research, but based on peer influence, past practices, or administrative policy (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004).

House (1989) concluded in a study about teachers' beliefs regarding retention that 65% of teachers believed students should always be retained if they qualify. It was also found that teachers held the opinion that co-workers would ridicule them if they promoted a student who was not prepared. Retention was not viewed as a negative practice. It was alleged by teachers that they could be saved from frustration and future failure if retention was exercised. It was recognized that all teachers endorsed retention, but not all practiced it or simply did not have other alternatives to retention. For some teachers, the belief is that the child with the ability who does not measure up will be retained, whereas others contend if the child has the ability, what would be the rationale for retention.

Pomplum (1988) found that teachers accepted retention as being more beneficial when it takes place in primary grades. The beliefs of teachers that students benefit from retention decreased as the grade level of the student increased. Teachers assumed that retaining students in the upper elementary grades has a greater negative effect on students than retention in the early grades.

Faerber and Dusseldorp (1984) gathered data on teachers' attitudes toward retention. Most teachers in the study felt grade repetition can be ultimately beneficial to students. It was thought that promotion to the next grade should not be automatic and that behavior should be considered in making the decision.

Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) conducted a study on the beliefs of teachers regarding grade retention and what they based this knowledge on (practical or propositional). Results revealed that teachers lacked propositional knowledge on the effects of grade retention. Their knowledge was based on personal experiences or practical knowledge with retained students. It was concluded that retention is an effective practice. Researchers concluded that the first step in changing this practice that research has proven to be ineffective is to effectively connect educators with current research. Propositional knowledge is gained through professional literature and practical knowledge is incomplete or misleading.

Tanner and Combs (1993) examined 880 elementary teachers on their beliefs on grade retention. Results revealed that teachers believed retention was an effective means of helping students to improve academically. However, the researcher noted that the findings of the study contradicted the research reported in the study which stated that retention had little effect on improving academics. Teachers' perceptions were not reflective of the vast body of evidence indicating that retention is an ineffective means of closing the achievement gap.

Definition of Terms

Elementary schools - in the United States are commonly comprised of grades kindergarten through 5; however, there are schools categorized as kindergarten through 6.

The participating Mississippi elementary schools in the study are comprised of grades kindergarten through 6.

Grade retention - is defined as requiring a student to remain at his or her current grade level the following school year despite having already spent a full year at that given grade (Jackson, 1975).

Meta-analysis - is a statistical approach to summarizing the results of many studies that have investigated the same problems (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Perceptions - is a set of attitudes and beliefs.

Rural - in this study refers to the northern area of Mississippi.

Social promotion - is allowing students who do not meet grade-level performance or requirements to promote to the next grade level.

Suburban - in this study refers to the southern area of Mississippi.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I gives an introduction to the study. It provides in detail a brief overview of the literature, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and definitions. Chapter II presents a review of the literature that relates to grade retention. Additionally, Chapter III describes the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. Chapter IV analyzes and presents the results of the data, and Chapter V summarizes and draws conclusions of the results.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention. Understandings of teachers' beliefs serve as an addition to previous research findings of grade retention's effectiveness within schools and possibly help educators evaluate the procedure at both the local and national level.

This chapter includes a review of literature representing various elements that have relevance to the educational practice of grade retention. The literature contains several topics: (a) historical overview, (b) academic outcomes of grade retention, (c) characteristics of retained students, (d) emotional and behavioral outcomes of grade retention, (e) alternatives to retention, (f) retention and dropout, (g) monetary cost, and (h) teachers and decision making regarding grade retention.

Historical Overview

Historically, before the 1900s education took place in a one-room schoolhouse where students were taught by one teacher. Students were taught regardless of their level of learning or age. Since the settings of the schoolhouse were so small, learning was individualized. Students worked at their own pace and their education level was determined by the number of books completed and the material mastered (Medway & Rose, 1986). Soon after, schools were developed and age-graded schooling was adopted in the United States. This, of course, led to the standards for promotion from one grade to another.

Grade retention became a method to deal with students who were considered slow learners. Grade retention is a major issue in the debate over how to improve education in the United States. Grade retention, also known as “flunking,” generally refers to the educational act of having a child repeat a grade in school. It has also been referred to as a year of growth for students. According to Jackson (1975), retained students view grade retention as failure.

Research suggests that students are retained for a number of reasons. Some of those reasons include: (a) immaturity (Light & Morrison, 1990), (b) the belief that an extra year of schooling will produce successful academic outcomes (Natale, 1991), (c) failure to meet criteria for promotion (Dawson, 1998), and (d) nonattendance and frequent unexcused absences (Light & Morrison, 1990). These reasons have helped implement retention and promotion policies during the last 2 centuries to deal with students who are considered slow learners.

Grade retention was implemented in the early 1900s with the main goal being to allow students who have academic difficulty more time to develop needed skills to make them academically successful. Later, researchers began studying the effectiveness of this practice. During that time, researchers began to gather and report the negative aspects of grade retention.

A synthesis was done by Goodlad (1954) on grade retention. The researcher summarized studies between 1924 and 1948. It was revealed that grade retention had no positive effect on students. It was also suggested that retention had no educational value or academic gain for students.

More research revealed evidence on the effect of grade retention. One researcher (Jackson, 1975) examined whether low-achieving students or those with socio-emotional maladjustments benefitted from grade retention or promotion to the next grade level. This review of studies between 1911 and 1973 concluded that issues such as biases and lack of control due to factors other than retention or promotion questioned conclusions regarding retention and promotion (Jackson, 1975).

In 1983, the *A Nation at Risk Report* increased the awareness of educators, parents, and policymakers to the troubles that this nation's schools face. The United States' test scores were the lowest in the world. Following the report, it was concluded that in order for America's children to compete with students around the world, the educational system had to improve. A debate over social promotion and standardized testing was sparked as a result of the report. There was a belief that low test scores were related to students being socially promoted before mastering grade level objectives.

A meta-analysis on effects of grade retention on elementary and junior high students was conducted nearly a decade after Jackson's (1975) study. The predictors used in the study by Holmes and Matthew (1984) were achievement and socio-emotional outcomes. Included in the meta-analysis were 44 studies, 4,208 retained students, and 6,924 regularly promoted students. Results revealed statistically significant differences favoring promoted students in each area. The retained students had lower achievement and favored school less when compared to students who were promoted.

Jimerson's (2001) meta-analysis of 20 studies on the efficacy of grade retention also included variables such as achievement and socio-emotional adjustment. A total of 16 studies focused on socio-emotional adjustment outcomes of retained students

compared to non-retained students. The authors of the studies had mixed conclusions. For example, approximately 20% of the authors were favorable toward grade retention's effectiveness while 80% did not support it. Jimerson (2001) mentioned that the authors sometimes considered additional analyses comparing retained students during the retained year relative to their achievement or socioeconomic status.

The practice of grade retention is such a common practice that nearly 2.5 million students are retained each year in schools in the United States (Black, 2004). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2003), between 30% and 50% of students repeat a grade at least once by the time they reach ninth grade (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 1999; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999).

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It was implemented as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The purpose of the act was for states to be required to set high standards for what students in each grade should know. It also made states responsible for measuring each student's progress.

Along with No Child Left Behind, the government also required test-based accountability standards. Students are tested beginning in the third grade. According to Goldberg (2004), such measures have made things more complicated for students. Schools feel that students must be taught to perform well on tests. Parents, teachers, and especially students feel discouraged when retention is due to test performance regardless of classroom performance. In 2003, Florida overturned failing test scores of students who were to repeat the third grade because of test performance.

Despite No Child Left Behind there are still millions of students being left behind, marking the 21st century as the era of grade retention (Jimerson, Pletcher, et al., 2005). As a result, it is the responsibility of schools to examine if grade retention is effective.

Retention policies vary from state to state. Research has found some overlapping policies on the criteria for grade retention. Some policies include factors such as standardized test scores, age of a student, and number of times a student can be retained. These factors have raised questions as to how many times is too many for a student to be held back in a grade. Also, whether school districts are willing to provide monies to provide extra assistance is being questioned.

