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AN EXPLORATION OF HOW EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS PERCEIVE THE IMPLICATIONS OF GRADE REPETITION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN WESTERN UGANDA: A QUALITATIVE MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

by

PATRICK TUMWINE

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

December 2024

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Without the generosity of Fr. Thomas O'Hara, CSC, and Bishop Patrick Neary, CSC, I would not have registered for this education program in the first place. Thank you for trusting me and assigning me to this obedience.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all Holy Cross schools in the Province of East Africa, Congregation of Holy Cross, as they accompany students in a Holy Cross education tradition.

AN EXPLORATION OF HOW EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS PERCEIVE THE IMPLICATIONS OF GRADE REPETITION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN WESTERN UGANDA: A QUALITATIVE MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

Patrick Tumwine

University of the Incarnate Word, 2024

Grade repetition is one of the bottlenecks to Uganda's vision of producing skilled human capital to transform the nation's status from peasant to middle class. This study explored how education stakeholders perceived the implication of students' grade repetition at a secondary school level. I employed a qualitative approach with an embedded multiple-case study design, through which cross-case synthesis on each school's perspective revealed similarities and differences in understanding grade repetition at a secondary school level. Individualism-collectivism theory guided the study, to understand how students realized educational expectations through an interplay of educational and cultural influence on a school's instructional process. I purposely selected 10 participants from four secondary schools (two private and two government), including four teachers and four administrators with at least 5 years of instruction, and two Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) chairpersons. I triangulated data collection through interviews, observation, document analysis, and focus group discussions and thematically analyzed the data through codes and categories to condense the voluminous field data into five themes without losing their intended meaning and focus. Study findings revealed a lack of standardized educational controls in regional schools as they raced for national examinations, ignoring the students' individualized needs. It established how schools' safeguards of their image and status led to more student expulsions for not meeting percentage pass marks, disparaging averages, and slow learners, impacting students' emotional and psychological well-being. As

schools overlooked government directives to satisfy their missions and belief systems, they widened the gap between rich and poor in accessing preferred schools. This study recommended the government's intervention with financial controls and enhanced supervision to create equal access to desired schools for well-to-do and low-income families and support students' holistic education. Schools' academic decisions also should reflect students' gender differences for inclusion.

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Chapter 1: Background of The Study

As Holy Cross educators, we transcend cultural and international boundaries to call to mind the totality of the human being. Our Founder, Blessed Basil Moreau (1856), considered formal education a way to prepare youth as “useful citizens for society [but more importantly as] citizens for heaven” (p. 27). He viewed education as the “art of helping young people to completeness” (p. 1). Our call as teachers in a Holy Cross tradition was and is grounded in knowing that each student is a unique individual whose potential and gifts we are to bring forth through our ministry of presence as teachers and educators.

My experience as a Holy Cross Brother and as a former chairperson of the Board of Governors of two secondary schools in Uganda (2014-17) has influenced this study. During my leadership tenure, I dealt with emotional parents when one of our schools forced their children to repeat a previous grade after half of 106 students in the class failed to meet an internal examination pass mark in preparation for the following year’s national examination. Unfortunately, such a scenario caught my board unaware, as the school administration decided to let go of that half of the students without seeking permission from the school board. The only reason the administration gave to us about their decision to require students to repeat or leave school was that the school wanted to keep its national examination passing percentage high.

Using the national examination as a yardstick for readiness meant that the school overlooked other areas of students’ growth needs. The school’s aim to raise its percentage pass at the national level, without considering the impact such a decision had on the students, parents, and other stakeholders, forfeited the holistic nature of Holy Cross education. If a religious school, focused on the holistic education of not educating the mind at the expense of the heart (Moreau, 1856), can let go of many such students, how about secular schools? Such an

experience drew me to explore the reasons why lead schools make such decisions, and how the players in education service delivery view such decisions through the lens of education recipients, such as students. While I understand that our schools still must compete favorably through national curriculum to maintain the benefits of increased student enrollment, this study explored how secondary schools failed some students because of the weight of academic excellence necessary to keep the schools nationally recognized.

Context of the Problem

As a certified Ugandan teacher who has also served in different leadership capacities at the secondary school level for more than 5 years, seeing schools force students to repeat a grade left me with more questions than answers. Unfortunately, there was inadequate understanding of the implications for grade repetition at the Ugandan secondary school level, since the limited available literature has focused solely on the primary education level. Initial research on grade repetition included Okurut's (2015) study, which only focused on the benefits of Automatic Promotion Policy to counteract grade repetition at a primary school level.

Okurut (2015) employed a human capital theory with a difference-in-difference approach to focus on Ugandan primary education and understand the effects of automatic promotion on literacy and numeracy abilities among pupils in Grade 3 and Grade 6 at the elementary level, using existing datasets. This study narrowed its findings to document analysis rather than to empirically obtain data from respondents in schools that implemented educational policies, to make justifiable conclusions to his findings. Building upon Okurut (2015), Kabay's (2016) empirical study dealt with grade repetition at a primary school level, reflecting on the rate of student dropout rather than exploring the understanding of grade repetition as a challenge of its own.

A qualitative study conducted in Uganda by Otaala et al. (2013), which focused on the faculty and students of one Ugandan public university and the teachers and students from 16 secondary schools in the Ugandan central region, claimed that different schools tend to improvise methods of excelling in national examinations and force learners they consider academically weak to repeat or even leave their schools. However, Otaala et al. did not reveal whether such secondary schools had measures to keep the weak students in check before forcing them to repeat or leave school. More concerning, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES, 2016) provisional information on students' education progress revealed 15 years of students repeating classes since 2002.

Education data from 2014 to 2017 (MoES, 2017) indicated a continuous persistence of grade repetition at the secondary level, although there were no data accessible through MoES to describe the current status of grade repetition from 2018 to date. The data available revealed an increase from 1.5% of grade repeaters in 2014 to 3.0% in 2017. The government's intervention at the primary school level, by implementing the Automatic Promotion Policy (APP) for all students in a universal primary education program (MoES, 2004; Okurut, 2015, 2018), helped counteract the challenge of grade repetition. However, the APP's implementation failed to factor in secondary education, so the issue of repeating grades continues at this level.

Based on the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2017), the undulating numbers of students repeating classes at the secondary level continues to hamper the country's desire to provide a systematic "quality education and training that is central to the creation of a highly skilled" labor (p. 1). For the country to train and nurture such skilled human resource requires solid financial stamina to impact the growing population's economic demands. However, when

students fail to progress from one class to the next, they undermine the government's effort to train such skilled labor.

Although the MoES (2016) report shows a 1.02% small class repetition reduction from 2.39% in 2002 to 1.37% in 2016, this data reveals 2.4% of repeaters in 2006 and 3.0% in 2007, while in 2008 there was 2.4% of repeaters. The MoES (2016) report does not show why such occurrences of students repeating classes continue to happen even when the government is committed to funding and promoting quality education for all its citizens. Based on such limited information, the current study was interested in discovering what goes on in schools as students enroll and progress from one class to another.

Knowledge Gap

Grade repetition in Ugandan secondary schools has been persistent for over 15 years, since 2002, as reported by MoES (2016, 2017). Reviewed literature on secondary school grade repetition revealed a general lack of understanding of its causes, how it impacts the student's personal and academic life, and the schools' missions under the Ugandan education system. Most studies that pointed to the implication of grade repetition on students focused on African countries and beyond, other than Uganda.

Uys and Alat (2015) focused on South Africa, using literature from the nation's database, while Glick and Sahn (2010) dealt with this phenomenon in Senegal. A case in point was that Glick and Sahn viewed grade repetition through existing literature from the World Bank on Senegal education as a challenge to stakeholders who bear the considerable expense of paying for the repeated grade. However, this study did not reveal how such high financial education costs impact education service delivery to the intended recipients, as students continue to repeat grades.

Even though Uys and Alat (2015) observed how repeating grades makes students overgrow the age bracket of their subsequent grades, there is limited knowledge in the Ugandan context of its implications for students' personal and academic lives. As different schools devise means to remain academically competitive nationally, Otaala et al. (2013) noted how some schools in Uganda force low-performing students to repeat their grades. However, the authors did not reveal any existing academic yardstick on how such schools determine who, amongst students, should repeat a grade. Neither did they indicate how such action affects students and schools alike.

Other studies that focused on the psycho-social implications of grade repetition were conducted in both OECD and non-OECD countries (Ikeda & Garcia, 2014) but did not include the Uganda education system. Even with the concern of how psycho-social issues of grade repetition impact students' academic stability (Brophy, 2006; Ikeda & Garcia, 2014; Valijarvi & Sahlberg, 2018), no studies on Ugandan education show how educators accompany and sustain the learning needs of student repeaters. Consequently, there is no evidence showing how Ugandan schools intervene in students' learning process before school administrators ask them to repeat or progress to the next grade. Therefore, this study intended to raise awareness of how schools—through teachers', administrators', and Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) chairpersons' perspectives—related grade repetition with other schools' challenges, such as financial and student needs.

