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Teacher Perceptions of Grade Retention: An Update

Jillian Brianne Kintner
Western Kentucky University, jillian.kintner@gmail.com

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE RETENTION: AN UPDATE

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Jillian Kintner

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF GRADE RETENTION: AN UPDATE

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Dr. Sarah Ochs, Director of Specialist Project

Dr. Carl Myers

Dr. Jeremy Logsdon

Associate Provost for Research and Graduate Education

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Department of Psychology Western Kentucky University

The purpose of the current project was to replicate a previous study examining the beliefs and knowledge of grade retention (i.e., Witmer et al., 2004) and evaluate any changes in the past 17 years. Nineteen teachers completed all sections of the Teacher Retention Beliefs Knowledge Questionnaire (TRBKQ; Witmer et al., 2004). Support for the use of retention as an effective intervention was demonstrated. Influential factors differed by level of importance depending on the grade level the participant taught. Statistically significant correlations were also found between the practice of retention and propositional and practical knowledge before and during/after the Covid-19 pandemic. Limitations and future directions are discussed as well.

Literature Review

Grade Retention

Grade retention is a procedure that requires students to repeat grade curriculum due to academic or behavioral concerns. This practice is commonly referred to as being "held back," "flunking," or an "extra year to grow" (Mattison et al., 2018). Social promotion, on the other hand, is the process of promoting the student's grade level regardless of mastery of academic content (Frey, 2005). Grade retention has been around since the 1860s. Schoolhouses originally promoted students based on age but then began to practice grade advancement based on achievement (Beebe-Frankenberger et al., 2004; Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Although this historical practice was not a formal process like we see today, it was the start of both retention and social promotion based primarily on the judgement of the teacher (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005). The practice of grade retention remained a common, accepted practice until concerns began emerging in the 1930s (Dennler et al., 1986) and more significantly in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s, schools scaled back retention as research on its effects became available (Glavin, 2018).

The most notable establishment of formal procedures and academic standards began after the release of the *National Report on Excellence in Education* in 1983 (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). This publication is notable because it led to increased public interest on the topic of retention and was often cited by politicians when developing educational policies or legislation (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Retention and social promotion became prominent political issues throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as 49 states were participating in standardized testing. This created the high stakes testing procedures that most districts still have in place today (Frey, 2005). The statewide

academic achievement assessments for students were linked to decisions regarding school personnel employment, school funding, and administrative decisions. Standards set by these assessments drove a notion that students who could not meet the standards should be retained (Segool et al., 2013). Since the interest in academic standards increased, the once popular strategy for lower performing students (i.e., social promotion) declined and retention rates increased (Lynch, 2013). Difficulties arise when trying to analyze effectiveness of either retention or social promotion because of the lack of a universal system for tracking, a state requirement to declare retention rates, or on the national platform, an agency that regularly reports the rates of retention (Frey, 2005; Warren & Saliba, 2012).

In the late 1990s, retention continued to gain traction as an intervention in response to President Clinton's demand for increased academic standards and decreases in social promotion (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). The pressure was repeated when *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* was implemented in 2001 by President George W. Bush. The implementation of NCLB created a foundation for requiring standardized testing to demonstrate academic ability and a platform to reinforce the practice of retention. That is, state test performance became a significant consideration for holding a student back from the next grade. NCLB established that students in third to eighth grade would receive annual testing to determine achievement levels. These trends in testing are still in place today and have influenced state policies on retention. For example, the most recent re-authorization of NCLB as Every Student Succeeds Act continues to include requirements and language about testing and accountability.