The American Federation of Teachers (1997) reviewed promotion policies of 85 of the largest school districts in the United States. Included in the review were the nation's 40 largest districts. It was found that 78 districts actually had written policies in place. However, there was no consistency regarding standards for promotion, who makes the decision, alternatives for failing students, and publicizing retention information to the public.

Retention is usually paired with social promotion. Social promotion has become a very controversial political topic. Since President Clinton's mention of social promotion in his State of the Union Addresses, more politicians are calling for the end to social promotion.

Governor Jeb Bush indicated that there would be an end to social promotion in the state of Florida with the rationale being that if a student does not master the skills or objective necessary for his or her grade level, retention is the answer. Many districts feel that if social promotion is not an option, then the only alternative is grade retention.

According to the American Federation of Teachers (1997), teachers passed students who were unprepared because:

1. Teachers felt under pressure to promote students out of fear of a high failure rate which would be a bad reflection on the school or on themselves.
2. Teachers were pressured by administrators.
3. Teachers know that educational research indicates that retention is not effective and feel that there are no alternatives.

A review of findings on grade retention revealed that the efficacy of grade retention has been researched for more than 100 years. There is controversial debate regarding whether it is an effective practice. According to Bowan (2005), there is no clearly defined academic standard to measure student progress. Even though there has been research performed on grade retention, the results of the studies have been mixed. There has been some evidence of the short-term effects on grade retention; there is still no evidence of the long-term effects.

Academic Outcomes and Grade Retention

Grade retention has been researched for decades to determine its academic effectiveness for students who are academically challenged. The practice shows some short-term benefits; however, in the long run, holding students back puts them at risk. As a result of being held back, students never catch up academically, possibly drop out of school, and end up in the system. The widespread trust in retention is considered uncritical and unwarranted. It seems to lack empirical support and lacks evidence. Several decades of research show that retention:

- Does not improve low achievement in reading, math, and other subjects
- Fails to inspire students to buckle down and behave better
- Fails to develop students' social adjustments and self-concept

A study conducted by Silbergliitt, Jimerson, Appleton, and Burns (2006) examined the effects of grade retention on reading outcomes. Short- and long-term effects were compared between students who had been retained for a year, students who had not been retained, and a group of randomly selected teachers. Participants included 147 students from rural and suburban Minnesota. Students completed a series of Reading Curriculum-Based Measures (R-CBM) throughout their school career. Assessment was done three times each year. Results revealed that grade retention did not produce advantages in reading. In particular, the findings indicated: (a) retained students did not experience a benefit in their growth rate during their repeated year; (b) compared to similarly performing promoted students, retained students did not experience any benefit in their growth rate as a result of retention; and (c) the growth curve of the randomly selected group was significantly greater than the progress of the retained students. A continuation of previous literature on the effectiveness of grade retention was reflected in this study.

Additionally, Ferguson, Jimerson, and Dalton (2001) examined the family and individual characteristics of successful and unsuccessful retained students. These researchers chose 106 students who were followed from kindergarten through 11th grade. The students were categorized by the grade retained. For example, the first and second category represented students in a transitional period or traditional early grade retention, and the third and fourth category represented students who had been recommended for

transitional grade placement but were promoted and students regularly promoted on schedule.

Ferguson et al. (2001) revealed some factors that are associated with retained student academics and behavior:

- initial school readiness
- socioeconomic status
- mother's level of education
- parental value of education
- kindergarten personal social functioning
- chronological age

A study by Alexander, Dauber, and Entwisle (1994) suggested positive outcomes of retention. The researchers examined the academic progress of several hundred students in the Baltimore School District. The students were studied over an 8-year period. It was found that retention had a positive effect on academic achievement as well as a factor such as self-esteem.

Gottfredson, Fink, and Graham (1994) investigated the social psychological effects of grade retention of a same-age sample of Black sixth and seventh graders in two urban middle schools. The study was conducted 11 months after the students were retained. The population consisted of 197 retained and 204 promoted students. It was found that retained children showed more school attachment, greater overall ratings of school adjustment, and less negative behavior. However, there were no significant differences found for educational experiences and positive peer associations.

Hong and Raudenbush (2005) compared math and reading scores for both retained and promoted students for one year. They also compared these students after the third and fifth year following the retention year. The study consisted of 21,409 kindergarten and first grade students. The number of retained students in kindergarten was 471 and 201 in the first grade.

The results revealed that the negative effects of kindergarten retention on retainees' reading and math outcomes at the end of the treatment year substantially faded by fifth grade. Meanwhile, first grade retention indicated negative effects that stayed consistent from the first year after treatment to 3 years later. In general, there was no evidence that early-grade retention brings benefits to retained students' reading and math learning toward the end of the elementary years. The retained students did not achieve more on average than they would have if they had been promoted.

According to Anderson, Whipple, and Jimerson (2002), there are several explanations of why retention is a failed intervention.

1. Absence of specific remedial strategies to enhance social or cognitive competence.
2. Failure to address the risk factors associated with retention.
3. Retained children are usually retained approaching middle school and puberty.

In a study by Stone, Engle, Nagaoka, and Roderick (2005), teachers reported that the curriculum they provided for retained students was not modified and that most of the same materials were used from the previous year. Students who are retained are indeed at risk and require additional help in the classroom. It is evident that when support or

additional help is given to these students they have a better chance of success. As a result, it is very important that teachers modify instruction for a student who is at risk.

Characteristics of Retained Students

There is not a set guide that identifies students who should be retained in a grade. Retention and promotion guidelines vary in each state and school district. It is common for a child who is retained in one district to be considered for promotion in another. Although school regulations are not consistent, research indicated that some children are more at risk of retention than others.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that every year a larger percentage of male students are retained than females. In 2007, 12% of male students had been retained at one time or another, compared to 8% of female students. These percentages had not changed considerably since 1996. Additionally, a greater percentage of Black students than White students are retained yearly. Socioeconomic status also plays a role in grade retention. NCES reported that 23% of students from poor families had been retained compared to 11% of students from near-poor families and 5% of students from non-poor families. The percentages from poor families who had ever been retained were higher in 2007 (23%) than in 1996 (17%), while the percentage of students from non-poor families who had been retained was lower in 2007 (5%) than in 1996 (7%). Also, interestingly, the percentage of retained students was greater among students whose mothers had less education.

A study by Rodney, Crafter, Rodney, and Mupier (1999) examined variables that contributed to grade retention among African-American males. The study found that African-American boys are retained more than Caucasian boys. The results also showed

that these students score lower on standardized tests and are usually placed in special classes for students who are academically challenged. Additionally, these students are more likely than any ethnic group to become behavior problems and suspended or expelled.

Anderson et al. (2002) reported that boys are retained more often than girls and more minority students are retained compared to White students. Also, other predictors of grade retention include low parental involvement in education, discipline history, absenteeism, low standardized test scores, and numerous school changes.

Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes of Grade Retention

Grade retention has a long-lasting effect on students. It plays a big part in students' behaviors, social skills, and emotions. Students who have been retained often develop low self-esteem due to the fact that they are not with their peers. Students who are retained often are teased by their peers. Some are affected to the degree that they will not reveal to others that they have previously been retained. More than 25% of children retained in elementary school were too ashamed to admit that they had failed a grade. Grade retention made them feel "sad," "bad," and "upset," and these students also felt that repeating a grade was a "punishment" (Black, 2004, p. 41).

The development of relationships between a teacher and students is very important. It is especially important in students' primary years. It has been noted that if a primary student develops negative relationships with a teacher, the student tends to have behavior problems and academic levels are lower.

Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2005) conducted a study on elementary children's perceptions of stressful life experiences at home and at school. This study was

basically a replication of an earlier study done by Yamamoto and Byrnes (1987). The results for both studies were similar. Both studies revealed that irreversible, permanent loss was rated as the most stressful event in a child's life. There appeared to be no significant differences between academic retention, losing a parent, and going blind for sixth graders. With this being said, sixth graders perceived academic retention as a highly stressful experience.