Statement of the Problem

Cost Implications of Repeating Grades for Parents and Community

The persistent number of class repeaters at the Uganda secondary school level raises concerns for parents, Uganda MoES, and the country. Glick and Sahn (2010) argue that

considerable expenses on repeating students are enormous for the government and students' caretakers, like parents and guardians responsible for these children's wellbeing. Kabay's (2016) empirical study on Ugandan primary schools concurred with Glick and Sahn when she reported that parents are forced by schools to "pay for the grade twice" (p. 598) when their children repeat the same grade. Since most parents struggle to raise funds, Kabay revealed that it is a financial burden on both parents and the government, as reported by parent respondents. None of the authors revealed whether the financial implication of grade repetition was a concern for teachers and administrators when making decisions about who should repeat the grade.

Implications of Grade Repetition on Students' Self-Efficacy

When schools force students to repeat class levels or look for other schools because of their academic challenges, they demean the schools that take them in, and Brophy (2006) noted how these students see themselves as failures. Based on a meta-analysis of the existing data from 30 OECD and non-OECD countries across the globe, Ikeda and Garcia (2014) stated that student repeaters tend to be discouraged in pursuing their educational dreams and lose a competitive spirit when new students from lower classes join them. The authors further postulated that student repeaters tend to portray a sense of hopelessness and a lack of self-confidence when they see their former classmates progressing from one grade to the next. However, Ikeda and Garcia did not reveal how schools were prepared to accompany such repeaters before deciding who should repeat a grade.

Brophy (2006) remarked that when students repeat their grades, they develop antisocial behavior and find it hard to readjust within their school environment with the rest of their peers. Furthermore, Uys and Alat (2015) caution that students who fail to progress from one grade to the next tend to overgrow the age bracket of the subsequent classes as repetition persists.

Even as Brophy (2006) and Uys and Alat (2015) concur that the persistence of repetition encourages a high rate of student dropout, these studies focused on countries other than Uganda. This current study explored whether Ugandan schools had divergent views on the well-being of their student-repeaters as they transition through their current grades, and how such views may help explain the school's understanding of the essence of grade repetition. I also focused on understanding how Ugandan educational stakeholders prepare themselves to handle such students' emotional and psychological challenges, mentioned by both Brophy and Uys and Alat.

Impact of Automatic Promotion Policy on Current Secondary School Grade Repeaters

In Uganda's effort to equip its youths with literacy and numeracy, MoES (2004) gave a directive to all universal primary education (UPE) schools to allow all pupils to progress from one grade to the next without being held up by internal examinations. According to Okurut (2015), the MoES directive, which became a policy of Automatic Promotion of pupils in the UPE schools, was officially implemented in 2005. Moreover, the MoES (2004) directive of automatic promotion required primary school teachers in the UPE schools to pay critical attention to the academically struggling pupils that teachers were to accompany through remedial classes.

However, no current studies exist on first-generation students under APP and their academic performance in secondary education. Furthermore, Okurut's (2018) study on the impact of grade repetition on pupils' dropout rates, using a difference-in-difference technique as a data analysis tool, raised a concern that the APP's implementation in UPE schools lacked a collective awareness of all stakeholders on both the benefits and shortcomings of APP.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple-case study was to explore the educational stakeholders' understanding of grade repetition at a secondary school level in Western Uganda. I focused on teachers, administrators, and PTA chairpersons as the immediate educational stakeholders responsible for students' well-being and implementation of curriculum requirements. The study considered grade repetition as synonymous with repeating a class level.

Central Research Question

The central question that guided this qualitative study was:

1. How do teachers, administrators and PTA chairpersons perceive the implications of grade repetition on educational cost, students' self-efficacy, and national examination pass rates at the secondary level in Western Uganda?

Research Sub-Questions

Three research sub-questions guided the study in responding to the central research question above. These include:

1. What are parents' and community's perception about the cost implications of grade repetition within the secondary education system in Western Uganda?
2. What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the impact of the current system for grade repetition on students' self-efficacy?
3. What are administrators' and PTA chairpersons' understanding of the impact of social promotion policies on national exam pass rates and related implications?

Rationale for the Methodology of the Study

The use of a qualitative research methodology enabled me to gather data from multiple sources using various data collection methods, including but not limited to observation,

interviews, and document analysis, that enhanced the credibility of the study through data triangulation (Yin, 2016). I was able to relate to and confirm such data collected through interviews and observation methods with participants' body language and their actions (Gabriel, 2015). Qualitative research further offered an opportunity for me as a researcher to enhance the understanding of the research problem through multi-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003) to establish existing differences, similarities, and what would be surprising knowledge emerging from my interaction with participants in their natural setting.

Unlike in the quantitative paradigm, the participants' natural setting minimized my interference with the position and perspectives of participants on the research phenomenon during the data collection process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As this study focused on understanding how teachers, school administrators, and PTA chairpersons interactively perceive and experience student grade repetition in their schools, this qualitative research enabled me to learn from participants' lived experiences (Yin, 2016) of the phenomenon encountered through their interactions with students.

Significance of the Study

This research study helped me to raise awareness for the Ugandan MoES about how the persistence of grade repetition serves as a stumbling block to MoES's vision, and develop strategies to overcome it. The study served as a springboard for the Uganda MoES as it continues to implement the government's plan of creating professional and skilled labor for sustainable development (UBOS, 2017).

This study intended to serve as a reference for curriculum developers and education policy implementers when laying out long-term plans for education service delivery,

understanding the predicaments that grade repetition brings to financial sustainability and classroom congestion at a secondary school level.

With this study, school administrators could understand the constraints that persistent grade repetitions bring to the school's image and realize the impact that repeating grades has on students' self-efficacy and projected future focus. This study focused on raising the need for schools to put in place a system that would provide repeating students with morale and emotional support and help them fit in the school community as they refocus their personal lives and educational experience.

The study aimed to fill the gap of knowledge on the implication of grade repetition on education costs among parents, guardians, and government, but also raised awareness of a need to refocus on students' educational experience that is inclusive of each student's prior and created encounters as a result of repeating grades. As schools focus on national examination requirements, this study brought to mind the schools' attention to students' general needs beyond the cognitive process to fulfill holistic education.

Nature of the Data Methods

The current study focused on four private and government-aided secondary schools. I targeted male and female teachers and administrators who had been in teaching service for at least 5 years in Ugandan schools to establish the meaning and context of student grade repetition in their respective secondary schools. I purposively selected 10 participants from the targeted four Ugandan secondary schools (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020) whose lived experience of student grade repetition vitally informed the study.

Using a multiple-case design (Yin, 2003, 2012) helped me view each of the four secondary schools as a unique case that instrumentally helped me to understand the research

problem using different leadership angles. In short, selecting four secondary schools comprising government and private sponsored schools fostered understanding of the research problem through cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003, 2012) based on how they experienced, related to, and handled such challenges of students' grade repetition.

Definitions of Terms

- Grade: The term "grade" in this study referred to an entire class of senior one, two, three, four, five, or six as they appeared under the secondary school education cycle in the education system of Uganda. This study used the term "grade" interchangeably with the term "class" (MoES, 2016; Otaala et al., 2013).
- Student grade repetition: This term referred to any student retained in senior one, two, three, four, five, or six at the end of an academic year for having failed to successfully fulfill the academic requirements to be promoted to the next class (Grossen et al., 2017).
- Secondary school level: This concept referred to all high school classes, from senior one to six (MoES, 2016).

Summary

The existing data from the Ugandan MoES since 2002 on the frequency of student grade repetition (MoES, 2004, 2016; Okurut, 2105, 2018), in addition to my experience as a former chairperson of the Board of Governors for some of the Ugandan secondary schools, influenced the need for this current study. I sought to understand the meaning and context of grade repetition through the experiences and perspectives of immediate education stakeholders who oversaw the day-to-day instructional needs of students. The study further reflected on the research phenomenon through the secondary education curriculum as schools responded to the

pressure of the national examination that kept them competitive as schools disseminated knowledge to the students (Otaala et al., 2013).

I explored how the school learning environment played a role in revealing the factors that contributed to grade repetition and how schools responded to the needs of students amid the external pressure of keeping the schools' national examination performance percentage high. During this study, I focused on both cost implications and time availability to the education stakeholders to sustain students' needs, and what implications such issues had on parents/guardians, schools, and other stakeholders when students did not progress as intended (Glick & Sahn, 2010; Kabay, 2016). Furthermore, the study explored how schools reflected on the class instructional focus (Altinyelken, 2010; Watanapokakul, 2016), students' self-efficacy, the school's image, and reputation as the students continued to repeat their grades (Brophy, 2006; Ikeda & Garcia, 2014). Last, the study's three research sub questions guided me to explore the meaning and context of governments and privately owned secondary schools attached to the problem of grade repetition.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review focused on student grade repetition at a secondary school level and how instructional activities such as lesson planning, individual student follow-up, student self-efficacy, student-student interactions, and teacher-student relationships influenced their performance. This chapter further focused on how educational institutional structures and policies helped me to understand the phenomenon. Based on the persistent increase in grade repetition rate for more than a decade, since 2002 (MoES, 2016), this qualitative multiple-case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003, 2012, 2018) explored how Ugandan secondary schools focused on student-oriented instruction, amid the underlying factors behind such repetition persistence. The individualism-collectivism theory (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) guided the overall review of literature.