A report by the *Education Commission of the States* provided an overview of state retention policies for third grade proficiency standards, where 34% of states plus the District of Columbia require retention in state policies, 20% allow retention, and the remaining 46% of states do not specific retention policies in state statues (Education Commission of the States, 2020). The variance in guidelines can also be seen in the difference of reporting policies established. This makes it challenging for accurate tracking of retention practices and accurate representation of retained students (Warren & Saliba, 2012). Retention is considered a prominent tool for intervention in current education practices; but a costly one. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the total cost per student in a public elementary/secondary school during 2015-2016 was $13,847 in the United States. This makes retention one of the costliest remedial strategies for a single student in a system already financially strained. Further, NCES (2019) reports that of public and private schools in 2016, 1.9% of the total student population was retained indicating a decrease in comparison to 2015's 2.2% retained. Despite the reduction, retention practices are still an expensive form of intervention (NCES, 2019), and one which often lacks supporting evidence.

Retention is commonly used simply as a repeated year of instruction for students with no additional supports or specialized instruction (Bonvin et al., 2008). Retention by itself is not beneficial and may even have negative implications for academic and socioemotional factors (Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001). Even when provided interventions during the retained year, retained students still performed inadequately when compared to promoted students (Temple et al., 2004). Some studies demonstrate positive short-term benefits for retention, but the

results diminish over the following years (Algozzine et al., 1997: Walberg et al., 2004). Even with limited research showing positive implications and a larger number of negative consequences, retention is still a dominant response to struggling students who fail to meet academic grade standards (Rafoth & Knickelbein, 2008). Often students who are retained share similar demographic factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) (Anderson et al., 2002). For instance, Black students were retained at a higher rate than White students; but not significantly different than Hispanic students, in the overall population in represented totals in K-12th (NCES, 2019). Of all Black students, 2.5% were retained, but for all White and Hispanic students, only 1.5% were retained each. Of note, significant differences were not exhibited in the specific grades of 9th-12th. Across all grades, we also see a marginally higher percentage of males (41.2%) retained when compared to females (39%) (NCES, 2019). These statistics demonstrate that there is an overrepresentation of Black students in the retained population and that other factors besides struggling academically may be contributing to the probability of being retained. Moller et al. (2006) indicated that the biggest impacts on academic achievement over time were socioeconomic status, race, and the event of retention (Moller et al., 2006). In Florida schools, children were 14% more likely to be retained if their mother had less than a high school diploma, compared to children whose mothers held bachelor's degrees (LiCalsi et al., 2019). The number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) has also been found to be a contributing factor to retention rates. Students with three or more ACEs are at a significantly higher risk (68.8%) of being retained than those with no ACEs (Hinojosa et al., 2019). Those who are exposed to economic hardship, a category of ACEs, were 60% more likely to repeat a grade than

those who did not experience economic hardship. The largest ACEs predictor of increased likelihood of grade retention was parent incarceration (OR = 2.35, Cl 1.69-3.27). These findings about student and family demographics further highlight the need for additional targeted interventions, rather than a repeated grade without increased support.

The overall effects of retention have been researched for decades with a variety of variables, but a large focus has included short and long-term impacts on academic and social-emotional outcomes. With the years of dedicated research, there are criticisms concerning methodologies of previous studies on grade retention and its effects. These criticisms sparked the meta-analysis by Allen and colleagues (2009) which examined the methodologies of 22 studies regarding the impacts of retention. Findings suggested that the effect sizes were within the medium range (-.30) when methodologies did not account for pre-retention discrepancies, but the methodologies that did remove pre-retention discrepancies had an effect size of .04 which suggests zero difference between those retained and those socially promoted (Allen et al., 2009). Several educationally based organizations have publicly referenced the lack of evidence in support of retention (e.g., Education World, NEA). In a position statement on grade retention and social promotion, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2011) indicates that research does not empirically support social promotion or grade retention and attention should instead be directed to evidenced-based interventions. NASP concludes that the practice of retention should not be endorsed (NASP, 2011).

Social-Emotional and Academic Effects

Literature examining retention highlight academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes**.** Research before and during the early 1990s have several methodological concerns to include the lack of exploration of socioemotional outcomes for retained students (Jimerson, 2001) Socioemotional outcomes are often measured by a variety of variables to include students' engagement, satisfaction, attitude, achievement expectations in relation to academics, and behavioral and social emotional adjustment.

