

## **Self-Esteem of the Repeaters: A Mixed Method Study of Elementary Grade Students**

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This mixed method study examines the impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of elementary grade students. For the quantitative part, 4<sup>th</sup> grade students ( $N = 305$ ) from 42 public schools of Rawalpindi city were taken as the study sample. Initially, this sample was divided into two main groups, identified poor performers ( $n = 203$ ) and the normal group of students ( $n = 102$ ). After annual examinations, the former group was further divided in two subgroups on the basis of the result, Repeaters Sample ( $n = 117$ ) and Identified Poor but Promoted Sample ( $n = 86$ ). A two-phase panel study was designed to collect quantitative data. The self-esteem of the students was measured through Urdu translation of Beck Youth Inventory for Self-Concept of Children (Steer, Kumar, Beck, & Beck, 2005). For the qualitative aspect of the study, a group of 12 experienced primary school teachers teaching in public schools of Rawalpindi city were selected as the key informants. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with the participant teachers. The two sets of data were collected concurrently, whereas the triangulation of both types was carried out after the completion of the analysis stage. The overall findings of the study suggested that the impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of the repeaters was found to be considerably negative.

*Keywords:* Grade retention, self-esteem, universal primary education, elementary grade students

Grade retention in the early elementary grades, particularly, is often considered as beneficial for child's socialization and emotional growth in their academic environment. This policy is still seen as a controversial practice in most education systems, both in developed

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All the field work of this study has been conducted in Government schools of Rawalpindi (Punjab).

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and developing countries. Educationists presented convincing arguments regarding this controversy. A number of research studies indicated that grade retention is harmful for children's social and emotional development; damages their self-image and academic self-concept. Research studies also showed that grade retention upholds discipline problems in schools and has a negative effect on the student's self-esteem (Anderson, 2000; Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007). Similar studies also reported that grade retention did not seem to improve academic achievement, but did appear to have adverse affects on the child's self-image and on his/her popularity with other children. McMartin (1995) stated that "failure in school plays a significant role in forming a negative self-image" (p. 68). Repeaters often do not get social support or appreciation of the regularly promoted students. As a result, they become more reserved and unfriendly with their class fellows. Grade retention often results in depression and discouragement resulting in child's distrust in his/her ability and very often leads to probability of further failure. On the other hand, a number of research studies also found that retained students became considerably more attached to school than their promoted peers and improved behavior during the year following the retention decision is reported (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Gottfredson, Fink, & Graham, 1994).

### **Situation Analysis in Pakistan**

A cursory view of the education policies of Pakistan informs that they recognized, high dropout rate at elementary level as a limitation that obstructed universalization of elementary education, but these documents did not mention the phenomenon of grade retention as a main reason of high dropout rates. However, the report of the Commission on National Education (Govt. of Pakistan, 1959, p. 171) realized this fact and stated that "one of the major contributing factor in the dropping out of children from school is the practice of forcing them to repeat classes". The commission recommended the promotion of children to the next class by age rather than by results in the end of year. The National Education Policy (Govt. of Pakistan, 2009) also admitted that "repeat rates are an important measure of internal efficiency of the education system, and the overall repeat rates for Grades 1 to 5 are between 2.1 to 2.6 and typically highest for Grade 1 and Grade 5" (p. 69), but this policy did not offer any specific measure to improve the situation.

Pakistan has several national and international commitments to achieve universal primary education and is a signatory of millennium development goals thus, aims to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In line with these commitments, in 2002, Ministry of Education in collaboration with provincial departments has taken some initiatives for achieving the target by 2015. In order to reduce the dropout phenomenon at elementary level, the students of first three or four grades (depending on internal policies of provinces) in all public schools are promoted without examinations to next grade at the end of academic session. Although there are some special cases where retention is considered very necessary and allowed such as serious illness or immaturity but no child repeats the early three grades due to slow learning. This initiative was considered as a helping measure for reducing dropout phenomenon, but negative consequences were also seen because, the pupils who have not acquired the desired learning standard for the next grade are also promoted along with better performers. When these poor performers reach grade four, most of them are retained in the same grade, because at the end of primary level, all students of grade five have to appear in final departmental examination for promotion to grade six<sup>1</sup>. This examination increases the pressure especially on low-achieving schools to retain the low-scoring children at grade four. If the weak students are also promoted to grade five, there will be greater probability of their failure in the final departmental examination and in turn negatively affect the school result at departmental level. But, the higher authorities do not show any concern about these repeaters that what happens to them in the class rooms throughout the “repeated year” as a consequence of poor implementation strategies of educational policies. Most of these repeaters drop out from school as a result of continuous insulting behavior and unfair treatment by the teachers and their class fellows.