Theoretical Framework

The allies of individualism-collectivism theory considered Hofstede to have coined the concept of individualism-collectivism in 1980 (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). Consequently, Triandis (1995) came in with a mindset of developing definitions of such concepts that would help bring out the contrasts among the parts of the theory. According to Grimm et al. (1999), there are four main characteristics of the individualism-collectivism theory that Triandis pointed out to be crucial. These include:

> a sense of self as an autonomous, independent person versus a sense of self as more connected to in-group, a priority on personal goals versus subordination of personal goals to group goals, an emphasis on personal attributes versus roles and norms in guiding behavior, and [lastly] the maintenance of relationships for personal benefits rather than for a sense of connection and obligation. (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011, p. 467)

The theory of individualism-collectivism points toward how people interact, how they form relationships, and what drives the formation of such relationships within cultural bounds

(Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). The theory is concerned with the type of relationships that define group interaction. According to its proponents, the theory emphasizes respect for individuals as autonomous persons with individual needs in the collective group. Grimm et al. (1999) warn of the repercussion of neglecting individual differences in a collective whole. In addition, Gundlach et al. (2006) remarked that self-interest and personal goals tend to compete with group goals when individualist tendencies override the collective responsibility. As this theory postulated the guiding principles of any given culture, I viewed such postulates as unique to each school's culture, which governs its education service delivery, bringing out the uniqueness of each school as a distinct entity. Triandis and Gelfand (2011) view a school culture as composed of external and internal domains whose environments impact the functioning of its system and determine the school's intended outcomes.

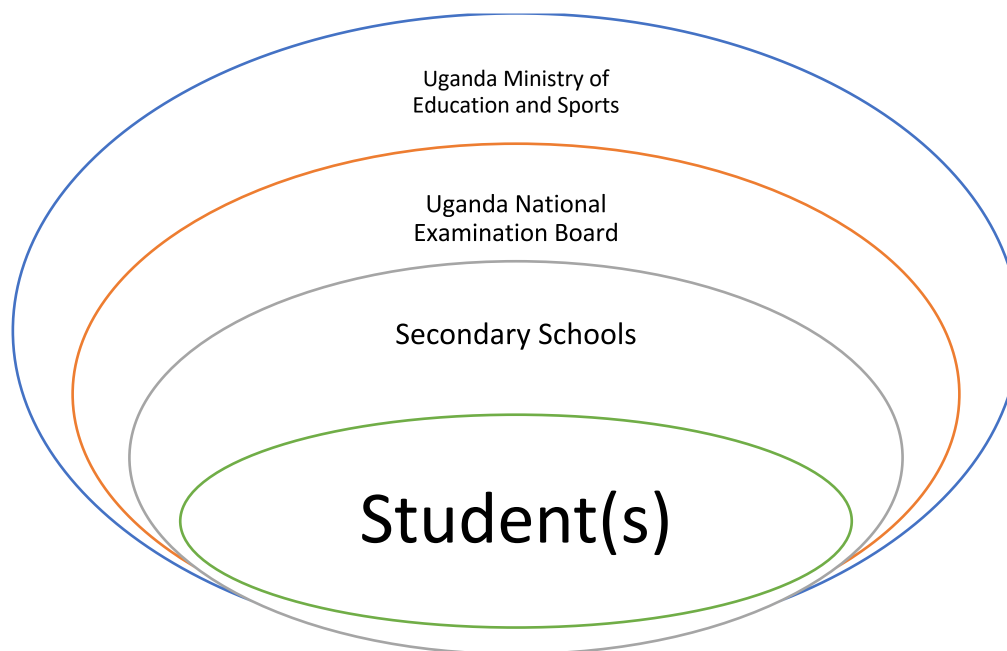
Viewing a school as an open system created an understanding of how internal and external factors influenced its mission. Unless such cultural interactions were complementary, the theory of individualism-collectivism offered more understanding of the conflicts that emerged within schools during emic (differences between cultures) and etic (similarities between cultures) interactive influence on school's needs (Gundlach et al., 2006; Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). Uniquely constructed school culture may find challenges emerging from individualistic and collectivistic interaction (Gundlach et al., 2006). The challenge may emerge from the schools' overall uniformity to an external cultural influence that may, in one way or another, strengthen or interfere with the school's internal mission. Such influence extends to how schools offer and transmit knowledge to students and who influences such teaching and learning processes. For example, MoES expects all schools, regardless of location, financial stamina, or enrollment, to compete favorably with other schools in the same curriculum through the national

examinations at every end of an instructional cycle (Figure 1). The centralized culture of Ugandan education through a common curriculum impinges on its influence on each school's internal environment and either complements or antagonizes what would be the school's individualized mission to the learning community of students.

The elements underlying the influence of the school system on individual students fall within a range of held beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms that govern the day-to-day functioning of the school. Such cultural tools see to the functioning of an educational system in which learning and teaching norms are dictated by what surrounds and directs the school culture. Regardless of individual freedoms, theory proponents point out, the external influence on the school's internal dynamics continues to impose an overall pressure on each student for a common goal of producing better grades at the national level (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011).

Figure 1

Visual Interaction of Key Components in the Study Problem



According to Triandis and Gelfand (2011), the individualism-collectivism theory emphasizes "group identity and in-group-out-group distinction" (p. 500). Following this theory, I examined student-learning cohorts that represent and strengthen group identities and benefits and help students learn from and appreciate each other as peers, colleagues, and learning friends. When grade repetition sabotages the existing bond between and among individual students, this theory helped me understand how the ingroup-outgroup identities emerge as individual students redefine their locus of control. Triandis and Gelfand's theory of individualism-collectivism guided me in comparing each school's culture and how each school viewed, experienced, or embraced grade repetition.

I used individualism-collectivism theory based on emic (differences between school cultures) and etic (similarities between school cultures) experiences as a lens to understand the rules that governed each school's instructional activities and how such values and learning norms dictated the direction of students' academic progress (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). I recognized that each student comes to school with expectations, some of which are formed by family, peers, or environment, or are self-influenced. Such expectations must fit within the school's academic culture, either through competition or in a complementary mode. Some individual students' expectations may have to compete with a school's academic requirements if the school had to position its academic performance at the national level. Although the school may have an inclusive-collective internal culture, even more forces from within may be working for or against it. This study set out to understand how such dynamism of competing cultures could help me understand the existence of grade repetition as one of the many challenges emerging from the interactive nature of cultures.

Based on how the parts of such social entities interact or relate with each other, I benefited from the guidance of the learning culture of each school to understand the depth and breadth of grade repetition based on all schools as a collective informant of the study. The theory of individualism-collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) has an embedded conflict that emerges from individual and group-directed autonomy. For example, as each school sought to exercise its academic freedom, the education system's centralization conflicted with such a perspective based on nationally shared educational guidelines. Such pressure emerging from shared national education directives increased pressure on the internal dynamics of each school. Such pressure was eventually born by the students who the schools expected to share, respond, and live by nationally dictated guidelines.

The theory of individualism-collectivism helped me to look at each school's yardstick of academic excellence as being strenuous to students' learning behavior, and eventually determining each student's academic progress from one grade to the next. Triandis and Gelfand (2011) indicated that using individualism-collectivism theory would help understand how schools make individual or group inclusive priorities as they accompany students in preparation for national examinations. Schools' priorities often create conflicting situations within the needs of each student and as a collective whole. As a researcher, the rival perspectives emerging from each school's educational culture widened my grasp of how rooted the study problem was, as seen through the lenses of each school involved in this study.

Individualism-collectivism theory emphasized that our perspectives on the same issues indicated how different or likeminded we are (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). Such a perspective played a vital role in my understanding of how each school viewed, related, regarded, or embraced grade repetition and how they viewed its consequences on students and the schools

themselves. Education institutions should integrate individualist and collectivist perspectives in their cultural systems to avoid overshadowing students' individual needs with their group needs. Collective-focused instruction would tend to submerge the needs of slow learners, while the teaching and learning process promotes only the needs of those learners who can respond faster than others.

Using the complex lens of individualism-collectivism theory (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) helped me unravel how schools navigated the influence of internal and external factors to meet the learning needs of individuals and student groups before, during, and after any student repeated his/her previous grade. Without losing sight of the consequences of collectivism on emotional behavior when groups or a group member does not meet expectations, Grimm et al. (1999) revealed how individuals become emotionally broken when they fail to meet group or self-set expectations. However, being mindful of the collectivistic nature of Ugandan communities, no existing studies on Ugandan education indicated how the interaction of national examination culture and schools' cultures considered individual students' expectations in the long run.