Grade retention has been noted previously as a scarring experience (Andrew, 2014). A scarring event is defined as an incident that reduces the social status and affects successive outcomes. Examples provided include divorce and unemployment. A student who is retained experiences a change in status and even though the change in status may be temporary, the effects can be lasting. Andrew (2014) continues to note that grade retention is a scarring occasion because of three main reasons. First, the significantly negative experience of retention itself, citing from surveys in which students ranked negative experiences, retention was commonly second highest (the first being the death of a parent); secondly, by the negative association of retention defined by cultural beliefs and the representation of importance linked to intelligence; thirdly, the hindering expectations likely placed on the student by themselves, family members, peers, and educators to limit future capabilities by evaluating and associating previous failures. Other social/emotional associations with grade retention include increased disorderly classroom behavior, inattention levels, and anxiousness (Pagani et al., 2001). An Australian study found implications that grade retention had negative impacts for retained student's self-esteem, self-concept, academic motivation, and academic engagement

(Martin, 2011).

Academic effects have been measured using a variety of outcome variables including performance scores on standardized assessments, grade point averages, and high school completion. Several studies demonstrate either no difference in academic outcomes for students who are retained when compared to those who are not; or that students who were retained had a negative outcome (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Jacobs & Lefgren, 2004; Jimerson et al., 1997; Mantzicopoulos, 2003; Meisels & Liaw, 1993; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Jimerson (2001) reviewed 20 studies between 1990 and 1999 that provided an updated examination of the practice of retention on academic achievement and socioemotional adjustment. The academic achievement outcomes produced a total of 175 analyses between socially promoted and retained students. Of that total, 91 of the analyses were statistically significant. Forty-seven percent showed positive correlations for the socially promoted students while the remaining 5% favored the retained students (48% yielded no difference). Academic achievement as measured by standardized assessments (e.g., Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement); had a mean effect size in favor of those socially promoted (*ES* -.39). Analyses of composite score totals (-.20), grade point averages (-.18), and the areas of language arts (-.36), reading (-.54), and math (-.49) demonstrated negative annotations for the retained population than the socially promoted (Jimerson, 2001).

Retention and dropout rates are positively correlated, ranging from .34 to .98 (Bowman, 2005; Cortázar et al., 2020; Eide & Showalter, 1999; Hughes et al., 2018; Jimerson, Anderson et al., 2002; Jimerson, Ferguson et al., 2002; Marchbanks et al., 2014; Roderick, 1995; Stearns et al., 2007). While dropping out is sometimes examined

as a social-emotional effect of retention, it is primarily considered an academic effect. Retention has been identified as one of the largest predictors of drop out (Jimerson, Anderson et al., 2002; Rumberger, 1995). If a student is retained for one academic school year, the likelihood of dropping out increases 40% to 50%, but if a student is held back twice, the likelihood of dropping out increases to 90% (Andrew, 2014; Silberglitt et al., 2006). In further consideration of completion versus dropout, retention significantly increased the likelihood of dropping out by a projected regression of .98 (*SE* = 0.34). Retained students were 2.67 times more likely to dropout than those who had been socially promoted (Hughes et al., 2018).

Dropout rates are of great interest because those students neglect to fulfil the main agenda of obtaining an education and becoming a contributing member of society. Those who dropout are less likely to become homeowners, less likely get married, and will contribute less to society (Amos, 2009). High dropout rates are also commonly linked to higher rates of incarceration and unemployment. On average, a student who drops out of high school will contribute a debt of $5,200 to society over the working span of their lifetime versus their graduated counterpart who will contribute a positive amount of $287,000 in their lifetime. In August of 2019, employment rates for those who had a high school diploma with no college was 55.3% of those aged 25 years and older, whereas; those who had less than a high school degree (or equivalent) was 44.6% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). While retention has not been linked to causation of dropping out, research consistently demonstrates a relationship (Jimerson, Ferguson et al., 2002).