Pagani, Tremblay, Vitario, Boulerice, and McDuff (2001) examined the practice of grade retention and children's academic and behavioral adjustment. The researchers tracked the impact of grade retention during elementary school on academic and behaviors until age 12. It was found that children's disruptive and inattentive behaviors continued and even proceeded to worsen after being held back. Grade retention influenced more negative behaviors and lower academics among boys. Even though girls experienced the same behaviors, the influence was not considered as long term as it was for the boys.

Pianta, Tietbohl, and Bennett (1997) reported that when compared to themselves over a 2.5 year period, retained students actually showed a reduction in behavior problems and increased task orientation. The authors concluded that grade retention may not be the answer for the increase of competency but that it is affiliated with decreased competency.

Alternatives to Retention

Grade retention has been studied for decades, with research findings being consistent revealing that it has negative effects on students. Given these findings, educators must promote policies that are research-based evidence interventions. There is

no easy solution that will effectively target the specific needs of all low-achieving students. According to Jimerson, Pletcher, and Kerr (2005), literature indicated that effective practices for at-risk students tend to be very similar to the best practices of general education but at a more intense, individualized level. Many schools are intervening by using positive educational strategies to help students. Some strategies that Jimerson et al. (2005) suggested as possible interventions for students are as follows:

- Actively encourage parental involvement.
- Adopt age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies.
According to Darling-Hammond (1998), highly skilled teachers who know how to use a variety of teaching strategies that are geared to diverse students are the most important alternatives to grade retention. This type of teaching allows for a greater range of students to succeed academically.
- Establish multiage groupings in classrooms with teachers trained to work with students of mixed age and ability. In many schools the use of multiage grouping reduces the need to retain students. These classes include students of different ages and grades and do not punish students for difference in learning styles and level of performances.
- Create the opportunity for students to have additional time to master materials without becoming overage for grade by high quality summer school, intersession programs, and before and after school programs. The effectiveness of the named programs has mixed reviews. However, it has been noticed that structured programs can help students catch up. The Chicago Public Schools established a summer program that is required for

students to attend who are academically behind or did not meet required test scores for promotion. The Chicago Summer Bridge Program was established in the 1996-1997 school year and has served over 100,000 students. The initial goal of the program is to end social promotion. The program gave low-achieving students extra help needed to improve academically and meet test scores needed to excel to the next grade level. The program was initially geared towards third, sixth, and eighth grade students. The third and sixth graders attended the program 3 hours a day for 6 weeks which is 90 hours of extra instruction. The eighth graders attended the program 4 hours a day for 7 weeks which is a total of 140 hours of extra instruction. Teachers included Chicago Public School teachers and the curriculum is aligned with Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The students are given supplies as an incentive. The students are taught in small classes and are usually based at the school the child attends during the school year. According to Roderick, Angle, and Nagaoka (2003) who evaluated the program:

1. The Summer Bridge Program has been effective in producing test score gains.
2. The program produces relatively uniform gains across demographic and achievement gaps.
3. Students were extremely positive about their experience.

4. The program provides a short-term intervention that allows low-achieving students to raise their test scores and may provide an extra boost in keeping them from falling further behind.
- Create personal intervention plans for students. Teachers are generally more effective when they know their students personally and understand how each student learns. It has been found that students with teachers who taught in ways that engaged them, provided substantive feedback, and worked to address individual learning needs, had a larger number of students to learn (Protheroe, 2007).
 - Identify specific learning or behavior problems and design interventions to address those problems. Teachers experience greater success with students when the educational setting is organized to create relationships with each student. Students in schools in countries such as Germany and Japan stay with the same teacher for 2 or more years. This allows the teachers to gain a greater knowledge of the students and how they learn.
 - Provide appropriate special education services. (n.p.)

Additionally, since teachers are predictors of the success of students, Protheroe (2007) mentioned that helping teachers increase their effectiveness is an intervention to reduce possible retentions. Teaching that is developmentally, cognitively, and culturally responsive allows a greater range of students to achieve academically.

Consequently, there is a significant difference between the training of veteran and today's teachers. According to Darling-Hammond (1998), many veteran teachers were not trained to meet the needs of today's generation of students. In their training it was not

stressed how to deal with the needs of students with learning disabilities, those at risk, or students whose first language is not English. However, new teachers may have had the chance to access this knowledge; they have had little or no experience as classroom teachers. There is a need to increase teachers' knowledge regarding new performance standards. As a result, some teachers may need additional professional development to help them develop effective ways to help students who are considered at risk. The Nashville Public School District implemented a comprehensive program that allows professional development for teachers serving high poverty students. The program gives insight on poverty and differentiated instruction for at-risk students.

Grade retention is reoccurring as a widely used method of remediation for poor academic performance. The use of grade retention has changed tremendously in schools across the nation. As schools are being held more accountable for student academic performance, retention is increasingly viewed as a key instrument of school reforms around the country (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999).

Retention and the Dropout Rate

The student dropout rate is a huge issue for most schools. It has been suggested that dropping out is a developmental process and is influenced by one's home environment, educational experiences, and current circumstances. There is accumulating evidence that students who are retained are more likely to drop out of school.

Many teachers also believe that when students are retained in early grade levels, it can be beneficial to the student. However, the later the retention, the more harmful it is for the student. This analogy predicts that later grade retention will have a greater impact on dropping out than retention in earlier grades.

According to Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002), grade retention is a strong predictor of not completing high school. Additionally, the experience of being retained may influence other factors that are associated with dropping out of high school. Some examples are self-esteem, socio-emotional adjustment, peer relations, and school engagement (Jimerson et al., 2002). These researchers conducted a comprehensive review that examined dropout research and grade retention. A review of 17 studies regarding the topic was analyzed. It was found that all studies recognized that grade retention is a predictor of dropout. Additionally, several studies found grade retention to be the most powerful predictor of dropping out. It was also revealed that dropout rates for students who have failed at least once in elementary school are considerably high.

One of the studies examined was researched by Roderick (1994). The researcher found that students in kindergarten through eighth grade were more likely to drop out compared to students who were not retained. It was also found that 69% of students retained once between kindergarten and eighth grade dropped out compared to a 27% dropout rate of students who had never been retained (Roderick, 1994). Surprisingly, there was not a big difference in the effect of grade retention between students retained in kindergarten through third grade and students retained in fourth through sixth grades. Interestingly, there was a 58% dropout rate for students who were never retained, but were over age due to other factors such as starting school late. Being over age is a major factor for the high drop-out rate among retained students.

Rumberger and Larson (1998) performed a national longitudinal study using eighth graders attending public, private, and Catholic schools. This study looked at high school dropouts and examined possible predictors. The findings revealed that students

who were retained prior to eighth grade were more than four times as likely as students who were not retained to not complete high school or receive a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) 2 years after they would have normally graduated from high school. The authors concluded that grade retention was considered to be a powerful predictor of failure to drop out of high school.

The Rhode Island School District sought to find ways to address the problem of students dropping out of school. Research was examined and revealed that students not completing their high school career had nothing to do with academic potential. It was shown that the most reliable indicator was grade retention. As a result of these findings, the school district created Urban Collaborative Accelerated (UCAP) to address this problem. This program worked with students who had repeated at least one grade. The program was designed to help retained students complete more than one grade per school year. As a result, a retained student could possibly catch up with his or her age-appropriate grade level. According to Deblois (2005), director of the program, "If nothing else, serious consideration of a change in promotion policies will lead to a great deal of learning that can be beneficial to our current practice" (p. 310).

Many studies revealed the relationship between grade retention and the dropout rate. However, Lorence and Dworking (2004) conducted a study on retention and school dropout behavior in Texas. The researchers studied a cohort of academically challenged third graders from 1994 through 2001. The results of the study revealed that requiring a student to repeat the third grade does not increase the probability of the student dropping out of school. The study also showed that minorities were not adversely affected by grade retention with the exception of one year of middle school.

Monetary Cost

States and school districts spend a considerable amount of money on remediation as well as grade retention. Researchers agree that grade retention is not an inexpensive intervention. Percentages and monetary costs are not consistent throughout the studies; however, the reports are only estimates and are considerably close. Presently there is no precise national data record that identifies the exact cost associated with the practice.