Related Literature Review

Class Repetition and Its Consequences

Ikeda and Garcia (2014) argue that while schools claim benefits in forcing students to repeat their class level, students sustain damning consequences from not progressing to the next class. Ikeda and Garcia observed that repeating students tended to get discouraged and lose morale when academically competing with other students who join them from the lower class level. Moreover, Ikeda and Garcia also mentioned that many repeaters lose confidence and enthusiasm as they undergo the repeated instructional activities, when their former classmates

advance with the curriculum. However, the authors did not mention any special attention schools should offer to repeaters to lessen such consequences. Valijarvi and Sahlberg (2008) share the same view based on their meta-analysis study in Finland, which revealed that student repeaters ended up developing "educational stigma [that] had a dramatic negative impact on students' self-esteem, their motivation and effort to learn" (p. 387).

Further, Valijarvi and Sahlberg's (2008) study on the development of policies on educational failures and repeating of class levels in Finland's elementary schools observed that teachers who taught repeaters had low confidence in them. As a result, such students developed antisocial behavior because of feeling sidelined. However, Valijarvi and Sahlberg did not reveal how prepared teachers and administrators were to foster conducive integration of repeaters into their new peer groups, or how schools prepared their teachers and administrators to help student repeaters improve their academic performance.

Brophy (2006) concurred when he acknowledged that school-imposed "grade repetition is counterproductive" (p. 14) because of its lack of assurance that repeaters would be academically successful in their subsequent attempts as they endured lengthy time in their educational endeavors. On the other hand, Ikeda and Garcia (2014) focused on grade repetition with a positive lens when they revealed that grade repetition helps to send a ripple experience to students that there is "no tolerance for weak effort and low performance and allows lagging students to get serious for their next grade" (p. 271).

Students' Emotional Wellbeing. Regardless of Ikeda and Garcia's (2014) stance that grade repetition is a reminder to poorly performing students, Brophy (2006) contends that "involuntary grade repetition has negative effects on social, emotional and behavioral aspects [of students as they] adjust to the school" (p. 16). However, what was missing in Brophy's study

were guidance on how schools could help repeating students to overcome frustrations brought on by grade repetition. Furthermore, as Stewart (2019) reflected on the predicaments of introverted students in an American classroom environment based on her experience as a school counselor, she postulated that teachers' position gives them the advantage of influencing each student's learning ability based on each student's disposition. It was, therefore, incumbent upon this current study to explore what Ugandan secondary schools put in place as a support system for the repeaters, and to use that information to help others avoid the repercussion of grade repetition.

Brophy (2006) further contends that students who undergo grade repetition tend to "experience it as a personal punishment and a social stigma [which] reduces their self-esteem, impairs relationships and increases behavioral problems" (p. 16). As the current study explored the understanding of grade repetition by school administrators and teachers, it was essential to explore ways that schools use to counteract the eminent behavioral problems that students are likely to develop as they repeat class levels.

Examination Oriented Teaching. Valijarvi and Sahlberg (2008) also mentioned that globally, the "education reform movement has heightened the role of testing and competition in the world schools as a consequence, failure is determined by test scores and 'failing' schools and students are thus easy to identify" (p. 389). However, Valijarvi and Sahlberg observed that the country's education system was "responsible for making students and schools fail due to race for higher standards and lack of individualized support mechanisms" (p. 389). Knowing that Valijarvi and Sahlberg conducted their study in Finland, this current study explored how Ugandan teachers and administrators oriented their instructional activities and how such teaching could help reveal an understanding of the impact of grade repetition.

Mackatiani's (2017) mixed methods study on instructional approaches conducted in Western Kenyan rural primary schools revealed that most teachers focused on teaching for the national examination and frequently used teacher-centered instruction as a quicker way to cover the teaching content. Mackatiani used a transactional analysis theory while studying instructional approaches, targeting a population of 536000 that included school administrators, faculty, and students. Mackatiani observed that traditional pedagogical methods deny students' active engagement during class instructional time.

Otaala et al. (2013) concurred when they mentioned that enthusiastic young teachers join the teaching field with the desire to change their students' lives positively. However, such teachers grapple with "senior teachers' influences, low morale, limited resources and examination pressures" (p. 102), which deter them from strictly following a preferred teaching method that focuses on students' interests and abilities. Chen's (2007) phenomenological study conducted in Northern China viewed excellent teaching as the one in which teachers are fully present for students' needs and are interested in each student's learning strength rather than teaching for exams.

According to Mackatiani (2017), when teaching is examination-oriented, it deters students from identifying with what teachers are teaching them. Instead, it forces students to resort to memorization and regurgitation to attain good grades. Although Mackatiani focused on Kenyan primary teachers and did not relate examination teaching with students' grade status, this study helped me explore whether teaching for examination and rote learning contributed to students' grade repetition in Ugandan secondary schools. Otaala et al. (2013) contend that the pressure on schools to complete the teaching syllabus and compete for top positions in national examinations continued to force school authorities "to devise all sorts of strategies to enable

students to pass national examinations" (p. 110). Some of the strategies that schools adopt include allowing teachers to conduct lessons "before dawn and after dusk, [and also] expelling or causing students they consider weak to repeat classes" (p. 110). Otaala et al. did not reveal the schools' internal yardstick to determine which students to repeat or progress.

As Ugandan teachers focus on completing the syllabi in preparation for the national examinations (Otaala et al., 2013), likewise the teachers in Myanmar resort to instructional methods that favor teachers to complete their syllabi, such as "lecture, memorization-based activities, and individual classwork" (Tyrosvoutis, 2016, p. 123). Like Mackatiani's (2017) study, Tyrosvoutis' (2016) mixed methods study targeting 19 student participants at a Thailand university expressed concern that these instructional methods only perpetuate students' passive learning and deprive them of the benefits of interactive learning. Knowing that Myanmar's and Kenya's educational environments are different from Uganda's, I became interested in establishing whether the same pedagogical practices could explain the persistence of grade repetition at the secondary level in Western Uganda. I further focused the study on understanding how Ugandan teachers cultivate critical and inquisitive minds in their students amid their focus on teaching for exams.

Tyrosvoutis (2016) concurred with Otaala et al. (2013) when he raised awareness that class instructional activities were dependent on the demands of "high stake national standardized tests" (p. 121) as a criterion set by Myanmar's educational system for ranking schools' academic performance. As a result of teachers' focus on instructing their students for national examinations, Tyrosvoutis postulated that bribery and favoritism mar Myanmar's classroom and school environments. Tyrosvoutis further revealed that favoritism and bribery are common with parents and students, who pay teachers to be "more equipped to prepare students" for national

examinations (p. 121). However, this study did not reveal whether students whose parents cannot afford to bribe teachers to pay extra attention to their students are prone to failing.

Grouping Students Based on Academic Strength. According to Tyrosvoutis (2016), what was worrying in Myanmar schools was that "schools often segregate students into classes based on academic performance [where] some parents give money to school administrators and teachers to get their children into the preferred classes with the best teachers" (pp. 121-122). What Tyrosvoutis did not reveal was whether those students who access the revered and outstanding teachers perform better than those students whose parents cannot manage to give extra remuneration to their teachers. With the need to fulfill each student's learning needs, Tyrosvoutis did not show how exceptional teachers dealt with each student's learning needs.

Moreover, Stewart (2019) cautions that teachers should distance themselves from their biases and preconceived ideas about students in different learning categories so that they can teach each student based on his/her unique learning needs. Based on Steward's and Tyrosvoutis' (2016) inputs, I wonder whether teachers' biases, accompanied by the segregation of students into their academic performance groups, are a characteristic of lower secondary education in Uganda. Therefore, this current study focused on ascertaining whether Ugandan schools created divisions among students based on their academic performance, which eventually staggered the numbers of grade repeaters.

Biased and Discriminatory Instructional Approach. Jones's (2011) longitudinal ethnographic case study, based on existing gender disparities, contended that some "teachers did not [often] believe girls to be [as] ambitious about education and future career as boys" (p. 398). Dessel et al.'s (2017) study on the importance of teacher support examined data from 953 high

school students in the United States and revealed how a lack of teacher's mindfulness of the "use of biased language was negatively associated with [students'] self-esteem" (p. 140).

Nevertheless, neither Jones (2011) nor Dessel et al. (2017) noted whether the teachers' discriminatory language affected students' academic performance and progress from one grade to the next. In this study, I tried to understand whether teachers were aware and mindful of their purposeful interaction with students and how their rapport reinforced students' self-efficacy. Even when Dessel et al.'s study dealt with various types of gender and sexuality issues in educational institutions, teachers' negative bias against female students continued to discourage their focus, determination, and success in their learning goals.