Perceptions of Retention

Another key factor in the practice of retention is often the perception of those involved in decision making, including parents, teachers, students, and administrators. For the 2020-2021 school year, according to *Education Commission of the State*, 10 states allow retention as a local decision, 17 states require retention with exemptions possible as outlined in state policy, and 23 states do not specify whether retention is required or not. Exemptions defined in state policies have a range in defining terms to include teacher recommendations, participation in summer reading programs, special education services, and previous retention. Of those with retention policies specified, seven states require parental input (Education Commission of the States, 2020). These policies highlight that many individuals may be involved in promoting retention as a policy (e.g., policy makers, school administrators, parents, teachers). Therefore, it is important to consider several stakeholders' perceptions of retention.

Previous research has indicated that the perception of retention varies across those who are included in that decision. Penna and Tallerico (2005) examined students' perceptions of being retained and the event of dropping out. The retention event was identified as a large contributing factor in dropping out. Common themes perceived about the event of retention included that there was no academic benefit to the repeated year, negative stigmatization by peers, and adverse self-interpretation of failure (Penna & Tallerico, 2005). Teachers typically perceive retention as an intervention that will diminish future academic failure and aid in development of juvenile students causing reduced behavioral issues (Anastasiou et al., 2017), even in the absence of data to support this idea. Of note, principals do not hold the same interpretations of grade retention.

Range et al. (2012) concluded that principals and teachers had differing perceptions of the effectiveness of grade retention, with principals perceiving retention as an unsuccessful intervention. Additionally, teachers noted significantly more than principals that retention decreased future academic failure, sustained grade standards, provided additional math fundamental practice, encouraged students to attend school, and increased self-concept in kindergarteners and first graders (Range et al., 2012).

Witmer et al. (2004) attempted to provide a whole view approach to answering why the practice of retention is still being implemented by including both beliefs and knowledge pertaining to retention in one survey measure. Separating knowledge into two categories based on how it is obtained provides additional insight to decision making practices. Knowledge obtained through research is referred to as propositional knowledge and knowledge obtained through experience is termed practical knowledge. Witmer et al. (2004) used the Teacher Retention Beliefs and Knowledge Questionnaire (TRBKQ) to examine teachers' use of practical and propositional knowledge.

The TRBKQ was completed by 35 teachers (27 female and 8 male) from one district representing grades K-4th. The results showed that 77% of the teachers believed that retention was an adequate intervention for preventing future failure and 94% of them reported disagreement with the idea that children should never be retained. Two groups were derived from the sample by grades, K-2nd and 3rd-4th. Group differences were marked on four items between the groups. The first item asked if older aged peers (by more than a year) cause more behavioral problems in the classroom, in which significantly more K-2nd teachers disagreed with than 3rd-4th ($U = 83.0$, $p < .05$). The second item pertained to students meeting grade level standards through retention in

which more 3rd-4th teachers agreed with than K-2nd ($U = 44.50$, $p < .05$). The third item pertained to if students who did not apply themselves should be retained or not and significantly more K-2nd disagreed than 3rd-4th teachers ($U = 78.0$, $p < .05$). The fourth item that had significant group difference was that students in elementary should only be retained once. K-2nd teachers agreed more than 3rd-4th teachers ($U = 88.0$, $p < .05$), even though this was similar to the school districts policy. Influential factors in considering retention were ranked, and academic performance was suspected to be the biggest influence. This was supported in the study, as academic performance was ranked first. A significant difference between the two groups was noted for the factor of child's self-esteem, as K-2nd ($M = 9.8$, $SD = 7.5$) rated it more importantly than 3rd-4th ($M = 5.1$, $SD = 4.0$).