The number of students being retained yearly is steadily rising. According to Dawson (1998), these additional educational expenses exceed \$14 billion annually. Eide and Showalter (2001) reported that the estimated cost for retention is approximately \$2.6 billion per year and affects about 450,000 children. Additionally, using credible estimates of 5% annual retention rates are reported as having a cost of \$13 billion and affecting over 2 million children. Anderson et al. (2002) reported that the cost of retention exceeded \$14 billion to pay for the needed extra schooling.

Dropping out is a variable that can possibly be factored into retention costs. This variable is more of a hindrance on society. According to Leckrone and Griffith (2006), controlled studies of comparable groups of children who were retained found poorer outcomes in early adulthood. Students who were retained are likely to become unemployed, live on public assistance, or placed in prison compared with students who did not repeat a grade (NASP, 2003). Expenses relating to grade retention are immediate costs for states and districts. Costs for transitional grade classes such as developmental kindergartens and other responses are often higher than simple retention. This is because the usual practice is to reduce transitional grade class sizes and to provide extra

instructional assistance (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). However, society's having to pay for students dropping out becomes a long-term cost.

Thomas (1992) added:

The additional cost of losing students who drop out is intangible but we all know that the cost to society of welfare, crime, and unemployment is enormous, and if those same . . . children can be better helped through means other than retention, they have a much better chance of becoming productive citizens instead of a burden on society. (n.p.)

Teachers and Decision-making Regarding Grade Retention

Teachers play an important role as decision makers in today's classrooms. They are considered to be the center of academic improvement. The way teachers teach and how pupils learn is a strong indicator of whether the teacher is successful. Since teachers play such a huge role in the classroom, they also play a vital role in grade retention.

Teacher decisions can create a successful educational experience for a child.

Teachers hold different perceptions about grade retention. It has been said that teachers barely alter their beliefs or perceptions based on research, but instead are more likely to relate or base their perceptions on personal views (Kagan, 1992). These perceptions are important factors in decisions that are made as to the efficacy of grade retention. Research revealed that there are outside factors that possibly impact teachers' decisions about retention. Some of these factors include: (a) beliefs of student potential, (b) content knowledge, (c) personal values, and (d) school policies.

Most teachers believe that retention does prevent or is an intervention for academic failure. It is their belief that it benefits students (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Even

though academic failure is the main reason teachers retain students, lack of readiness is also a factor. Teachers can recommend that a student's readiness or maturity has not been met in order for the student to move to the next grade.

Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) conducted a study on teachers' knowledge about grade retention. The purpose of the study was to develop a knowledge assessment to measure teachers' awareness of research findings. A pilot study was conducted using the assessment and pre-existing survey entitled the Teacher Retention Belief Questionnaire. Important results revealed that:

1. Teachers indicated that their knowledge of grade retention was based on personal experiences and talking to other colleagues.
2. Twenty-three percent of teachers reported that they had limited knowledge of current research regarding grade retention, 56% revealed they had somewhat limited knowledge about retention, and 21% reported moderate knowledge.

It is acknowledged that some districts or governments control policies regarding retention. However, some districts do allow teachers to approach decisions about retention from their beliefs and perspectives and what is considered to be the best thing for the child. According to Bonvin (2003), the probability of a child being retained is substantially influenced by teachers' attitudes toward the efficiency of grade retention. Therefore, teachers' personal beliefs or perceptions and their knowledge or research on retention are important variables in the grade retention process.

Summary

This chapter summarized some of the literature that was explored on grade retention. It is evident that there are mixed findings concerning the effects of grade retention. Most research findings showed that grade retention has no long-term benefits for students. However, there is continued use of grade retention as an alternative to help students with academic difficulties. Researchers claimed that schools are continually using grade retention because previous research findings on the effectiveness of retention are ignored by many educators. This chapter presented the following topics related to grade retention: (a) historical overview, (b) academic outcomes of grade retention, (c) characteristics of retained students, (d) emotional and behavioral outcomes of grade retention, (e) alternatives to retention, (f) retention and dropout, (g) monetary cost, and (h) teachers and decision making regarding grade retention.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Teachers often play a huge role in the grade retention process. These educators usually initiate the retention process and play a key role in determining if a child retains a grade. Even though most retention policies are implemented by school officials, it is important that teachers understand the practice and effects of grade retention.

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention. Additionally, this quantitative study examined the differences in perceptions of teachers in relation to geographical location, years of experiences, grade assignment, age, level of education, and ethnicity. According to Glatthorn and Joyner (2005), quantitative research emphasizes studies that are experimental in nature, emphasize measurement, and search for relationships. This chapter gives insight into the research design, population, instrument, procedures, collection of data, and methods that were used to analyze data. The following questions served as a guide to the research:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by geographical location?
3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by years of experience?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by grade level assignment?

5. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by age?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by level of education?
7. Is there a difference in the perception of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by ethnicity?
8. What are elementary teachers' strongest influences on perceptions of grade retention?

Research Design

This study was descriptive in nature. Descriptive research is used to describe a phenomenon (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). This type of research does not answer what caused a situation but indicates frequencies, averages, and percentages. The study sought to reveal possible relationships between variables that were utilized in the research study.

The independent variables were:

- geographical location
- years of experience
- grade level assignment
- age
- level of education
- ethnicity
- influence

The dependent variable was:

- elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention

Participants

The participants for this study included 164 elementary teachers from five suburban (southern area) and five rural (northern area) Mississippi schools during the 2009-2010 academic school year.

Instrument

The Grade Retention Survey was used as the instrument in this research study. The instrument has been used in previous studies and validity and reliability have been established. The survey was originally created by Manley (1988) who researched primary teachers' attitudes toward grade retention. Manley established validity of the survey by conducting a pilot study. The study consisted of 20 elementary school teachers who were not part of the study who read vignettes and identified the issue that related to considering the child for retention. It was noted that 100% of the teachers indicated the targeted retention issue. Manley (1988) established reliability at .72 using Cronbach's alpha. A reliability of .70 or higher is considered acceptable in most research. Alkhrisha (1994) used the instrument to find the perceptions of pre-service and professional teachers' perceptions of grade retention. The instrument was modified to include 26 questions and four vignettes. The instrument was given as a pilot study to 76 pre-service teachers to establish validity. A Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .85 was reported in this study. One researcher (Kerr, 2007) used the survey to gather counselors' perceptions of grade retention and resulted in Cronbach's alpha of .77.

The instrument consisted of two different sections regarding attitudes of elementary teachers toward grade retention. The first section of the study consisted of 35 questions that related to perceptions of grade retention. For measurement purposes, the

first section used a five-point Likert scale. The scale consisted of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *undecided*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. The researcher coded as follows: 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *undecided*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*. The second section consisted of demographic questions including geographical location, grade level assigned, years of experience, age, level of education, ethnicity, and influences of perceptions.

Procedure

A proposal was submitted to The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board for permission to proceed with the study (Appendix A). Once approved by the board, a permission letter was sent to the superintendents of the participating schools (Appendix B). A copy of the letter was also forwarded to the elementary schools' principals who participated in the study.

The delivery of surveys was as follows:

Each school's principal served as the original assigned contact person. The principals were willing to participate in this process because the results, if requested, give an insight into how teachers really view grade retention and possible consideration into how to utilize teachers in developing retention policies. Rural schools' surveys were mailed because they were the farthest distance from the researcher. A packet was mailed to each school's principal and consisted of a cover letter (Appendix C), surveys (Appendix D), and a pre-addressed mailing envelope for their use in returning the surveys. The cover letter included the purpose of the study as well as deadlines for the return of the surveys.

Surveys for the suburban schools, which are local schools for the researcher, were personally delivered to the schools by the researcher. The researcher delivered the survey packets to the school's contact person. A cover letter, surveys, and envelope for the return of completed surveys were provided for the suburban schools. Once all surveys were completed, the researcher picked up the surveys from each school.

One of the researcher's interests was to find if there is a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by geographical location. The researcher knew which schools are rural and suburban by method of return. However, in alleviating any mix-ups, surveys were color coded for tabulation purposes. Lavender color was used for rural schools and light blue for suburban schools.