Jones's (2011) study unraveled an alarming situation of sexual exploitation and rampant sexual harassment in Ugandan schools. For example, Jones revealed how participants acknowledged how teachers sexually harassed their students in their respective schools, a claim confirmed by "20 out of 30 teachers [who participated in the study and] believed this to be a general problem in Uganda" (p. 403). However, there was no indication from the study that girl students were more prone to repeating grades due to sexual harassment. With the challenge of gender-based biased language and exploitation, I was interested in exploring the interactive position among students and teachers, and how such positions aided my understanding of the research problem.

As Ugandan education progresses from empowering students in numeracy and literacy to professional skills for sustainable development (UBOS, 2017), Okurut's (2015) quantitative study of the regression results of automatic promotion at a primary level show that there was "a positive and statistically significant effect" (p. 93) on education's ability to attain numeracy and literacy when schools implemented the automatic policy. However, Okurut's study dealt with

government primary schools, since the automatic promotion policy does not apply to private schools. Moreover, Okurut did not see this study as conclusive since it was one-sided, and recommended a study considering both private and government schools. As Okurut focused on elementary government primary schools and how they handled the automatic promotion of students, this current study focused on secondary schools (both government and private) and explored why they preferred grade repetition to automatic promotion.

According to Brophy (2006), in developing countries like Uganda, “grade repetition is associated with low achievement and early drop out” (p. 9) of students at either elementary or high school levels. He further observed that students’ repetition of classes is heavily influenced by the “school administrators, teachers and parents [who] believe that repeating the grade is preferable to promotion when students have achieved poorly” (p. 9). However, Brophy contended that when schools decide to make some of their students repeat classes, they limit their judgment on how other students have performed in the same class. During this study I sought to understand whether schools had existing national education guidelines that governed them when deciding which students to repeat grades.

Student Dropout as a Consequence of Grade Repetition

As mentioned in the 2014 census findings on the Ugandan education system (UBOS, 2017), there were increasing percentages of class repeaters; the census report also pointed out a progressive school dropout of students. However, the census report did not identify the factors that led to such high numbers of students repeating their grades or dropping out. In efforts to understand the connection between grade repetition and dropout, Glick and Sahn (2010) contended that “repeating students were more likely to leave school before completing primary level than students with similar abilities who are not held back” (p. 93). Nevertheless, this meta-

analysis study did not involve empirical and up-to-date information from teachers and school administrators. Considering that this data focused on Senegal's primary educational level, I found it necessary in this current study to focus on the secondary school level to find out if there was empirical evidence explaining the intersection of student repetition and dropout and how schools worked to alleviate such consequences of repetition.

Glick and Sahn (2010) further contended that "students who lag behind their peers early in primary school are at a substantially higher risk of early withdrawal from school" (p. 110). They further argued that "while repeating is thought to help lagging behind students to catch up with their peers, the impact of repetition on their attainment or learning has not been established" (p. 110). With the lack of tangible evidence on the benefits of class repetition in Senegal, it was important to find out through the current research how Ugandan secondary schools justified the repetition of students based on evidential experience.

Like Glick and Sahn (2010) on their panel data analysis, Uys and Alat (2015) based their findings on a document analysis that provided a range of data from elementary to high school. The difference between the two groups of authors is that, for the Senegal study, Glick and Sahn dealt with the elementary level, while in South Africa, Uys and Alat were interested in 1st to 12th grades' experience on repetition, promotion, and dropout rates. Uys and Alat further established that, as students failed in their current classes and schools forced them to repeat the class level, their age bracket ceased to match their corresponding class levels. As a result, these students were prone to repeat subsequent classes as they progressed from one class to the next. However, Uys and Alat did not reveal the measures that schools put in place to accommodate growth changes in repeating students in order to counteract the problem of disconnect between the age bracket and the grade level.

Using a quantitative paradigm, Grossen et al. (2017) focused on class repetition among 11th and 12th graders in South African township schools, unlike the current qualitative study that focused on senior one to six classes in Ugandan secondary education. According to Grossen et al., the right age of students' class level is "positively correlated with academic achievement" (p. 6). Moreover, this empirical study postulated that students who joined classes below their age tended to perform poorly academically. Based on the study, it was vital to establish how Ugandan secondary schools considered a student's age in conjunction with their class level before deciding who was to repeat a grade.

Grossen et al. (2017) further established that the "academic achievements of retained students decreased with the number of times they had been retained" (p. 7). Mansouri and Moumine (2017) concurred that students were delayed in meeting their education endeavors due to frustrations caused by frequent grade repetition, which did not guarantee improved academic achievement. Mansouri and Moumine's study focused on the historical and current educational situations in Moroccan education to understand how repeating grades contributed to the students' wasted years of formal education, using accessible data from the country's education database.

Grade Repetition, a Bottleneck to Uganda's Economic Advancement

As the Uganda government focuses on education as a springboard for the realization of its vision of "transforming Ugandan society from peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years" (UBOS, 2017), there was a need to raise awareness as to why so many students did not progress with secondary education as the government would have wished. The 2014 census expressed a fear that the country would not meet its target of "high skilled human capital [since] the results of the census showed that there was inadequate skilled labor force" (UBOS, 2017, p. 65). It was evident by UBOS (2017) that, with a "population of more than 34 million,

only 4% had attained professional qualifications at certificate or diploma levels, implying a shortage of skilled manpower in the country" (p. 65). With this study, I was interested in whether the MoES had made a deep dive into an understanding of the extreme reduction of numbers of graduates at both UCE (Uganda Certificate of Education) and UACE (Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education) levels that interfered with the skilling process at the higher institutions of learning.

Meager Financial Resources. According to Fredriksen and Fossberg's (2014) reflection on the future educational needs of the Sub-Saharan region and the need for international funders to be aware of the rapid growth of educational needs for school-age children, access to educational services leaves much to be desired in rural settings compared to urban areas. They contended that due to income inequalities between cities and rural settings, parents and their children struggle as they scramble for minimal educational services. However, Fredriksen and Fossberg do not reveal whether the meager financial resources are responsible for students' academic inability to progress from one grade to the next. Neither do they reveal whether student repeaters come from areas with financial hardships.

Akkari's (2004) comparative study on education systems in North Africa and the Middle East, which focused on educational differences and similarities, observed that accessing education in developing countries is challenging for low-income families. Akkari pointed out that it is primarily a challenge for children from low-income families to access quality education, especially in the North African region, because of the minimal school resources at their disposal. However, the study did not show whether insufficient incomes and low-quality education were pointers to student grade repetition, even when he noted that without the intervention of international financial bodies, student dropout rates would be high.

Furthermore, Fredriksen and Fossberg (2014) concurred with Akkari (2004) when they observed that low-income families in rural settings faced increased “opportunity costs and direct costs of education” (p. 239). Like Jones’s (2011) perspective on girls’ struggles for educational attainment in Uganda, Fredriksen and Fossberg remarked that “girls are at a [more] disadvantage compared to boys” (p. 239) as the scramble for the scarce educational resources continues to worsen. Since the data from MoES (2016) became available, Akkari and Fredriksen and Fossberg did not reveal which student gender was more prone to repeating grades. This current study explored the understanding of teachers and administrators on grade repetition and ascertained whether students’ gender played a role in grade repetition.

Fredriksen and Fossberg (2014) emphasized, while referencing the 2008 Commission on Growth and Development, that the country can sustain its economic growth when it “puts substantial effort into schooling its citizens and developing its human capital” (p. 248). However, for such countries to reap much from their financial investment into the human skilling process through formal education, there should be measures in place to further a smooth transition of students from one educational cycle to the next in order to meet the educational timeline strategies. The challenge of grade repetition to the nation’s timeline strategies of empowering her human capital becomes a stumbling block to national educational visions and goals.

Grade Repetition Trend at Ugandan Secondary School Level

The readily available literature on secondary school grade repetition emanates from the Ugandan census documents, which do not give an in-depth understanding of the persistence of class repetition. The section on secondary education in the Ugandan census of 2014 (UBOS, 2017) revealed that, of the total student population who had enrolled in 2011, only 67% comprised students aged 13 years; but out of the total enrollment, it was only 13% of students

aged 16 years who progressed to senior four. However, the census report did not reveal the whereabouts of the rest of the students (44%).

Based on Otaala et al.'s (2013) input on repeating students, and schools decisions to dismiss poor-performing students, I was interested in exploring the perspective of both teachers and administrators on whether this 44% of students were affected by persistent repetition trends, and what they perceived of the benefits and challenges of such high numbers of students who do not progress from one grade to the next. Moreover, ignoring the position of 44% of the students questions Uganda's ability to fulfill its dream of skilling as many Ugandans as possible for self-sustainability and for strengthening national economic development.