Results also indicated that teachers performed better on the practical knowledge questions than propositional knowledge-based questions ($T = -3.70$, $p < .001$). Twenty-three percent of teachers rated their propositional knowledge of retention as extremely limited, 56% rated it as somewhat limited, and 21% rated it as moderate. None of the respondents rated their knowledge as extensive. A hypothesis pertaining to the number of students retained by participants in relation to the participants' level of propositional knowledge was proposed, but no significant relationship was found. Limitations related to this hypothesis include sample size and availability of sample (all participants were from the same district).

Current Study

Despite research citing that retention is an ineffective practice (e.g., Algozzine et al., 1997; Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 2001; Temple et al., 2004), it still happens in schools today. Since research has demonstrated a lack of evidence for the use of retention, the number of published studies has slowed in recent years. The purpose of the current project was to replicate a previous study that examined beliefs and knowledge about grade retention (i.e., Witmer et al., 2004) and evaluate any changes in the past 17 years. Specifically, the following research questions were examined (Witmer et al., 2004):

1) What are elementary teachers' beliefs about grade retention and do they differ by grade taught?

   Hypothesis: A majority of teachers will believe that retention is an effective practice and beliefs by grade will differ with K-2nd teachers having stronger beliefs.

2) What factors influence teachers' decisions to retain students?

   Hypothesis: Academic achievement will be the highest factor for the 3-4th group and parental input will be highest for the K-2nd group.

3) How much propositional and practical knowledge do elementary teachers have about grade retention?

   Hypothesis: Teachers will have limited propositional knowledge about retention.

4) Do elementary teachers have higher levels of practical or propositional knowledge about grade retention?

Hypothesis: Elementary teachers will have higher levels of practical knowledge.

5) What is the relationship between teachers' propositional knowledge about retention and their practice or retaining students?

   Hypothesis: Teachers' knowledge level will be significantly and negatively related to the number of students retained at a moderate level.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were originally projected to be educators teaching kindergarten through fourth grade. To increase the access to responses, participation included all current educators, regardless of grade taught. Institutional review board (IRB) approval was granted for both methods of data collection. Fourteen responses had been completed prior to the distribution of the survey on social media, meaning that a majority of the participants were derived from the primary research's district of employment. This district is located in the southeastern region of the United States and contains three elementary schools. An electronic invitation of participation was distributed to educators of kindergarten through fourth grade. A second wave of participation was solicited through the primary research's social media platforms. In total, twenty-six participants started the survey, but sections had various participation counts. For Part I, 20 participants completed all questions, and one answered the first two items. Part II had 21 complete responses and Part III had 19 complete responses. The demographic items (years taught, ethnicity, etc.) had various numbers of responses for each item, but the practice of retention questions in Part IV had 20 complete responses. Respondents who indicated ethnicity (N= 17) identified as White or non-Hispanic. Seventeen respondents identified as female and two identified as male.

Teacher Retention Beliefs and Knowledge Questionnaire (TRBKQ; Witmer et al., 2004)

The TRBKQ (Witmer et al., 2004) is a modified version of the Teacher Retention Beliefs Questionnaire (TRBQ, Tomchin & Impara, 1992). The TRBQ was developed to

assess views of retention and originally created based on review of students' records, written policies, teacher interviews, and previous literature (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). To expand the use of the scale, Witmer and colleagues (2004) added 16 additional items assessing knowledge of retention practices which kept the original measure largely intact but added an additional section (Part III). The resulting scale had four parts.

Part I measures teachers' beliefs about grade retention and contains 20 statements to be ranked based on Likert-Scale formatting of agree to disagree (1=Agree, 2= Tend to Agree, 3= Tend to Disagree, 4= Disagree). Although some changes were made to the TRBQ for the TRBKQ, Part I is almost identical with only one change being implemented to better fit the sample population (Item 9).