Data Analysis

SPSS was used in analyzing the data for this quantitative research. Descriptive analyses consisted of identifying means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were used to summarize the data. The researcher also used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare data. An alpha level of .05 was used for all analyses.

Summary

This chapter served as a guide to the methods that were used in the study. It gave insight into the research design, population, instrument, procedures, and data analysis. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding the practice of grade retention. The study also explored demographic data that examined the differences in elementary teachers' perceptions by: (a) geographical location, (b) years of experience, (c) grade level assignments, (d) age, (e) level of education, (f) ethnicity, and (g) influences on perceptions.

The sample population consisted of elementary school teachers from both rural (northern) and suburban (southern) regions of the state of Mississippi. A total of 269 teachers were invited to participate in the research. A total of 164 teachers participated, which is a 61% response rate. This chapter presents the findings of the research study. The findings are presented in two sections. The first section presents descriptive findings and the second section analyzes the comparative findings of the data.

The following research questions were used in navigating the research:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention?
2. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by geographical location?
3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by years of experience?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by grade level assignment?

5. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by age?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by level of education?
7. Is there a difference in the perception of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by ethnicity?
8. What are elementary teachers' strongest influences on perceptions of grade retention?

Descriptive Findings

Table 1 displays the overall findings of whether the participants are employed in the suburban or rural area of Mississippi and the number of years of experience teachers have in the classroom. Over half of the participants were classified as being employed in the suburban (southern) region of the state. The findings also revealed that 41.5% (68) of the participants had more than 15 years of experience as a classroom teacher.

Table 2 examines grade level assignments and age categories of the participants. There was not a big difference in the percentage of teachers who are presently assigned to grades kindergarten through 5. The range for grade assignment for these levels was 24 and 28. The frequency for grade 2 was the highest with a frequency of 28 teachers. The lowest grade level taught by the participants was grade level 6, which had a frequency of 5.

Additionally, approximately 51.2% of the teachers were under the age of 40 and 48.8% were above the age of 40. Therefore, both the novice and experienced teachers

Table 1

Geographical Location and Years of Experience

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Area		
Suburban	98	59.8
Rural	66	40.2
Years of Experience		
1-5	34	20.7
6-10	38	23.2
11-15	24	14.6
Over 15	68	41.5

Sample Size: N = 164

Table 2

Grade Level Assignment and Age

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Grade		
Kindergarten	27	16.5
Grade 1	27	16.5
Grade 2	28	17.1
Grade 3	26	15.9
Grade 4	27	16.5
Grade 5	24	14.6
Grade 6	5	3.0
Age		
25 and Under	7	4.3
26-30	23	14.0
31-35	25	15.2
36-40	29	17.7
41-45	35	21.3
46-54	16	9.8
55 and Over	29	17.7

Sample Size: N = 164

were represented in the study. The age categories of 36-40 and over 55 had the highest number of participants ($N = 29$).

An analysis of the independent variables level of education and ethnicity is presented in Table 3. A total of 89 (54.2%) of the 164 elementary teachers had received education higher than a master's degree. Furthermore, the number of White teachers who participated in the research study nearly doubled the number of Black teachers.

Research question 1: What are the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding grade retention?

In order to answer research question 1, means and standard deviations were calculated for the 35 questions of the Grade Retention Survey. Participants were asked to share whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were undecided, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each question that showed a positive or negative perception about grade retention. The higher the score the more positive perceptions teachers had on grade retention. Analyses of the questions on the instrument are presented in the form of an item analysis. Table 4 provides each question along with the means and standard deviations.

As shown in Table 4, the lowest mean was for item 35, which emphasizes that students should never be retained. The mean for this item was 1.45 ($SD = .579$). The statement that teachers felt strongest about was questions 5 and 1. The mean for statement 5 was 4.29 ($SD = .634$) and question 1 means is 4.27 ($SD = .881$). In addition, Table 4 presents the overall mean score for the Grade Retention Survey ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .227$).

Table 3

Level of Education and Ethnicity

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Degree		
Bachelor's	75	45.7
Master's	84	51.2
Specialist	4	2.4
Doctoral	1	.6
Ethnicity		
Black	58	35.4
White	105	64.0
Asian	1	.6

Sample size: N = 164

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis of Grade Retention Survey

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Retaining students in primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades.	4.27	.881
2. Students should be retained if they are behind in a major subject.	3.02	1.009
3. Retention will stifle students' desire to learn.	2.30	.824
4. Students with 30 days of unexcused absences should automatically be retained.	3.20	1.068
5. Promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements.	4.29 3.51	.634 .975
6. Immature students benefit from retention.		
7. The primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade.	4.19 2.54	.740 .968
8. The threat of retention makes students work harder.		
9. Students in special education programs should not be retained.	2.84	.974
10. The decision to retain students should be made solely by the teacher.	2.45	1.046
11. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement.	2.28 2.31	.739 .772
12. Retention promotes behavior problems.		
13. Retention can have a positive effect on students' learning.	4.12	.569
14. Students who are considered for retention share many common characteristics.	3.41	.782
15. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' self-concept.	2.65	.826
16. Retention increases the probability that a student will drop out of high school.	2.57	.900
17. A teacher can determine within the first 2 months of school which students need to be retained.	2.18	1.009
18. Retention provides students with time to grow and mature.	3.88	.695
19. Retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success.	3.91	.926
20. Students' parents should immediately decide whether to retain their children.	2.32	.775

Table 4 (continued).

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
21. Retention discourages rather than encourages learning.	2.07	.622
22. Retaining students will help them catch up academically	3.84	.691
23. Students being considered for retention should be included in the decision-making process.	2.70	1.053
24. Competency testing and proficiency testing will increase the number of students retained.	3.02	.893
25. Students who have been retained are rejected by their peers.	1.99	.622
26. Classroom behavior is an important consideration in determining whether to retain students.	2.68	1.073
27. Retention reduces the range of academic levels in a classroom.	2.50	.903
28. Retention provides incentive for students to try to do better at academic tasks.	3.20	.919
29. All students who are retained should be referred for psycho-educational settings.	2.29	.858
30. Promotion should depend upon attending school a certain number of days during the school year.	2.92	.984
31. Students who are larger than their classmates should not be retained.	2.04	.824
32. Repeating a subject will promote mastery of that subject.	3.28	.943
33. It is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade.	2.35	1.049
34. In making a retention decision, students' maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement.	3.72	.840
35. Students should never be retained.	1.45	.579
Perceptions: Min. 2.37 Max. 3.71		
Overall Mean of Model	2.92	.227

Comparative Findings

A *t* test for independent samples was used to determine if there was a significant difference in elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention as it relates to geographical location and ethnicity. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was used to determine if there was a significant difference in elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention as it relates to years of experience, grade level assignment, age, and level of education. Lastly, information from composed descriptive analysis was used to answer item 8 which describes the biggest influences on teachers' perceptions of grade retention. The dependent variable was teachers' perceptions and the independent variables were geographical location, years of experience, grade level assignment, age, level of education, ethnicity, and influences.

Research question 2: Is there a difference in the perception of elementary teachers regarding grade retention by geographical location?

As represented in Table 5, the total represented for teachers from the suburban region was $M = 2.91$, $SD = .190$ and from the rural region the total was $M = 2.95$, $SD = .273$. The results of the *t* test indicated no significant difference in elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention by geographical location, $t(162) = 1.20$, $p = .232$.

Research question 3: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by years of experience?

As presented in Table 6, the combined total represented for teachers' years of experience was $M = 2.92$, $SD = .227$. The one-way analysis of variance chosen to compare the means of the teachers' years of experience revealed $F(3, 160) = 1.12$, $p = .342$. This was not statistically significant at the .05 alpha level. Therefore, there was not

Table 5

Grade Retention by Region

Variable	M	SD	n
Suburban	2.91	.190	98
Rural	2.95	.273	66

a significant difference in the perceptions of elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention by years of experience.

Research question 4: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by grade level assignment?

The results of the analysis of variance used in determining if there is a difference in the perceptions of teachers and grade taught are revealed in Table 7. It was determined that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of elementary teachers and grade level assignment, $F(6, 157) = .128, p = .993$.