What is more alarming is the mere 6% of children who proceeded to advanced level after their Uganda certificate of education (UBOS, 2017). Considering that 67% of students (13 years of age) started in 2011, that means that 61% did not make it to the last phase of secondary level. Even without accounting for students who began senior one while above 13 years old, the 2014 census did not establish why 61% of students did not proceed to senior six, apart from the presumption that such students could have either "dropped out of school or chose to join vocational education" (UBOS, 2017, p. 31). Such speculations from the 2014 census remained unsubstantiated and required a deeper understanding of the problem if the government was to meet its educational mission.

Teacher-Student Relationships

According to Kocyigit and Jones's (2019) qualitative study of 17 participants from an American K-12 classroom in charter schools, "teachers who create and maintain a positive relationship with students are more likely to utilize effective teaching strategies and establish necessary norms for successful classroom management" (p. 42). Furthermore, they reveal that

"teachers who have secure and trusting relationship with their students will use more appropriate and supportive strategies" (p. 42) during instructional periods.

Kocyigit and Jones (2019) observed that the "quality of interaction and relationship [between teachers and students] provides the means for creating a positive classroom environment and a more desirable social atmosphere that is necessary for increasing student motivation and interest in learning" (p. 53). Since these findings focused on the elementary level of education, my study was more interested in exploring how secondary school teachers viewed, upheld, and embraced the benefits of their relationships with their students for their academic progress.

Rapport Between Teachers and Students

According to Claessens et al.'s (2017) mixed methods study on the instructional experiences of 28 high school teachers in the Netherlands, teachers need to look out for any available opportune moments and utilize them to facilitate positive interactions between them and their students. Moreover, a qualitative study conducted by Frisby and Martin (2010) on interpersonal relationships based on teacher-student and student-peer interactions during undergraduate training in a university in the State of Georgia revealed how a solid interactive relationship between teachers and students is a cornerstone of the conducive, interconnected, and interdependent classroom atmosphere where students feel they belong. Frisby and Martin (2010) remarked that such an interconnected classroom atmosphere fosters students' appreciation of the course(s) and their ability to relate to the instructional activities, and increases class participation. What was not said by both Cleassens et al. and Frisby and Martin was whether the absence of a positive teacher-student interactive relationship affected the students' commitment and performance in their course.

Likewise, Santamaria-Garcia (2017) observed that the teachers' keenness and gentility in commenting on students' class activities carry a tone that either encourages or discourages students' class engagement. Claessens et al. (2017) also emphasized that "moment-to-moment interactions between teacher and student are building blocks of their relationships" (p. 478). My question during my study was whether the lack of positive interactive moments and teachers' unconstructive comments during instructional time could help explain existing class repetition in Ugandan schools. I was also interested in establishing whether students accessed a supportive environment for their focused learning. A teacher's sensitivity and intentioned remarks should promote students' desire to refocus and work hard in class activities.

In the above regard, Santamaria-Garcia (2017) noted that "positive assessments are face-enhancing discourse acts and contribute to rapport" (p. 246). However, Santamaria-Garcia did not reveal what happens to students' performance when teachers use discouraging comments during instructional time with their students. In this study, I explored teachers' perspectives on their comments toward their students and how teacher-student rapport helped explain the persistence of the study phenomenon. Furthermore, a study that considered relationships between high school teachers and students in the Netherlands revealed that they were more robust when teachers interacted with students outside their classroom environment (Claessens et al., 2017).

Teachers' Knowledge of Their Students.

As teachers tailor class activities that satisfy each student's learning (Watanapokakul, 2016), Claessens et al. (2017) pointed out that the solid interactive teacher-student teaching relationship was seen chiefly with students who participated actively in class activities. However, Claessens et al. did not reveal how close and concerned teachers were with less engaged students during the class lessons. As I conducted this study, I was interested in exploring whether the

teacher's focus on only active students would help ascertain whether repeating students fell into the categories of less engaged students and/or those who were not in a close relationship with their teachers.

According to Zhou (2012), teachers' awareness of students' presence and needs should be the main focus of teacher-student interaction. Zhou remarked that a teacher's knowledge of his/her students guides him/her in determining which instructional method to use. Zhou provided an example of "imitation as an effective teaching tool to build rapport in teacher-student relationships, [to enhance] student learning through one-on-one teacher-student interaction" (p. 70). In addition, Zhou advocated for teachers' attentiveness to both verbal and nonverbal cues of his/her students that would help to break the learning barriers and so allow a friendly teaching and learning atmosphere with a student's relaxed mind and unwavering attention. When teachers identify and remove learning barriers, they get to know that students are "taking control of their learning [as] they share their thoughts on subjects and volunteer on questions" during instructional activities (Claessens et al., 2017, p. 483). According to Zhou's study, "teachers' imitative behaviors had a significant effect on the student's perception of rapport in interactions" (p. 70) based on a teachers' interests in their learning life.

Unnoticed Relationship Barriers

According to Zhou (2012), imitation would still require teachers to watch out for the learning barriers that go unnoticed during the teacher-student interaction. However, Zhou does not reveal how imitation behavioral learning can help establish learning barriers and propel improved student academic grades as a prerequisite for student progress from one grade to the next. Additionally, Toste et al (2010) noted that teachers should focus on their relationships with students to understand students' needs better and overcome learning barriers. They argue that,

when teachers know their students, they are in a position to develop students' individualized learning goals that reflect their instructional needs. Based on Toste et al.'s observation, I focused on learning from target schools about how teacher-student relationships positioned teachers to help their students overcome learning barriers. Such a perspective further left me to wonder if student repeaters suffered from a lack of individualized instructional methods and the teacher's lack of concern for each student's needs.

Toste et al. (2010) revealed that the more trust and mutual interaction the students have with their teachers, the more focused and attracted to their education they become. Such a need for mutual interaction helps explain how distant relationships between teachers and students (Claessens et al., 2017) occur when students have no inner freedom or willingness to approach their teachers for consultation when they have learning challenges. Moreover, Toste et al. concurred that "students who believe that they have a positive working relationship with their teachers are performing well in class and also have a positive perception of their performance" (p. 383). Even when Toste et al.'s and Claessens et al.'s (2017) studies acknowledged the existence of uneven relationships that tend to happen between teachers and their students, they did not reveal whether such uneven relationships deterred the students' progress from one grade to the next. My study ascertained teachers' understanding of how their relationships with students would illuminate the status of their students' academic progress.

Student-Centered Class Instruction

As Uganda continues to dedicate its resources to empowering its citizens through education, various hiccups hinder a student's progress, resulting in school dropout or grade repetition. As mentioned in UBOS (2017), there is a persistent problem of students repeating grades at the secondary school level. As a result, I was concerned about how the Ugandan

government, through MoES, would sustain its intention of equipping its younger generation with the desired educational skills amid the unwavering challenge of grade repetition.

With the knowledge that Ugandan teachers train in instructional methods that place the students at the center of learning, it was vital for me to learn from teachers' experiences on the contributors to grade repetition and how the class instructional process shed light on its persistence. Student-centered instruction aims at students' active engagement in what they do, both inside and outside their classroom environment. With my presence during walking ethnography both in a classroom and within the school, I explored such active learning through students' ability to ask inquisitive questions, give meaningful responses to class questions, and make extended consultations beyond the classroom. According to Spencer et al. (2020), a student's ability to "compose sophisticated questions indicate that the students are engaged and interested in the topic" the teacher is covering with them (p. 72). However, Altinyelken (2010) remarked that in African countries such as Uganda, "pedagogical practices are still described as authoritarian, teacher-centered and lecture driven" (p. 151). Such pedagogy does not encourage the development of students' inquisitive minds. Nevertheless, Altinyelken and Spencer et al. did not reveal whether the lack of student-centered pedagogical practices contributed to student grade repetition.

With the need to produce students with independent and critical minds, Altinyelken (2010) observed that, when teachers fail to focus their teaching on the needs and abilities of their students, the student's learning lacks "conceptual, critical learning and problem-solving skills" (p. 151). With the necessity to focus on the student's needs, Altinyelken discouraged teacher-centered teaching as it tends to limit students' active learning abilities. The study conducted by Spencer et al. (2020) in Mukono District-Uganda revealed that the teachers' way of engaging

students in class by use of questions that call for chorus answers does not help teachers to understand each student's needs. For example, Spencer et al. mentioned that teachers often asked students such questions as "is everyone together-and-the children say yes" (p. 77). Even when such students' responses make it hard for teachers to know if their students have grasped what he/she has taught, Spencer et al.'s study did not reveal whether or not such teaching style impacts students' progress from one grade to the next.

Other the other hand, however, teachers tend to strictly follow what their teaching college trainers taught them, and desire to identify with and implement those effective teaching methods learned as student teachers. Zhou and Guo (2016), in a study on imitation conducted on both U.S. and Chinese undergraduate students, observed that students tend to imitate their professors' teaching methods, including class demonstrations. The study revealed that imitation encourages individuals to act like their mentors as they "perceive role models as their future selves" (p. 22). Otaala et al. (2013) also contended that teachers under training are highly likely to imitate and borrow their professors' teaching styles as they officially assume their teaching responsibilities after teachers' training courses. Conversely, none of the authors above observed whether the college/university teaching methods also fit the age bracket of students at the lower secondary level.