The national statistics of Elementary Education in Pakistan presented by the Ministry of Education, Islamabad, also reveal that grade retention is the major cause of dropout and other problems related to quality of education at elementary level. As depicted by Table 1, the report of National Education Census (Govt. of Pakistan, 2005) showed that the dropout rate between grade four to five is 8.5% that is much higher than grade two to four, i.e., 3.7% and 5.0%. The current practice of promotion policy in elementary education system is said to be one of the possible causes of this high dropout rate at grade four.

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<sup>1</sup>Revealed in conversation with head teachers of public schools and district education officer, Rawalpindi.

Table 1  
*Drop out Rates by Grade and Gender at Elementary Level for Public Sector Institutions (2005)*

Grades	Dropout Rates (%)		
	Total	Boys	Girls
Between Grade I – II	14.1	16.1	11.2
Between Grade II – III	3.7	8.6	-
Between Grade III – IV	5.0	7.4	1.5
Between Grade IV – V	8.5	9.9	6.5

Source: National Education Census, 2005; Government of Pakistan, 2006

This fact is also described by the highest number of repeaters at elementary level by the data taken from two latest consecutive reports of Pakistan Education Statistics as revealed in Table 2 that presented the statistics (2006-7, 2007-8) of repeaters at different grades and the total enrolment at elementary level of the public schools of Pakistan.

Table 2  
*Enrolment Statistics at Elementary Level in Public Schools of Pakistan*

Grades	Percentages of Repeaters Compared to Total Enrolment	
	2006-2007 (%)	2007-2008 (%)
I	4.5	3.5
II	3.9	2.8
III	3.9	2.6
IV	7.0	4.5
V	1.3	0.6

Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2006-07, 2007-08 (Government of Pakistan, 2008, 2009)

It is well demonstrated in Table 2 that highest number of repeaters was present in grade four. This huge difference is perhaps due to the policy of automatic promotion till grade three along with final departmental examinations at the end of grade five. In such a situation, it can be anticipated that the existing governmental policy and attitude of the schools' administration towards slow learners badly affects the performance of fourth grade students.

On the basis of above discussion, it is concluded that grade retention is still a controversial practice and is needed to be further discussed and studied especially in the context of Pakistani education

system. Therefore, the present study is designed to conduct a thorough investigation on the possible negative or positive effects of grade retention in terms of self-esteem of students of grade four in public schools.

### Method

By using mixed-method approach of research, this study has employed a quantitative as well as qualitative method of inquiry. The quantitative data was collected for hypothesis testing (see analysis section); whereas; the qualitative data explored one major question along with two subquestions. The two sets of data were collected concurrently, whereas the analysis was done separately. After the analysis, the thematic analysis part was triangulated with the findings of hypothesis of the quantitative inquiry, by employing “concurrent triangulation strategy” (Creswell, 2003, p. 217).