Part II of the TRBKQ asks participants to rate factors of retention using a point system (points totaled to 100). Changes for the TRBKQ included seven original factors from the TRBQ consisting of (1) academic performance, (2) social/emotional maturity, (3) age in relation to others, (4) home environment, (5) effort being put forth, (6) child's self-esteem, and (7) ability. Two factors were not included from the TRBQ in the TRBKQ: size in relation to others and gender. Four new factors were added after feedback was received from a research group which included (8) parental input, (9) presence of a learning disability, (10) student transience, and (11) attendance. These changes established that participants were to divide 100 points among the 11 provided factors when considering retention. Part III measures practical and propositional knowledge about retention on 13 multiple-choice items and three open-ended questions. These items were created using multiple choice vignette questions from the TRBQ and content validity was established through review by education professors.

Finally, Part IV includes demographic questions about the teachers and their retention practices. Validity and reliability were considered in Neuberger (2011). In support of Part I, an internal consistency reliability of .858 was noted and Part III was found to have an internal consistency reliability coefficient of .678.

For the current study, wording was slightly changed on the statements of Part III for clear comprehension. Part II was changed from a ranking question with point distribution to asking the participants to select the three most influential factors in the decision of retention. All open-ended questions were removed, and the practice of retention was defined by the likelihood that a teacher would recommend retention. These changes were made to make the survey briefer and require less effortful responding to hopefully encourage participation. In addition, one item from Part III (knowledge) was excluded due to an error inputting items into Qualtrics and an additional setting was included in the practice of retention to include pre- and post-COVID pandemic practices.

Procedure

The study contained a within subjects post-test design with no control group. Following university IRB approval, the first page of the survey included an informed consent page, which participants agreed to upon clicking through to the following items. The questionnaire was completed on an anonymous basis but did contain basic demographic (e.g., gender, ethnicity) items. Respondents were provided the link for the survey either through email or social media platform. The survey was created using Qualtrics and all responses were anonymous.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS, version 27, or within Excel. First, descriptive statistics were reviewed including mean, standard deviation, and range. Descriptive statistics were also calculated to answer questions related to beliefs and knowledge. To answer research questions related to differences between groups, a Mann-Whitney U test was used due to a small sample size. Three groups were determined by grade taught. Group 1 (N= 8) included educators of K-2nd grade, Group 2 (N= 4) included educators of grades 3rd-4th, and Group 3 (N= 8) included all remaining educators of 5th grade and beyond. To answer the research question examining the relationship between knowledge and retention practices, Spearman's correlation statistic was used.

Results

Teaching experience indicated a combined 158 years of experience with 79% of the teachers teaching between one and ten years. The remaining responses indicated teaching for 11 years or more.

The first research question sought to evaluate teacher beliefs about grade retention and how those beliefs differed by grade instructed. It was hypothesized that retention would be supported by the majority and that beliefs would differ by grade taught. K-2nd teachers were predicted to have stronger beliefs. Total account for all participants indicated that teacher suggested increased levels of agreement on nine belief items (Items #1, 2, 7 ,8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14) while indicating higher levels of disagreement on the remaining 11 items (#3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20) as displayed in Table 1. In total, teachers agreed (60%) that retention prevented students from facing daily failure in the next grade (Item #1). On the item "Children should never be retained (Item #20)," only 25% of the respondents agreed with the belief statement. Only two items yielded majority agreement across all three groups ("Students retained once in elementary school (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school" and "Retaining a child in 3-4 harms a child's self-concept").

As previously mentioned, it was hypothesized that significant group difference between grades taught would be apparent in the beliefs about retention with teachers in grades K-2nd having stronger beliefs. A Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there were no group differences between any grades taught on the retention belief items (#1-20) of Part I. Although not significant, there were differences between retention beliefs in relevance to the grade of the student. As seen in Item #11 and Item #12 that asked the

same contextual question pertaining to the effectiveness of retention in providing the immature child an additional opportunity to catch up.