Otaala et al. (2013) further observed that even when teachers understand that focusing on a student's learning needs is the prerequisite for effective teaching and learning processes, "the status quo in the field" (p. 102) tends to stray them away from the student-centered instruction. Nevertheless, Otaala et al. did not reveal whether the teaching status quo had to do with students' poor grades that affect their progress from one class to the next. According to Tyrosvoutis (2016), Myanmar's educational obstacle that hinders teachers from embracing student-centered

teaching methods emanates from relaxed teacher supervision by the country's Education Ministry. Tyrosvoutis postulated that during teachers' preparation for classroom instructional teaching, the teacher-training institutions teach them the importance of "student-centered or interactive instructional methods" (p. 121). However, Tyrosvoutis revealed that due to a lack of follow-up supervision of teachers in the classroom environment, teachers tend to "revert to the traditional methods they [are] more comfortable using" (p. 121). Nonetheless, Tyrosvoutis did not reveal whether inadequate instructional supervision is the genesis of students' inability to perform well academically in class, or as an indicator of students' grade repetition.

Essence of a Lesson Plan

Teachers can know and engage their students well through student-centered lesson plans that would successfully empower and "provide supportive learning opportunities that are appropriate and challenging for the students" acquisition of knowledge (Altinyelken, 2010, p. 153). Unfortunately, teachers only adhere to the teaching requirements while in training, which is hardly ever practiced in real-life teaching situations. For example, Richards and Renadya (2002) intimated that "pre-service teachers write daily lesson plans only because a supervisor or a school administrator requires them to do so; and after they graduate, many teachers give up writing lesson plans" (p. 31).

Altinyelken (2010) emphasized the need for teachers to employ instructional methods that engage students. However, Altinyelken revealed that frequent reminders from the Ugandan MoES through education policies have fallen on deaf ears, as teachers continue to "employ didactic authoritarian teaching styles" (p. 158) in their classroom environments. However, Altinyelken did not specify which type of schools, whether government or private, teachers implemented such inappropriate teaching methodologies, since his study generalized on the

atmosphere of classrooms. My study focused on private and government secondary schools. It was interesting to understand how lesson plans as a tool of instruction influenced students' learning potential and empower them in their critical and independent thinking.

What is surprising is that Otaala et al. (2013) revealed how Ugandan teachers adhere to their schools' teaching strategies to safeguard their teaching positions, even when they are aware of the "violation of teacher's code of conduct" (p. 110). As schools devise teaching strategies for passing national examinations, their teachers look at lesson preparation and "schemes of work as a wastage of time" (p. 110) as they race to complete the teaching syllabi. Although Otaala et al. remarked that "without lesson plans, teachers cannot reflect meaningfully on their lesson presentation" (p. 110), they did not reveal how teachers meet the student's learning needs as they race for syllabi completion.

Student Interest and Motivation

According to Courey et al. (2012), with a good lesson plan, teachers are well-positioned to "stimulate students' interest . . . [with] multiple means of engagement" (p. 10). Courey et al. targeted 45 teachers during their college training and after their teachers' training course to explore the use of instructional lesson planning. Butt (2008) also concurred when he revealed that focusing on lesson planning is vital in stimulating students' engagement in learning and acquiring knowledge. He further revealed that a teacher's devotion to lesson planning is the "key to good teaching, purposeful class management and the achievement of sustainable education process" (p. 2). With Ugandan secondary schools competing with each other in national examinations, I was interested in exploring how such schools equally put the interests and concerns of their students at the center of their teaching strategies.

Challenges in Ugandan Education Policy Development and Implementation

As the Ugandan government continues to focus on formal education improvement through MoES, numerous challenges get in its way to realizing the success of what educational policies have intended to achieve. Some challenges date back to the colonial era, while others seem to emerge as a result of political ambitions and a lack of involvement among the stakeholders. Bazilio (2019) argued that different policy reforms tend to realize less success than MoES would have expected.

Unforeseeable Educational Policy Challenges

According to Ohajunwa (2022), Ugandan educational policy development tends to involve local communities for policy acceptance; however, the policies suffer the challenge of meeting the varying local needs of targeted communities. Educational policy implementation continues to suffer from varying understanding of policy needs among the stakeholders, especially with those in public schools having more knowledge than their private-owned schools' counterparts, due to uneven sensitization process (Twinomuhwezi & Herman, 2020). With the rollout of the universal secondary education (USE) policy, most stakeholders worried about the consequences of inefficiencies in educational planning and that Uganda would continue to witness a decrease in the quality of its educational outcomes, with an indicator of increased school dropouts (Kelly, 2013).

For example, with the introduction of USE policy, Twinomuhwezi and Herman (2020) revealed how several stakeholders had a common understanding of increased access to education for all school-age children, both from affluent and low-income families. However, Kelly (2013) argued that the government should have considered the repercussion of increased student enrollment on class size, teacher-to-student ratio, and needed infrastructure to accommodate the

needs of both ongoing and new entrants. Most scholars like Bazilio (2019) reflected on how Ugandan formal education has continued to suffer setbacks of high student-teacher ratios, infrequent attendance of both faculty and students, obstacles in teacher training quality, and a lack of resources. Like in primary schools, where UPE policy expanded student enrollment against immovable infrastructures, Kelly (2013) revealed how the same mistake has happened at the secondary school level—the government's enforcing of USE policy without planning for infrastructure expansion or recruiting additional teachers to counteract the overwhelming influx of new secondary students has continued to create difficulties in schools' daily operations.

Stakeholders' Inclusion in Education Improvement

Most studies have pointed out the need to involve stakeholders during the development of educational policies to reflect the local community's voices and needs, directly influenced by such a policy (Ohajunwa, 2022; Twinomuhwezi & Herman, 2020)). For instance, Kelly (2013) remarked that, for the policy developers to impact the Ugandan educational system, there is a need to establish how each school's "system, location, history and power" influence the policy's reception and implementation (p. 36). However, different policies in the history of Ugandan education seem to reflect different trends. For example, Bazilio (2019) revealed how the public criticized the 1989 educational policy review commission for ignoring the input of rural Community School parents on what affected their educational needs.

Even though the current policies seem to involve stakeholders through national consultations (Ohajunwa, 2022), Twinomuhwezi and Herman (2020) revealed how educational stakeholders in the current "public-private partnership policy" had varying understandings of its essence and implementation in USE secondary schools (p. 133). Twinomuhwezi and Herman indicated that the lack of government involvement of immediate educational stakeholders in the

development of the policies was the genesis of varying perspectives on the policy's success, since school-based stakeholders are the immediate implementers and monitors of the same policy. For example, the success story of policy implementation among government stakeholders seemed more focused on the quantity than the quality of what the USE policy brings to education seekers (Twinomuhwezi & Herman, 2020). For instance, the USE policy opened doors to many students who would otherwise not have managed to go to school, but not without sacrificing education quality.

Education, a Pointer to Wholeness

Education is a critical pointer to the wholeness of a person that requires collective participation, to share its influence on education seekers. Ohajunwa (2022) acknowledged how a country's education goes beyond instructional classroom activities in a school setting to "include the wider community and their local ways of understanding the world around them" (p. 2) to accord them the right to participate in and influence the education they receive. However, because politicians tend to play a role in such education policy development and implementation processes, policymakers end up arm-twisting grassroot-education providers to embrace what the government directs them to do (Twinomuhwezi & Herman, 2020). Kelly (2013) revealed how political ambitions drove both UPE and USE policies without considering the long-term formation and the outcome of such policies.

The government's enforcing of USE policy without planning for infrastructure expansion or recruiting additional teachers to add to the overwhelming influx of new secondary students continued to create difficulties in schools' daily operations. Some authors viewed political-driven policies as absurd when the great ideas from community empowerment tend to be haphazardly implemented by MoES because of political party ambitions. For example, the government

hurriedly implemented UPE policy without considering the needed "teachers, instructional materials and the physical facilities to accommodate the surge in enrollments, [which] also became a sudden financial burden to government" (Bazilio, 2019, p. 315).

Impact of Educational Policy on Intended Beneficiaries

A study in Uganda indicated that some existing educational policies lacked the linkage to local knowledge regardless of policymakers involving different communities during national consultation because the "local realities differ from policy directives" (Ohajunwa, 2022, p. 5). With the differences in local needs of targeted communities, Ohajunwa (2022) observed how hard it is to generalize the policy outcome, where sometimes local knowledge is pushed to the fringes of the policy-making process. The policy enforcers need to create buy-ins from local communities and school proprietors from the start of policy development, where their voices are included and respected, if any policy is to yield fruits. When such buy-ins are lacking in the process of developing and implementing any policy, the immediate educational stakeholders in schools end up executing what they think is implied by the policymakers, which directly affects the students, who are the intended recipients of the policy outcomes (Twinomuhwezi & Herman, 2020).