### Sample

The population of the study involved students and teachers of public elementary and primary schools of the Punjab. As the automatic promotion policy is homogenously implemented at primary level in all public schools of the Punjab, so by employing convenient sampling technique, the sample for this study was selected from Rawalpindi city only. According to the report of National Education Census (Govt. of Pakistan, 2005) the total number of students studying in grade four in public primary and elementary schools of the Punjab is 44,199 (Govt. of Pakistan, 2006). The determination of sample size for the quantitative aspect of the present study is very complex. In the light of official statistics regarding dropout and grade retention (Govt. of Pakistan, 2006, 2008, 2009) it was decided to take 20% of the whole population as poor performers. This large value was taken due to greater probability of dropout cases after failure as revealed by official statistics (Govt. of Pakistan, 2006). With this estimate, an approximate formula (Cochran as cited in Czaja & Blair, 2005, p.142) for determining the sample size for a variable expressed as a percentage is  $n = (1-n/N) \times t^2 (p \times q) / d^2$

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<sup>2</sup>n= the sample size

N= the size of the eligible population

t<sup>2</sup>= the squared value of the standard deviation score that refers to the area under a normal distribution of values

p= the percentage category for which we are computing the sample size

q= 1-p

d<sup>2</sup>= the squared value of one-half the precision interval around the sample estimate

To solve the equation, the researcher sets the values for two components (probability level and confidence interval) and approximates the third (variance). The researcher took confidence interval to be  $\pm 5\%$  and probability level to be 95%; that was to include the population value in 95 of every group of 100 samples of the same size and its score is 1.96 (Czaja & Blair, 2005). It was assumed  $p = .20$  and therefore,  $q$  is  $1 - .20 = .80$ . Substituting these values into the formula renders the desired sample size ( $n = 240$ ).

It was then decided to take approximately 240 fourth grade students as sample of poor performers. In addition to poor performers, another group of fourth grade students (normal group) was also taken for comparison and verifying the validity of the results. This group comprises 108 students of fourth grade. Thus the whole sample of the quantitative aspect of the study was comprised of total 346 fourth grade students, which were then reduced to 305, with 203 being identified poor performers, and the normal group remained 102 students in phase II a two-phase panel study was designed to collect quantitative data.

The sample size for the qualitative aspect of this study was not pre-determined and it was decided that if the researcher finds the results are the same for the selected group of individuals and learns nothing new by sampling again from this population or a point of "theoretical saturation" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 72) is reached, then the researcher may stop gathering data. Due to selection of a "cohesive sample" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 73) the saturation was obtained after interviewing twelve teachers with at least 14 years of experience. All of them were regular classroom teachers and taught either in the public primary schools or in the primary section of the public elementary schools located in the Rawalpindi city.

### **Instruments**

**Beck Youth Inventory Scale for Self-Concept.** The issue of the assessment of the self-esteem of the students has become more complicated because of two reasons. First, absence of any self-esteem scale developed for Pakistani children and second, the scales found are mostly developed in western context or for American students, due to the contextual diversities, they are quite unfamiliar to Pakistani students. Thus, a standardized scale (Beck Youth Inventory Scale for Self-concept; Steer et al., 2005) was selected and then translated into

simple Urdu for better understanding of the students by using forward and back-translation method (Gjersing, Caplehorn, & Clausen, 2010).

Steer et al. (2005) stated regarding this scale, “the statements in the Self-Concept Inventory represent perceptions about self-competence, potency, and positive self-worth. The inventory requires less than 10 minutes to complete and is composed of 20 statements that are written at a second grade reading level. A total score is calculated for this inventory by summing its 20 ratings, and these scores can range from 0 to 60” (p. 123).

The Cronbach’s alpha was determined for the Urdu version of 20 item scale with a sample of 48 students of age group 11 to 14 studying in grade four of the public schools of Rawalpindi city. The reliability level of .88 was attained that was quite near to the reliability (.89 for girls and .91 for boys) measured by the authors of the scale with a sample of 400 children (girls = 201 and boys = 199) of age 7 to 10 (Steer et al., 2005, p. 39) The Urdu translation of the scale was administered to the sample students in the two phases.