Research question 5: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by age?

The results of the analysis to determine if there is a difference in the perceptions of elementary teachers and grade level are presented in Table 8. The results indicated $F(6,157) = 1.68, p = .130$. The outcome was that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding grade retention and age.

Research question 6: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by level of education?

The one-way analysis of variance did not determine a statistically significant difference at the .05 level between the perceptions of elementary teachers and level of education, $F(2, 161) = 1.75, p = .177$. Table 9 displays a complete summary of the findings of the analysis.

Research question 7: Is there a difference in the perception of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by ethnicity?

Table 6

Percentage by Years of Experience

Variable	M	SD	n
1-5 Years	2.93	.252	34
6-10 Years	2.90	.240	38
11-15 Years	2.86	.173	24
Over 15 Years	2.95	.224	68
Total	2.92	.227	164

Table 7

Percentage by Grade Teachers are Assigned

Variable	M	SD	n
Kindergarten	2.93	.236	27
Grade 1	2.93	.242	27
Grade 2	2.93	.214	28
Grade 3	2.94	.221	26
Grade 4	2.90	.243	27
Grade 5	2.91	.228	24
Grade 6	2.95	.244	5
Total	2.92	.227	164

Table 8

Percentage by Age

Variable	M	SD	n
Under 25 Years	2.81	.180	7
26-30 Years	3.00	.185	23
31-35 Years	2.84	.217	25
36-40 Years	2.91	.229	29
41-45 Years	2.90	.252	35
46-54 Years	2.97	.255	16
Over 55 Years	2.97	.209	29
Total	2.92	.227	164

Table 9

Percentage by Education

Variable	M	SD	n
Bachelor's Degree	2.91	.223	75
Master's Degree	2.94	.231	84
Specialist/Doctoral Degree	2.76	.184	5
Total	2.92	.227	164

As presented in Table 10, the total represented for teachers who were Black was $M = .297$, $SD = .289$ and the total for teachers who were White was $M = 2.89$, $SD = .181$. The outcome of the performed t test represented in Table 11 indicated a significant difference in elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention by ethnicity, $t(161) = 2.21$, $p = .009$. This indicated that Black teachers agreed more on statements on retention produced on the Grade Retention Survey than White teachers. As a result of having only one respondent of Asian ethnicity, it was omitted from data analysis.

Research question 8: What are elementary teachers' strongest influences on perceptions of grade retention?

Frequencies and percentages were used to answer question 8. The results, as revealed in Table 12, indicated that the elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention were strongly influenced by personal experience with retained students. A total of 127 (77.4%) teachers chose this influence. The item that was the least influential on perceptions was other teachers' opinion which represented a total of 4.3% of the sample size.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the analysis of data obtained from the Grade Retention Survey presented to elementary teachers. The first section of the instrument consisted of 35 items and a second section consisted of demographic information on the teachers. The sample size consisted of 164 elementary teachers from suburban and rural areas of Mississippi. In order to answer the research questions for the study, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to organize the data. Chapter V provides an in-depth discussion of the findings.

Table 10

Percentage by Ethnicity

Variable	M	SD	n
Black	2.98	.289	58
White	2.90	.101	105

Table 11

Ethnicity t-test Results

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		<i>t</i> Test for Equality of Mean		
	<i>t</i>	sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	sig (2-tailed)
Perception					
Equal Variances Assumed	14.465	.000	2.209	161	.029
Equal Variances Not Assumed			1.943	82.105	.058

Table 12

Influences on Retention

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Other Teachers' Opinions	7	4.3
Principal's Opinion	8	4.9
Personal Experience with Retained Students	127	77.4
Research	10	6.1
Other	12	7.3

Sample Size: N = 164

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the perceptions of elementary teachers relating to grade retention and possible factors that might contribute to their perceptions. Chapter V presents an overall summary of the research study, discussion of findings, conclusions, related theory, limitations, recommendation for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding the practice of grade retention. The study further examined demographic data which explored differences in elementary teachers' perceptions by (a) geographical location, (b) years of experience, (c) grade level assignments, (d) age, (e) level of education, (f) ethnicity, and (g) influence on perceptions. This study contributes to the existing literature that relates to grade retention. While numerous researchers have shown retention to have harmful impacts on children, educators believe that the practice is a good intervention when skills are not mastered for promotion. According to McCoy, Reynolds, and Temple (1997), teachers' beliefs about academic achievement are related to their retention practices.

The study began with a review that examined literature and other research studies relating to grade retention. The review was compiled to provide a foundation of information on retention that could possibly relate to or explain the findings of the investigation. The review was guided by several topics including: (a) historical overview, (b) academic outcome of grade retention, (c) characteristics of retained students, (d)

emotional and behavioral outcomes of grade retention, (e) alternatives to retention, (f) retention and dropout, (g) monetary cost, and (h) teachers and decision making regarding grade retention.

The sample for this study was represented by 164 elementary teachers from five suburban and five rural schools in Mississippi. The instrument selected for the collection of data was the Grade Retention Survey that had been used previously by other researchers. The survey consisted of two sections. Section one consisted of 35 statements for which teachers expressed agreement or disagreement. Demographic data were also collected in the section of the instrument.

Research data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Categories including geographical location, years of experience, grade level assignment, age, level of education, ethnicity, and questionnaire items' responses were described using frequencies and percentages. A *t* test for independent samples was used to compare elementary teachers' perceptions of grade retention and their geographical location and ethnicity. Moreover, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there was a significant difference in elementary teachers' perceptions as they relate to years of experience, grade level assignment, age, and level of education. Lastly, teachers' perception and their influence on grade retention was determined by a descriptive analysis.

Findings

In summary, the analyses of the research data found:

Q1. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention?

Teachers' overall perception of grade retention was extremely neutral. They did not present a very strong favor for grade retention nor were they totally against the practice as reflected in the overall mean score of 2.92.

An area where teachers had strongest agreement was geared towards the appropriate time for a student to be retained in a grade. Teachers felt strongly that retaining students in primary grades is less traumatic than in intermediate years. It was strongly favored that the practice should occur in kindergarten through the third grade to be most successful.

Participants also believed strongly that promotion should be based on students' mastery of grade level requirements. It was believed that the initial purpose of grade retention is to prepare students to be successful in the following grade. It was thought that retention can be beneficial for students who are having academic difficulties or were unsuccessful at mastering skills. The teachers believed the extra year will provide extended time for students to catch up academically and can have a positive effect on students' learning. These findings are consistent with findings of other studies presented in the literature. In a study by Tomchin and Impara (1992) that also examined teachers' beliefs about grade retention, it was also found that the beliefs of teachers were that students should be retained if they did not meet requirements for a grade and also that retention benefitted students who had not achieved the skills necessary for promotion. In a study by Smith and Shephard (1987), it was found that teachers believed that retention took children from the bottom of their class to the top.

Teachers disagreed most strongly with statements that reflected unconstructive beliefs about grade retention. A majority of the teachers disagreed that students should

never be retained in a grade ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .579$). A study by Manley (1988), who also studied teachers' perceptions of grade retention and also used the grade retention survey, found that teachers also strongly disagreed with students never being retained ($M = 1.302$, $SD = .580$). In addition, another factor that teachers in the research study opposed was that students who are retained are rejected by their peers. The findings are inconsistent with the literature. Previous research showed that retained children are often teased by their peers. Black (2004) found that students who were retained felt "sad," "bad," and "upset," and these students also felt that repeating a grade was a "punishment." Some retained students are even too ashamed to admit that they have been retained. According to Shepard and Smith (1989), when teachers feel that students are not rejected by their peers, they are thinking of the short- rather than long-term effects of grade retention and without the awareness of the social problems that retained students face.

Q2: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by geographical location?

It was concluded that suburban teachers' perceptions of grade retention did not differ from rural teachers' perceptions.

Q3: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by years of experience?

Years of experience did not account for any difference in the teachers' perceptions of grade retention. It was noticed that 41.4% of teachers had over 15 years of experience. Therefore, a majority of the teachers most likely have had numerous experiences with retained students. However, there was not a big difference in their beliefs about grade retention.