Table 1

Percent Agreement with Belief About Retention

Belief	K-2 % Agree	3-4 % Agree	5+ % Agree
1. Retention is an effective in preventing students from facing daily failure in the next grade level.	50	80	75
2. Retention is necessary for maintaining grade level standards.	38	60	75
3. Retaining a child in K-2 harms a child's self-concept.	13	0	25
4. Retention prevents classrooms from having wide ranges of student achievement.	38	25	50
5. Students who do not apply themselves should be retained.	25	0	63
6. Knowing that retention is a possibility motivates a student to work harder.	13	25	88
7. Retaining a child in 3-4 harms a child's self-concept.	63	75	63
8. Retention is effective at providing support in school for the child who does not get support at home.	50	75	63
9. Students retained once in elementary school (K-4) should not be retained again in elementary school.	88	100	75
10. Students who make passing grades but are working below grade level should be retained.	25	0	0
11. Retention in grades K-2 is effective in giving the immature child a chance to catch up.	88	100	13
12. Retention in grades 3-4 is effective in giving the immature child a chance to catch up.	63	50	50
13. Students with an Individual Education Plan should not be retained.	63	75	38
14. If students are to be retained, they should be retained no later than 4th grade.	88	100	50
15. In K-2, over-age children (more than a year older than peers) cause more behavior problems than other children.	25	0	13
16. In 3-4, over-age children (more than a year older than peers cause more behavior problems than other children.	38	25	50
17. Retention in grades K-2 permanently labels a child.	25	25	13
18. Retention in grades 3-4 permanently labels a child.	25	50	38
19. Children who have passing grades but excessive absences should be retained.	25	25	38
20. Children should never be retained.	28	25	13

Note. Column headings (e.g., K-2) represent the grade the participant teaches.

The second research question examined which factors were most influential in the decision to retain students. It was predicted that academic achievement would be the highest ranked factor for decision making for teachers of 3rd and 4th grade (Group 2) and parental input would be indicated more frequently for K-2nd grade (Group 1), as predicted in Witmer et al. (2004). Results indicated that teachers of Group 1 selected academic achievement and social/emotional maturity most frequently. The second highest selected factor was age in relation to others and tied for third was ability and attendance. Teachers in Group 2 selected the factors of social/emotional maturity most frequently, followed by academic achievement; and attendance. Teachers in the remaining grades (Group 3) selected the factors of academic achievement, social/emotional maturity, and effort being put forth. These results indicate that the hypothesis was not supported.

The third and fourth research questions addressed how much propositional and practical knowledge were possessed by teachers and which knowledge level was higher. It was predicted that teachers would have limited propositional knowledge and that teachers would have higher levels of accuracy on practical application questions than propositional knowledge questions. Participants (N = 19) averaged 26% of propositional items correctly with a range of 0% correct through 86% of items correct and 35% of practical knowledge items correctly with a range of 0% to 100% correct. Overall, this suggests that teachers demonstrated limited propositional and practical knowledge as a group, but individual participants demonstrated sufficient knowledge. These findings support the prediction that teachers would demonstrate higher accuracy on questions pertaining to practical knowledge than propositional knowledge-based questions, though both were generally low on average.

Table 2

Influential Factors in the Decision of Retention by Teachers

Factor	% K-2 Selected	% 3-4 Selected	% 5+ Selected
Academic performance	25.0	20.0	36.8
Social/emotional maturity	25.0	26.7	21.1
Age in relation to others	12.5	6.7	5.3
Home environment	4.2	0.0	0.0
Effort being put forth	4.2	6.7	15.8
Child's self-esteem	4.2	6.7	0.0
Ability	8.3	0.0	10.5
Parental input	4.2	6.7	0.0
Presence of a learning disability	4.2	6.7	0.0
Transient student	0.0	6.7	5.3
Attendance	8.2	13.3	5.3

Note. Column headings represent the percentage of teachers at that grade level who selected each influential factor.