**The Interview Protocol for Teachers.** A semi-structured and “issue oriented interview protocol” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 123) was prepared for study purpose in the light of existing literature (Anderson, 2000; Gomes-Neto & Hanushek, 1994, Stearns et al., 2007; Trethewey, 1999) on grade retention. The questions included in the interview guide were focused on the teachers’ experience about retained students. Teachers were asked to describe about the changes in the attitudes of retained students towards their studies, fellow students, and teachers and they were further asked to state the different kinds of coping strategies adopted by the retained students during the retained year. The interview guide was divided into themed sections so that the information obtained from each participant (teacher) can be to some extent regulated, yet allowing the researcher to explore the individual differences. The participants were given “authority over their own stories, which means that they were seen as experts” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 128).

The data was collected personally by administering the instruments developed for the study to the respondents in all the schools included in the sample.

### **Quantitative Part of the Study**

The quantitative part was completed through a multi-phase panel study, so that the self-esteem of the repeaters was assessed more than

once. Two major phases (phase 1 and phase 2) were designed for this purpose. Phase 1 was completed before commencement of annual school examination, and Phase 2 was completed at the end of second term of the successive academic year.

In Phase 1, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in the public elementary and primary schools of Rawalpindi city, who were considered weak in academic achievement, had taken as study sample and delivered them a Beck Youth Inventory Scale for Self-concept of the children of age group 11-14 years (Steer et al., 2005). At the same time, another group of normal students was also evaluated for verifying the validity of the instrument in Pakistani context and also the comparison of poor and better performers of the same grade. This group was comprised of the fourth grade students of sample schools who had shown better performance in internal assessment system and according to teacher's estimation; they had the chance of success in the annual examination.

In the second and last phase (Phase 2), the whole sample was reassessed by the Beck Youth Inventory Scale for Self-Concept of the Children of age group 11-14 years (Steer et al., 2005) at the end of second term, and after ten months of the first phase, in the next academic session. In this way, the researcher compared the repeaters of grade four with the promoted but identified as poor students of the same sample, at the same time the sample of identified poor performers was also compared with the sample of Normal Group of students.

The detailed account of the whole sample of the study is described in Table 3.

Table 3

*Detailed Account of the Original Sample of the Study (N = 346)*

Groups	Original sample	Promoted	Repeaters	Left	Remaining sample
Identified Poor Performers	238	91	147	35	203
Normal Group	108	108	-	06	102

Table 3 showed that out of total 238 fourth grade students, 91 (38.23%) were passed in annual examination, among them 5 (5.4%) were left the school due to unknown reasons and 86 (94.6%) remained in the school and continued their education in the same school. There were 147 (61.76%) students failed in the annual examination, out of them, 30 (20.4%) were dropped out from school, whereas 117



(79.6%) continued their studies and repeated the same grade. All the students of Normal Group had passed in the annual examination. Out of these passed students 6 (5.6%) were left due to unknown reasons and 102 (94.4%) had carried their studies in the next grade.

For the purpose of analysis, the whole study sample was categorized as repeater group, identified poor but promoted group, and normal group.

### Findings of Quantitative Part

The quantitative data was evaluated by paired comparison of the responses taken before and after the retention of the students. In order to test the hypothesis, One-Way ANOVA with post hoc Scheffe's test (Sirkin, 2006) was applied to the quantitative data.

The one-way analysis of variance applied to test the statistical difference among the three groups (repeaters, poor but promoted and normal sample) regarding self-esteem in phase 1 and phase 2 as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

*Group Differences among Identified Poor, Repeaters, and Normal Students on Self-Esteem (N = 305)*

Phases		<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-esteem Phase 1	Between Groups	11.64	2	5.82	.094	.91
	Within Groups	18693.76	302	61.90		
	Total	18705.41	304			
Self-esteem Phase 2	Between Groups	4252.12	2	2126.06	45.07	.00
	Within Groups	14246.20	302	47.17		
	Total	18498.32	304			

*Note.* Comparison of three groups, that is, Identified Poor but Promoted sample ( $n = 86$ ), Repeaters ( $n = 117$ ), and Normal sample ( $n = 102$ ) with respect to Self-Esteem (phase 1 and phase 2).

The results presented in Table 4 indicated that in phase 1 nonsignificant difference was found among the three groups namely repeaters, poor but promoted and normal sample,  $F(2, 302) = .094$ ,  $p =$

.91. Whereas, in phase 2, there were significant differences in the self-esteem of the three groups  $F(2, 302) = 45.07, p < .001$ .