Q4: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by grade level assignment?

No major difference was found in teachers' beliefs of grade retention and the grade level that they presently teach.

Q5: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by age?

The variable age did not have a major impact on the perceptions of retention among participating elementary teachers.

Q6: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by level of education?

The study found that the education level of teachers did not play a significant role in the attitude of teachers regarding grade retention.

Q7: Is there a difference in the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding grade retention by ethnicity?

Interestingly, it was found that there was a significant difference in teachers' perceptions of grade retention and ethnicity. The results indicated that Black teachers agreed more on the practice of grade retention than White teachers.

Q8: What are elementary teachers' strongest influences on perceptions of grade retention?

Elementary teachers' strongest influence on their perceptions of grade retention was their experience with retained students. A total of 127 teachers revealed the experiences with retained students had the largest effect on their attitudes toward retention. The least influential factor was others teachers' opinions about the practice.

Discussion

This study examined the beliefs of elementary teachers regarding grade retention. What do teachers' really think about grade retention? Some factors that are up for discussion are as follows.

Retention and Academics

Elementary teachers believed that retention granted students who are behind an opportunity to catch up academically. It is also a belief that it can perhaps have a positive effect on student learning. However, as stated in the literature, most studies have found it to be an ineffective practice and provide short-term effects.

Retention and Timing

A vast number of teachers believed that retention is most effective if done in the early years. According to the results, teachers believed that retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success. This researcher has mixed feelings about this belief. Usually, in the earlier elementary grades, the greatest influence on student retention is the teacher. Beliefs that come from experience can be greatly biased. Also, this researcher believes the perceptions that retention should occur in the early years could come from the belief that at that point students are so young that it will not emotionally affect them as would be the case at higher grade levels.

Retention and Behavior

It was believed in this study that retention does provide time for students to grow. Moreover, teachers are of the belief that most students who were retained shared many of the same characteristics. Some characteristics included behavior, low socioeconomic background, and gender is male. Behavior and maturity were factors that teachers

considered in making retention decisions. Retained students have more problem behavior than students who were not retained. Retention and these behaviors can also lead to an increase in high school drop-out rates. Surprisingly, not as many teachers as this researcher would have predicted thought that retention could increase the probability that a student would drop out of high school. This might be a result of the grade level of these teachers. Elementary teachers did not see the end result of the effects of grade retention as did middle and high school teachers. Therefore, they might not be able to connect grade retention leading to an increased drop-out rate.

Conclusions

Regardless of the negativity of the practice of retention exhibited by previous research, such as Jimerson (2001) and Black (2004), grade retention is a continuous educational practice in school systems across the nation. There have been many studies that have focused on teachers' opinions regarding grade retention (Manley, 1988; Tanner & Combs, 1993). Most of these studies revealed that teachers usually supported retention as a practice that helped students who were struggling academically.

Each year millions of students are retained in the same grade despite the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Educators' main goals are to provide a quality education for students and for students to be successful. However, there are many disparities as to the proper course of action to achieve these goals. This study was conducted in order to gain teachers' perceptions of grade retention.

This research examined the beliefs of elementary teachers in two regions of a southern state regarding the practice of grade retention. The overall findings of this study revealed that most teachers were indecisive about grade retention. The teachers were

neither strongly in favor of retention nor strongly disagreed with the practice. However, teachers did feel strongly about many aspects of the practice. It was strongly agreed that the rationale for grade retention was to help students catch up academically. The majority of elementary teachers found that grade retention could have a positive effect on student learning. They believed that the primary purpose of retention is to prepare students to be successful in the subsequent grade. This study's sample was relatively small and a general hypothesis could not be made that all cases of retention were harmful or indeed helpful.

The teachers in this study disagreed with the American Federation of Teachers (1997) stating that grade retention failed to improve low achievement in subjects and failed to inspire students to perform better academically. However, these perceptions were unlikely to address the multiple factors influencing poor achievement or adjustments that led to the student being retained (Jimerson, 2001).

Elementary teachers also believed that promotion of students should be based on the mastery of grade-level requirements and that it is not acceptable to promote students who had not completed skills for a grade. In 1999, President William Clinton called for an end to social promotion. As a result, many districts began to set guidelines for grade-level academics. Also, since accountability is extremely important in today's society, schools across the nation have implemented ways to measure students' progress.

Unlike Pagani et al. (2001), who found that children's disruptive and inattentive behaviors continued and even worsened after being held back, the teachers participating in this study believed that classroom behaviors were an important factor in determining student retention. Their perceptions supported the findings of Shepard and Smith (1987) who stated that retaining students may also prevent future academic failure. It was also

believed that students' maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement.

Lastly, teachers agreed that if a student is to be retained, it should occur in the primary grades for true effectiveness. The findings support Anderson et al. (2002) who gave explanations regarding the failure of retention as an intervention. One of the principal explanations suggested that retained children were usually held back when approaching middle school grades and puberty. Also, Tomchin and Impara (1992) agreed that K-3 student retention was not harmful but disagreed about the impact on student achievement in upper grades. However, in a study by Hong and Raudenbush (2005), who compared math and reading scores for both retained and promoted students for one year, there was no evidence presented that early-grade retention brought benefits to retained upper elementary students.

Participating elementary teachers' perceptions about grade retention indicated that it offered children the opportunity to obtain skills that were missed during the school year. They believed that some students required additional time and resources to be academically successful and that sometimes holding students back could be an appropriate intervention. These perceptions are consistent with research by Alexander et al. (1994) who found that retention has a positive effect on academic achievement as well as self-esteem. These beliefs were held even though most researchers, such as Jimerson (2001), supported that retention has short-term rather than long-term effects and that most educators' beliefs are not supported by research. Overall, teachers in the study did not favor grade retention nor were they totally against it. However, the attitudes of the teachers did reflect that some students needed additional opportunities to be ready for

advancement and that retention policies could provide that needed time for students if targeted at the appropriate time.

Teachers' beliefs of grade retention were related to Sergiovanni's Community Theory that was mentioned previously in the study. The teachers' responses showed that regardless of their agreement or disagreement with retention, decisions would be in the best interest of the child. The Community Theory pillar four explains that as educators, decisions concerning a student's academic future should be viewed as the best choice for the student.

In closing, even though there is a vast amount of research that indicates retention is not empirically based (Dawson, 1988), millions of students are retained annually in the United States. There is and will continue to be a conflict between research and the overall practice of grade retention. It is very important that there is some connection between what has already been presented and current practice. Policies must be implemented that put the child's best interest first.

Limitations

- The findings of this study were limited in that the respondents consisted of a small population from a rural (northern) and suburban (southern) region of a southern state. As a result, this study was not applicable to larger school districts because of the small sample size.
- The rural school districts as well as the suburban school districts that participated were in close proximity of each other. (This might explain why the beliefs are similar.)

- The study was limited to only elementary teachers. It does not capture the views of administrators, other levels of teachers, parents, or students. Having the views of others would allow comparing and contrasting of perspectives.
- The study used self-reported perceptions by participants and was solely dependent on the completeness of information given.
- Participants of the study voluntarily completed the questionnaire.
- The participants completed the questionnaire truthfully and did not answer the questions with what the researcher wanted to hear.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of the research study will add to the body of knowledge available for educators when making important decisions such as promoting or retaining a student. Such important decisions can greatly impact a child's life. It also has a tremendous impact on a student's future. The findings will enable teachers as well as other educators to explore their perceptions when making decisions that will help students academically excel.