Lastly, the fifth question examined the relationship between practice of retention and teachers' propositional and practical knowledge of retention. The practice of retention was measured by the reported likelihood of retaining before and during/after the COVID pandemic. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was used to determine statistical significance between the relationships. Two positive correlations were found within the last research question. A strong, statistically significant correlation was found between the practice of retention before and after the global pandemic (r_s =.77, p = .00, N =20). Propositional knowledge and the practice of retention before the COVID Pandemic

were strongly related (r_s =.60, p =.01, N =19) but propositional knowledge and practice of retention during/after the pandemic were not significant. Neither the relationship between teachers' practical knowledge and practice of retention before or during/after COVID were statistically significant.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to replicate a study by Witmer et al. (2004) that examined the beliefs and knowledge of educators on the use of retention in K-4th grade. Replicating the study by Witmer et al. (2004) allowed for increased contribution to the subject in research and the ability to examine possible changes of trends within the last 17 years. Research related to the topic of teacher perceptions and grade retention has been previously limited, as well as appearing to have lost traction within the last several years. Many results of the current study were consistent with the findings in Witmer et al. (2004) and other studies (Enters, 1994; Tomchin & Impara, 1992), regarding the assumption that teachers hold the belief that retention is an effective intervention despite the contradictions of previous research. Trends in teacher's beliefs were represented differently as there were not item differences found between grade levels taught as found in Witmer et al. (2004).

Factors that influenced retention were found to be unique results compared to those previously found in Witmer et al. (2004). Academic achievement was still the highest selected factor overall but teachers at different grade levels differed in choices than previously found. For example, parent input was rarely selected in this sample, and ability level was not selected at all for 3-4th grades. Given that this study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic when most schools have transitioned their learning to online, hybrid, or distanced in-person, it is possible that some of the responses reflect influences that may have shifted over time or as a result of the current educational landscape.

It is interesting that both average propositional and practical knowledge were generally low (less than 50% accuracy). However, there was significant variability within

groups. Overall, however, participants continued to demonstrate higher levels of practical knowledge when compared to propositional knowledge. Despite teachers scoring higher on the practical knowledge items, practical knowledge was not significantly related to retention practices. Instead, the propositional knowledge, while lower, was significantly related to retention practices before COVID-19; but not during/after. This was unexpected and suggests that the higher propositional knowledge, the more likely an individual is to recommend retention. One would suspect that propositional knowledge, or knowledge from sources like journal articles or workshops, would inform participants about the potential harm of retention and its lack of effect, leading to a lower likelihood of retention.

Unique to this study, in relation to the practice of retention, was the additional component of consideration before and during/after the COVID-19 global pandemic. The inclusion of this component allowed for indication that teachers may vary in their practice of retention depending on their propositional and practical knowledge level and due to the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, likelihood of retention before and during/after the pandemic is strongly related (.77, $p < .05$) suggesting that teachers may not vary their retention practices all that much. However, it is important to continue to monitor changes in retention practices following the COVID-19 pandemic. Further implications of the COVID-19 pandemic may be seen in the use of retention as an intervention in future research as retention appears to be discussed as a relevant intervention due to the pandemic. It is also possible that the historical event itself will have an impact and should be explored in future research.

While this study was able to provide a minor update to the literature on teachers' beliefs and knowledge about retention, this study has limitations. First, the size of the sample is small. Additional studies are needed with more robust sample sizes, across school types, and with more data collected about teacher demographics. Group differences may not have been well established due to the size of the represented groups. Trends in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic have also not been established and should be represented in future research as the pandemic was a historical event and changing point in education and will have some relevance of impact. The groups themselves were different from those found in the Witmer, et al. study as Group 3, was an additional component and group difference with other grades should be further investigated. Additionally, while some small changes were made to the survey items, the survey has largely remained intact since the 1990s. Significant changes have occurred in education and it may be useful to pilot a new measure examining issues around retention. Future research could also analyze teacher preparation programs and identify how they are trained on retention.

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