In Table 4, large inequalities and inflated alpha levels were seen between the three groups regarding self-esteem in two phases. Scheffe's test (Sirkin, 2006) was used in order to control the above mentioned factors and narrow down the conclusion regarding where these population inequalities are to be found. This test was applied because all the three groups (repeaters, poor but promoted, and normal sample) being compared were different in sizes.

Table 5

*Post Hoc Differences among Different Groups on Self-Esteem (N=302)*

Dependent Variable	Variance between three groups (i)	Variance between three groups (j)	Mean Difference (i-j)	p
Self-Esteem Phase 1	Repeaters	Poor but Promoted	.44	.92
		Normal Group	.02	1.00
	Poor but Promoted	Repeaters	.44	.92
		Normal Group	.42	.93
	Normal Group	Repeaters	.02	1.00
		Poor but Promoted	.42	.93
Self-Esteem Phase 2	Repeaters	Poor but Promoted	8.14	.00
		Normal Group	7.22	.00
	Poor but Promoted	Repeaters	8.14	.00
		Normal Group	.91	.65
	Normal Group	Repeaters	7.22	.00
		Poor but Promoted	.91	.65

*Note.* Comparison of Self-Esteem (Phase 2 and Phase 1) of the Repeaters ( $n = 117$ ), Identified Poor but Promoted sample ( $n = 86$ ), and Normal Sample ( $n = 102$ )

The findings of Scheffe's test (Sirkin, 2006) presented in Table 5 revealed that in phase 1, non significant difference of self-esteem was

seen among three groups; whereas, significant differences were seen in phase 2 between repeaters and poor but promoted group ( $p < .001$ ) and similarly, between repeaters and normal sample ( $p < .001$ ). The difference between poor but promoted and normal sample was not found significant ( $p = .65$ ). The findings from Table 5 also confirm that the self-esteem of the repeaters decreased after failure.

The statistical analyses presented in Table 4 and 5 revealed that a negative and significant impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of the students. So the null hypothesis that there is no impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of the students is rejected.

### **Qualitative Part of the Study**

The self-esteem is a complex psychological aspect of human personality. The self-esteem of a child cannot be observed directly but has to be inferred from a self report of the child or from observation of the teacher. Brooker (2005) stated that “in early childhood, self-esteem principally reflects the value the child perceives he/she has in the eyes of others, particularly those ‘significant others’ whose opinion really count” (p. 37).

For the qualitative aspect of the study, a selected group of experienced teachers ( $N = 12$ ) teaching at primary level in the public elementary and primary schools of Rawalpindi city was interviewed to collect in-depth information regarding behavioral problems of repeaters.

The interviews of the informant teachers focused on the expected changes in the attitude of students after failure at primary level in public schools. As the researcher employed Grounded Theory approach in qualitative aspect of this study, so the technique of “theoretical sampling” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 72) was used for sample selection. This type of sampling implies that “the researcher decides who or what to sample next, based on prior data gathered from the same research project in order to make comparisons with previous findings” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 72). Teachers were taken as study participants as they are the persons, who work most closely with these children, yet the teachers in Pakistani education system have no special training to understand the special problems created by grade retention, but experience gives them many strategies to cope with such situations.

In connection with the research questions, semi-structured in-depth interviews of selected group of teachers were carried out by the

researcher on individual basis. All participant teachers were asked about the changes in the attitude of repeaters with respect to their class fellows and the respective teachers. Teachers' perceptions of students' behavior were considered important as Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson, (2005) argued in their study that "no doubt actual student behavior and perceptions of student behavior both matter, but the two are hard to separate" (p.1490).

**Thematic Analysis of the Transcripts of the Interviews.** For the purpose of analysis, this part is further categorized to explore the main question along with two sub questions of the study regarding the attitude of repeaters as attitude of repeaters towards teachers and fellow students. A variety of responses were encountered, when the participants were asked about the changes in the attitude of repeaters after failure, which they had observed time to time during their teaching experience. The detailed account of the responses is given below.

