Repeating a Year

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on repeating a year in the Arab World context.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of repeating a year on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on repeating a year in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of this practice in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World

Students who do not reach a given standard of learning at the end of a year are required to repeat that year of learning by joining a class of younger students the following academic year. Also known as "grade retention", "non-promotion" or "failing a grade". For students at secondary school level, grade repetition is usually limited to the particular subject or classes that a student has not passed.

Worldwide evidence suggests that, in the majority of cases, repeating a year is harmful to a student's chances of academic success. Studies also suggest that students who repeat a year are more likely to drop out of school prior to completion. In Morocco, Mansouri and Moumine (2017) argued that generally, repeating a year occurs during the transition stage of children from primary to secondary school. As a result, it can lead to high rate of students drop out, harms students development and socialization, increase of illiteracy, and impact the society altogether.

In addition, fear from failure or repeating a grade was identified to be a psychological problem that is impacting students self-confidence and making them anxious. Surveys collected from a random sample of high school students aged 16 years selected from 14 high schools indicated that fear from failure is one of the reasons behind the learning difficulties of failing students in Kuwait (Al-Methen & Wilkinson, 1995).

Furthermore, years of previous grade repetition is significantly associated at $P<0.05$ with adolescents' students' underachievement in schools. Linear regression analysis of survey responses of a random sample of 400 students in Egypt revealed that years of previous grade repetition was a significant predictor of scholastic achievement and more encountered among the perceptions of underachievers than achievers (Hussein & Ouda, 2018). As a consequence, this educational experience has adversely impacted students motivation to perform in school.

Repeating a year consistently showed greater negative effects for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In Lebanon, student questionnaires and interviews were collected from 1,633 retainees revealed that a large percentage of the

students who entered the school early experience frequent retention and changed schools (El-Hassan, 1998). Majority of these students were overage for their classrooms (90%), male (59%), from public schools (53%) and lived in rural areas (57%). Other variables such as parents education and occupation levels and their marital status were also associated with the frequency of retention. Findings of this study are evidence that low socioeconomic status and poor environment have major consequences on children's physical and mental development which could lead to grade failure.

Through a qualitative ethnographic study, Al-Hroub (2015) discovered that failing a grade and having low scholastic achievement is the main reason why Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon dropped out of schools. Interviews with five dropped out students revealed that their low academic achievement lead to social isolation and shame. As a consequence, these students dropped out of school and joined the labor market to support their parents with low socio-economic status.

Studies to date showed that there is controversy in teachers beliefs that retention is an effective means of preventing academic failure in the next higher grade (Scimemi, 2019). While some teachers agreed that students should be retained because it gives the immature child a chance to catch up, others reported that it will harm students' self-concept. As such, it was important for researchers to examine factors that are associated with teachers' beliefs. In a recent correlational study conducted in the Unites Arab Emirates, Scimemi (2019) found that teachers' (n=120) beliefs and knowledge regarding grade-level retention are not associated with teaching experience and grade-level taught. This means that teaching experience does not influence teachers' decision to retain or socially promote a student who is struggling academically. Findings of this study suggest that even if teachers strongly believe that retention could help students improve their academic achievement, it is beneficial only if implemented appropriately and when the proper interventions were implemented. Furthermore, professional development should target experienced and less experienced teachers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to teach a wider range of students to meet standards to proceed to the following grade level.

Overall, studies mentioned above are aligned with the international evidence reporting that repeating a year may have a negative effect on academic achievement and suggesting that the practice is likely to increase educational inequality.

Summary paragraph:

In the Arab world, there remains little empirical support for the effectiveness of retention, and it has been found that repeating a year can be associated with negative academic, social and emotional outcomes.

Studies in Morocco, Kuwait, and Lebanon showed that younger students, refugee students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at a higher risk of repeating a year and dropping out of school.

More research is needed in this area to examine the impact of this intervention on students' academic grades. More quantitative or mixed-method studies are also needed to have an overall understanding about this phenomenon from parents, students, and teachers side.

References

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Search Terms

Social promotion; flexible progression; student promotion; grade repetition; grade retention; repeat a year; non promotion; hold back; academic failure; social promotion

Databases searched

Academic search complete

ERIC (EBSCO)

Education Source

Google scholar

ProQuest Central

ProQuest Dissertations

Web of Science