Most teachers have the best interest of students at heart and would not do anything purposefully to harm students' achievement. However, sometimes retention is not the solution for some struggling students. Often, when making important decisions that could affect students' academics, it is beneficial to become informed of previous research. Repeatedly, teachers make choices without a lack of factual knowledge that could be harmful. Retention can be an effective practice if utilized correctly. This researcher suggests the following potential actions for teachers as well as school administrators:

1. Become aware of recent grade retention research that is available. This can be obtained by having diverse professional development activities, discussions at meetings, or conferences that will help educators make informed decisions about grade retention.
2. Teachers can be active promoters of effective developmental practices in their classrooms. They can possibly develop personal accommodations for students who are at risk of failing. This will indeed help students learn in ways that meet their needs. This will eliminate possible labeling of students and encourage individualized instruction. It is truly obvious that children learn differently and educators must accept this and practice ways to satisfy the needs of all children.
3. District and school administrators should form committees when making retention policies. There should be teacher representatives on the committees. Teachers have the initial experience with students and know exactly what the criteria should be for retention.
4. District and school administrators should develop summer programs such as the one adopted by Chicago schools that will require students who did not pass state tests or meet grade requirements for promotion to attend. This program provided students with the opportunity to master skills necessary for promotion. The schools even offered students supplies. Once students successfully completed the required 90-140 hours of instruction, they were promoted to the next grade. This helped their school district decrease its retention rate as well as the drop-out rate.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is suggested that research be conducted comparing students who were retained and those who were provided other forms of interventions. Some alternatives such as after-school programs, multi-age grouping, or looping should be considered. Some school districts are in favor of the process which allows a teacher to move with students to the next grade level.

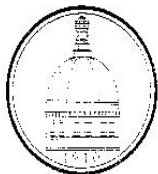
It is further suggested that retention rates of teachers based on their ethnicities be studied. The interest comes from the findings of the study revealing that Black teachers are more in favor of retaining students than are White teachers. There appears to be some differences in attitudes among ethnicities toward grade retention.

Students' perceptions of grade retention are also recommended for future study. Jimerson (2001) conducted a study on perceptions of retained students on grade retention. This can be a replication, but both non-retained and retained students' perceptions will be researched and findings will be compared.

Finally, this study should be replicated in all districts located in the state to assess consistency throughout the state.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE PERMISSION



 THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **29110302**

PROJECT TITLE: **Elementary Teachers' Perception of Grade Retention**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **08/19/09 to 04/19/10**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Latrice Richardson**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Counseling**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **11/17/09 to 1/16/10**

Lawrence A. Hosman

 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

11-19-09

 Date

APPENDIX B

SUPERINTENDENTS' PERMISSION LETTER

11-4-09

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Latrice Richardson and I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi majoring in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is entitled "Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Grade Retention." I am seeking permission from you to allow your district's elementary teachers to participate in the study by completing my brief questionnaire.

Educators presently face many tough decisions with accountability being a pressing issue. Teachers often face tough decisions on whether to retain or to socially promote students without meeting academic standards for promotion. The purpose of this study is to learn more about elementary teachers' beliefs toward grade retention.

The completed questionnaires will have full anonymity. All answers will be used for the study only and will be kept confidential with no respondent being identified individually. Participation for teachers is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn from the study at any time without any penalty.

Please consider allowing your elementary teachers participation in this study. If you have questions about this study or are interested in knowing the results, please contact me by phone at (228) 365-2878 or by email at latricerichardson@cableone.net. My dissertation chair is Dr. David Lee and he may be contacted by phone at (601) 266-6062 or by email at david.e.lee@usm.edu.

Thanks,

Latrice Richardson

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX C

SURVEY COVER LETTER

Dear Colleague:

My name is Latrice Richardson and I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi majoring in Educational Leadership. The attached questionnaire is part of my dissertation entitled "Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Grade Retention."

I have obtained permission from your superintendent and principal to invite you to participate in this study by completing the questionnaire. Educators presently face many tough decisions with accountability being a pressing issue. Teachers often face tough decisions on whether to retain or to socially promote students without meeting academic standards for promotion. The purpose of this study is to learn more about elementary teachers' beliefs toward grade retention.

The completed questionnaires will have full anonymity. All answers will be used for the study only and will be kept confidential with no respondent being identified individually. Participation for teachers is strictly voluntary and can be withdrawn from the study at any time without any penalty. Completion of the questionnaire will require approximately 10 minutes.

If you have questions about this study or are interested in knowing the results, please contact me by phone at (228) 365-2878 or by email at latricerichardson@cableone.net. My dissertation chair is Dr. David Lee and he may be contacted by phone at (601) 266-6062 or by email at david.e.lee@usm.edu. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude in advance for your participation.

Thanks,

Latrice Richardson

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX D

GRADE RETENTION SURVEY

Grade Retention Survey

This survey is designed to assess educators' beliefs about grade retention. There are two sections to this questionnaire. *Section A* inquires about beliefs on grade retention and *Section B* requires demographic information. Please circle one response to each item. There is no right or wrong answer.

Section A

The following scale will be used for this section.

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree U = Undecided D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Retaining student in primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 2. Students should be retained if they are behind in one major subject. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 3. Retention will stifle students' desire to learn. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 4. Students with 30 days of unexcused absences should automatically be retained. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 5. Promotion should be based on mastery of grade level requirements. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 6. Immature students benefit from retention. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 7. The primary purpose of retention is to prepare students for successful achievement in the following grade. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 8. The threat of retention makes students work harder. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 9. Students in special education programs should not be retained. | SA | A | U | D | SD |
| 10. The decision to retain students should be made solely by the teacher. | SA | A | U | D | SD |

11. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12. Retention promotes behavior problems.	SA	A	U	D	SD
13. Retention can have a positive effect on students' learning.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. Students who are considered for retention share many common characteristics.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. Retention has a detrimental effect on students' self concept.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16. Retention increase the probability that a student will drop out of high school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17. A teacher can determine within the first two months of school which students need to be retained.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18. Retention provides students with time to grow and mature.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19. Retention should occur in kindergarten through third grade for the most success.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20. Students' parents should immediately decide whether to retain their children.	SA	A	U	D	SD
21. Retention discourages rather than encourages learning.	SA	A	U	D	SD
22. Retaining students will help them catch up academically.	SA	A	U	D	SD
23. Students being considered for retention should be included in the decision making process.	SA	A	U	D	SD
24. Competency testing and proficiency testing will increase the number of students retained.	SA	A	U	D	SD

25. Students who have been retained are rejected by their peers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
26. Classroom behavior is an important consideration in determining whether to retain students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
27. Retention reduces the range of academic levels in a classroom.	SA	A	U	D	SD
28. Retention provides incentive for students to try to do better at academic tasks.	SA	A	U	D	SD
29. All students who are retained should be referred for psycho-educational testing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
30. Promotion should depend upon attending school a certain number of days during the school year.	SA	A	U	D	SD
31. Students who are larger than their classmates should not be retained.	SA	A	U	D	SD
32. Repeating a subject will promote mastery of that subject.	SA	A	U	D	SD
33. It is acceptable to promote students who have not successfully completed the requirements for a grade.	SA	A	U	D	SD
34. In making a retention decision, students' maturation and emotional health are as important as their academic achievement.	SA	A	U	D	SD
35. Students should never be retained.	SA	A	U	D	SD

Section B

Please provide the following demographic information by circling one answer for each question/statement.

A. Indicate what grade level you are presently assigned in your school.

Pre Kindergarten Kindergarten 1 2 3 4 5 6

B. How many years of experience do you have as an elementary teacher?

1-5 6-10 11-15 Over 15

C. What is your age range?

Under 25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-54 over 55

D. Indicate your highest level of education.

Bachelors Masters Specialist Doctoral

E. Please indicate your race.

Black White Asian Hispanic Other

F. Which factor strongest influences your opinion of grade retention?

**Other teachers' Principals' Personal Experience Research Other
opinions opinions with a retained student**

APPENDIX E

PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL DISTRICTS

FW: Dissertation Questionnaire

FW: Dissertation Questionnaire

[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, January 07, 2010 4:51 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Dr. [REDACTED] has given permission for Latrice Richardson to contact you for assistance in completing her dissertation. Please look for communication from her soon.

.e: FW: Dissertation

Re: FW: Dissertation

[REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, November 11, 2009 11:14 AM

to: Latrice Richardson

cc: **[REDACTED]**

You have permission to conduct this research in our district. I have forwarded your information to the principals of these schools.

>> Latrice Richardson <latrice.walker@biloxischools.net> 11/11/2009 10:11 AM >>>

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