**Attitude of Repeaters towards Teachers.** Teacher plays a key role in the success and failure of the student. In response to the queries about the attitude of repeaters towards their teachers, eight participants reported no change in attitude of repeaters after failure, whereas the rest of others observed some differences.

Teacher Ms. I.A described significant difference regarding the attitude of repeaters towards the teachers. She said that the attitude of repeaters is definitely changed with teacher, after failure. Often the child supposes that the teacher is responsible of his/her failure, and thus tries to stay away from the teacher. Stearns et al. (2007) reported that "retention may lead retained students to view the school system as one in which they have experienced failure" (p. 212). On the other hand, research studies have demonstrated that successful students who were "high in self esteem saw the teacher as evaluating their performance more favorably, than students low in self-esteem" (Jussim, Coleman, & Nassau, 1987, p. 95). Similarly, the teachers revealed that the child after failure start disliking him/her. Consistent with this view, Bangulia (2007) stated that "children with low self-esteem have negative self-image and poor self-concept. They do not believe in themselves or others and feels that they have nobody to depend on. No matter what effort they put in, they feel it is depreciated" (p. 17).

Teachers Ms. R. C and Mr. S. M reported more or less the same reaction from the repeaters. Both teachers told that at the start of the

repeated year, the students seems a little bit angry and remain at a distance from the teacher. Stearns et al. (2007) explored that “retention may hurt students' ability to bond with teachers later in their educational careers” (p. 213). Participants' views revealed that the student feels threatened by the expected insult from the teacher, but if teacher is caring and sympathetic, then the situation can be changed. Only the teacher can gave the confidence to the child to recover and return to normal life. Similarly, Repetti (1996) was of the view that “following a social or academic failure, it seems reasonable to expect that many children would attempt to restore self-confidence by seeking attention and reassurance from important others, such as parents” (p. 1468).

Teacher Ms. T. M added that though the child tries to keep at distance from teacher, but if the teacher shows concern for him/her, then he/she adjusts very soon. If the teacher does not show love and sympathy then the child reacts and shows worse attitude towards studies, fellow students and even behaves impolitely with teachers also.

These results are consistent with the research evidence of the study by Stearns et al. (2007) which has revealed that, “the retained students have lower achievement rates and more disciplinary problems, are more pessimistic about their future, are less engaged with school, and have fewer bonds with teachers than do continuously promoted students” (p. 231). Research evidence also revealed that “the children did see the teacher as having a role in their success and failure” (Gipps & Tunstall, 1998, p. 160).

The overall analysis of the views of the teachers who reported changes in the attitude towards teachers revealed that students blame teachers for their failure and the students often express their hatred by staying away from the teacher. They do not respond properly to the teacher and become more reserved day by day. This attitude depicts clearly that they need teachers' attention. A sympathetic and considerate teacher can minimize the bad effects of failure and stabilize the behavior of the child by paying more attention towards him/her.

**Attitude of Repeaters towards Fellow Students.** A number of research studies (Gomes-Neto & Hanushek, 1994; Pomplun, 1988; Stearns et al., 2007; Trethewey, 1999) indicate that grade retention is harmful for children's social and emotional development, being particularly damaging to their self-image and academic self-concept having long-term consequences.

While asking the participants about the anticipated changes in the attitude of repeaters toward their fellow students, seven participants reported no significant difference seen before and after failure, they argued that small children have no such sense of insult and failure. Others gave a variety of responses. For instance, two teachers Ms. S. I and Mr. S. M reported that after failure the child become more reserved and sensitive. They both stated that if class fellows make fun of his/her failure, then he/she reacts very aggressively. Research evidence has demonstrated that “demanding and difficult child behavior can be an unfortunate and unintended result of a child's efforts to recover from the distress engendered by a failure situation” (Repetti, 1996, p.1480). Similar results were obtained by McMartin (1995) who found that “failure in school plays a significant role in forming a negative self-image” (p.68).

The teacher Ms I. A expressed that she has never seen any improvement in the attitude of repeaters. Rather they tried to spoil other children, and terrify them. She further explored that they perceived academic failure as maltreatment and injustice. Research evidence also supports this notion. Bolger, Patterson, and Kupersmidt (1998) concluded that “the children who experienced chronic maltreatment were most likely to experience low levels of acceptance by their peers” (p. 1194).

Both the teachers Ms. R. C and Ms. T. M expressed that the repeater child feels very sad and lonely at the start of the year. He/she becomes more reserved than ever before. It appears that he/she feels threatened about expected insult by peers, but recovers later if receives special attention by teacher. Stearns et al. (2007) demonstrated that retention may rupture social bonds with peers Retention separates students from their same aged peers and may end friendships. Retained students must develop new peer groups among their new classmates and overcome their label of *flunker* while doing so.

A careful review of the above responses of the participant teachers revealed that grade retention does affect the psychological condition of the students; their reactions depict their abnormal behavior. Research evidence also demonstrated that “children with low self-esteem have negative self-image and poor self-concept” (Bangulia, 2007, p. 17). Research studies did show that retention promotes discipline problems and has a negative effect on the student's self-concept (Pomplun, 1988; Stearns et al., 2007).

In the light of participants' observations, it can be concluded that the effect of failure disturbs the personality of the student. He/she is

left behind by his/her class fellows and also loses their company. The student faces insulting behavior from teachers; fellow students in school, and in home parents and other family members also reproach him/her. The innocent child is held responsible for wasting money and time. These circumstances badly affect the mental health of the student, and he/she starts dislike himself/herself. Similar views were found in a study by Burfeind and Bartusch (2006) who concluded that “poor school performance leads to frustration and anger and subsequently to delinquent behavior” (p. 320).

The overall analysis of the above responses of the participant teachers clearly revealed that the role of teacher is very crucial for repeaters. A fourth grade student cannot understand the rational reason behind his/her failure rather he/she take this failure as some kind of revenge by teacher. So if the child does not receive any kind of support from family members or teacher, he/she shows rebellious behavior in order to gratify his/her inner self. This rebellious behavior further aggravates, if peers and teacher make fun of his/her failure. However, if the child receives support and encouragement from teachers and parents, then he/she feels better and the rebelliousness eventually changes into positive behavior.

On the other hand, participants’ responses also revealed that if the teacher ignores repeaters, or criticize them, then their performance declines and their personality may likely to damage. The neglect of teachers ultimately results in dropping out of repeaters from education system.

### **Triangulation**

In the present study, concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2003) was employed to integrate the findings of the thematic analysis with the results of hypothesis of the quantitative inquiry, by giving equal emphasis (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006) to both types of data. The rationale of the triangulation was that the Beck Youth Inventory Scale for Self-concept of the children of age group 11-14 (Steer et al., 2005) was standardized for American children of age group 7 to 11 years. Though this scale was adapted for fourth grade Pakistani children after careful reliability and validity testing, but for deeper understanding it was considered necessary to revalidate the data in order to get “a more complete picture of the topic studied and enhanced its credibility” (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 286).

There were similarities as well as discrepancies found while triangulating both types of data related to the self-esteem of the

repeaters. The quantitative analysis showed that the self-esteem of those students who were promoted despite learning deficiencies increased significantly (see Table 4). These results strengthen the notion that grade retention phenomenon negatively affects the psychological wellbeing of the child.

The qualitative findings, while supporting the quantitative relationship between grade retention and self-esteem of the students to some extent, did show some discrepancies also. The views of majority (eight out of twelve) of the teachers contradict the results of quantitative data, as they believe that the attitude of the repeaters remains the same as before failure. This discrepancy also discloses a big communication gap between the teacher and the student. The indifferent attitude revealed that these teachers were not very sensitive about psychological wellbeing of their students and did not pay proper attention to their behavioral changes. Their gestures and postures during interview sessions also showed their indifferent attitude towards their students. It was strongly felt by the researcher that they took such attitude as routine practice.

### **Discussion**

In the present study, the self-esteem of the repeaters was assessed by both quantitative (directly) and qualitative (indirectly) measures. Quantitatively, the self-esteem of the fourth grade students was measured through a standardized scale that was translated into Urdu. The scores obtained by the students in this scale were considered as self report of the students. Qualitatively, the self-esteem of the repeaters was indirectly assessed by the observations of the participant teachers relating to their attitude towards their class fellows and the teachers. In this way, the quantitative findings were verified by the qualitative data comprising of teachers perceptions. Consistent with the findings of previous quantitative studies (Gomes-Neto & Hanushek, 1994; Trethewey, 1999), the quantitative data did show a strong negative impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of the students of grade four, whereas, the qualitative findings revealed a variety of responses in this regard. The thematic analysis revealed individual differences among teachers and their attitude toward their duty also. Those teachers, who were well aware about the psychological needs of their students, were looking conscious about their students' problems. On the other hand, apathetic teachers showed unconcerned attitude towards their students as well. On the whole, the triangulation of both types of data did show a negative impact of



grade retention on the self-esteem of the students of grade four. This conclusion is supported by a number of research studies, (Anderson, 2000; Gottfredson et al., 1994; Pomplun, 1988; Stearns et al., 2007; Trethewey, 1999; Westbury, 1994). While, a contrasting position is taken by theorists like Alexander et al. (1997) who argued that retained students show no deterioration after retention.

In Pakistan, poverty is a major social problem, and when a student fails in some grade, his/her parents do not agree to spend money for an extra year. As a result, majority of the students leave the school, thus increasing dropout rate. Besides this, those who repeat the same grade are subject to continuous criticism of fellow students as well as teachers also. In such situation, where the majority of the parents are illiterate and economically depressed, the responsibilities of the school and the teacher increase more than in the normal situation. The cumulative findings of this study also revealed the importance of the teacher in the rehabilitation of the child after failure. The teachers should be more caring and consider their students' needs and interests and should help them define their personal goals and encourage students in a manner, that they perceive themselves as efficient individuals, through their own effort and responsibility for the learning process.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The first limitation of the study is related to the loss of participants because of the longitudinal design. During this 10 month period of data collection, a number of repeaters ( $n = 35$ ) dropped out of school, and the data for these students was no more usable and these cases were eliminated from the sample. Research revealed that "such loss of participants may have caused an unknown degree of bias in the usable sample" (Fan, 2001, p. 58). So the results cannot be generalized to the whole population of repeaters in the Punjab.

The second limitation is about the types of schools. There are three major categories of educational institutions in Pakistan, i.e. public schools, private schools and *deeni madaris*. All three systems have separate policy regarding admission, curriculum selection and examination criteria. The research findings taken from the sample of one category are not applicable to other categories. But as grade retention is common among them, hence it can be anticipated that to some extent, the institutions of other categories may take benefit from the findings of this study.

The present study is said to be a base-line study on the topic of grade retention in the field of primary education in Pakistan. During the whole study process, a number of issues arose, that need further exploration, such as social interaction of repeaters with successful peers, the contribution of family support, factors in success or failure, etc.

### **Implications**

The focus of present study is the phenomenon of grade retention which directly affects the elementary education in Pakistan. It provides evidence that how the experience of repetition for fourth grade students has badly affected their self-esteem. This study has attempted to increase awareness among policy planners and implementers so that they may focus on how their policies can facilitate students' engagement with learning activities. It was intended to reveal the facts regarding the effects of the school-level retention policy at the elementary level. The findings of this study will also assist teachers in realizing the problems related to repeaters at elementary level.

### **Conclusion**

This multiphase mixed method study was undertaken to explore the impact of grade retention on the self esteem of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade repeaters in public schools. The triangulation of both types of data demonstrated the strong negative impact of grade retention on the self-esteem of the students of grade four along with some variations of qualitative responses due to individual differences among respondents.

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Received March 20, 2013

Revision received December 01, 2013