Unintended Consequences of Educational Policies. Bazilio (2019) revealed how introducing APP brought more challenges to education than it could counteract. Brazilio further observed how the quality of teaching and learning processes declined as a result of not allowing pupils to repeat their grades. With a dramatic shift from academic merit at the primary level due to APP implementation, students did not seem ready for secondary education, which in the long run created a vicious cycle of low grades and low education quality outcomes (Kelly, 2013). Kelly (2013) further reported how the free transition of students to the secondary education level

reduced students' competitive spirit, since passing or not passing did not count for much. Bazilio also articulated how most education stakeholders expressed worries about the unplanned consequences of a policy, seen through swelling pupil enrollment whose mentality of examinations having no consequences on their promotion impacted unprepared secondary schools.

Kelly (2013) concurred, revealing how overcrowded classrooms forced teachers to resort to teacher-centered instruction because of the overwhelming number of students, and where student-centered teaching would be a nightmare for teachers. Such unplanned consequences of USE policy, like congested classes, limited number of teachers, and focus on examinations, seemed to increase pressure on school administrators as they focused on keeping their schools' national percentage pass rate high (Bazilio, 2019). At a secondary school level, Kelly revealed how teachers felt arm-twisted by national examination needs, which controlled how they conducted their class instruction. For example, in Kelly's study on the paradox of USE in Uganda, "Ugandan teachers repeatedly pointed to the examination as a reason to stay on schedule and not to deviate from the test preparation booklets that acted as a curriculum guide for many of them" (p. 35). Without educational checks and balances to equally involve all stakeholders in determining the direction of educational policy, the government of Uganda would continue to carry forward colonial-initiated challenges of competitive and test-driven education that beset the quality and functioning of educational institutions (Bazilio, 2019).

Summary

The literature reviewed on secondary school grade repetition revealed a general lack of understanding of the causes of student grade repetition and how it impacts students' lives, teacher-student relationships, and the schools' missions. Besides the emphasis on teachers

straying away from student-centered teaching (Altinyelken, 2010), limited studies have focused on grade repetition in Ugandan schools, particularly at the secondary school level. The reviewed literature shows a disconnect between the learners' needs and teachers' focus on syllabi completion. This scenario indirectly explains why the growing problem of grade repetition has been swept under the carpet as schools academically compete for the top performance positions at the national level (Otaala et al., 2013; Tyrosvoutis, 2016). For example, when Otaala et al. (2013) noted that schools in Uganda force low-performing students to repeat their grades, no academic yardstick was revealed on how such schools determine who to repeat or not. Moreover, there was no evidence from Otaala et al.'s study that showed how teachers intervene in students' learning processes before schools determine who to repeat or to progress.

Tyrosvoutis (2016) revealed how, academically, school instructional systems in Myanmar sideline weak students. However, there was no accessible information on Uganda's education system to imply a similar situation. More so, there was no data on how Ugandan secondary schools plan, accompany, and treat grade repeaters before, during, and after being asked to repeat their grades. As in Toste et al. (2010), the reviewed literature does not show how teachers express their interest in creating individualized learning to help explain how students can be encouraged to meet their learning needs. Based on Toste et al.'s perspective, there was no study on Ugandan secondary teaching and learning processes that helped to reveal how schools helped weak students to avoid falling victim to grade repetition.

Most of the studies focused on uneven teacher-student relationships both in and out of the classroom (Claessens et al., 2017; Toste et al., 2010), but such studies did not justify how such undulating relationships can help explain students' ability or inability to progress from one grade to the next. Even with the challenges encountered by students in accessing education, such as

distance and financial resources (Fredriksen & Fossberg, 2014; Jones, 2011), there was no evidence that such challenges were the genesis of persistent grade repetition or weaker academic performance. Furthermore, while Jones (2011) and Fredriksen and Fossberg (2014) mentioned how female students were more disadvantaged in their educational endeavors, they did not indicate whether female students were more prone to struggle with academic progress compared to their male counterparts. Schools' understanding of grade repetition's impact on students' emotional, psychological, and academic well-being (Brophy, 2006; Ikeda & Garcia, 2014; Valijarvi & Sahlberg, 2008) did not show how teachers and administrators either accompany or sustain grade repeaters' needs. Based on inadequate knowledge of grade repetition from the literature, I used this current study to explore the understanding of teachers and school administrators on how they work, relate to, or accompany student repeaters in their respective schools.

The existing literature indicated that parents and the government incur a high financial burden when students repeat grades (Glick and Sahn, 2010). Nevertheless, there was hardly any evidence of how schools considered financial expenses before asking students to repeat their grades. Therefore, this study will raise awareness of how schools, through teachers' and school administrators' perspectives, relate grade repetition with other school challenges, such as financial and classroom space.

Lastly, while there is an understanding that age brackets fit well in a given grade level (Grossen et al., 2017; Uys & Alat, 2015), there is no evidence from Uganda secondary education showing how schools consider each student repeater's age before asking him or her to repeat the grade. Thus, I wonder what the teachers' and administrators' understanding of students' age could be as they determine who among the students should repeat a grade. According to Brown

(2015), there is a lack of evidence on how schools focus on reinforcing students' internal drive and self-realization during teaching and learning processes to curb the poor performance that contributes to persistent grade repetition. The current study focused on the knowledge and experience of Ugandan teachers and their administrators to ascertain ways that contributed to the persistence of grade repetition.

Chapter 3: Methodology

With a need for an in-depth understanding of grade repetition implications in Ugandan secondary schools, this study adopted a constructivist worldview as its philosophical underpinning, with the essence of understanding the research phenomenon based on the individual participant's experience. My philosophical stance was in line with Gibbs' (2018) assertion that "constructivism is a version of idealism which stresses that the world we experience arises from multiple socially constructed realities" (p. 9). I employed a qualitative approach to inductively explore Ugandan secondary schools' perspectives on the meaning and context of the grade repetition issue. The study's understanding of the position of school stakeholders on grade repetition helped put into perspective the persistence of the phenomenon, as reported by MoES (2017) and UBOS (2017).

Research Methodology

Because the qualitative paradigm brings out participants' real lived and meaningful experiences of the research problem (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), I used a qualitative approach to understand how my participants interact with the research problem and cope with it within "their real-world settings" (Yin, 2016, p. 40). This allowed me to paint a picture of the phenomenon and explore its magnitude. Based on Yin's (2016) perspective of the qualitative approach, I interacted with participants in their familiar environment. With such a paradigm, I was able to engage with teachers, administrators, and PTA chairpersons in "their real-life roles" (p. 187) in the school environment. My field research interaction with the participants through a multiple-case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003, 2012) helped me obtain a well-lived experience that underpinned a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from a rich multi-perspective expressed by each participant in the study.

Research Design

With this study focusing on more than one school, I employed a multiple-case design (Yin, 2003, 2012) to help me benefit from each school as a unique case. An embedded multiple-case design strengthened data analysis through each case's unique contribution to the study. Each school, as an independent case toward my understanding of grade repetition, helped increase the study's confidence based on whether the emerging study outcomes were divergent, similar, or surprising (Yin, 2012). The design helped me to focus on all schools as a collection of cases that offered a wide range of characteristics that benefitted the study. Mills et al. (2010) observed that multiple-case study can be interchangeably synonymous with a collective case study. According to Mills et al. ,a collective case study refers to "several instrumental bounded cases [that] are selected to develop a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon than a single case can provide" (p. 582).

Although Ugandan schools offer the same curriculum, their status as either government aided or privately owned makes each school an instrumental case with a unique culture, location, and educational niche. The interactive nature of the schools as unique cases during this study helped strengthen my understanding of how different schools viewed and handled the challenges and benefits of grade repetition (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The rival and divergent perspectives emerging from these cases deepened my awareness of the magnitude of the study problem (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2012). It also helped me understand the meaning each school assigned to grade repetition as they accompanied students through their educational needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

Based on Creswell's (2007), Mills et al.'s (2010), and Stake's (1995) perspectives, using multiple cases helped me to incorporate participants from several secondary schools in Western

Uganda for positionality and understanding of grade repetition, as expressed within such schools' educational environments. I further enriched the study with varying and collective participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon, as experienced in each school participating in the study (Stake, 2006). While each school instrumentally provided a unique perspective (Stake, 1995), using a multiple-case study helped me strengthen my understanding of grade repetition through a cross-case analysis of each school's perspective on the phenomenon (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003).

As I explored teachers', administrators', and PTA chairpersons' perspectives of grade repetition through their experiences with grade repeaters, I was able to develop an understanding of what they "perceive[d] to be the case's own issues, context, [and] interpretation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 450) based on the study's multifaceted thick description that was reflective of participants' experiential interaction with the research problem. In short, I was able to ascertain how schools determined when students should repeat their grades and how they accommodated such students as they progressed with their repeated grades.

Sampling Design

I used a purposeful selection of participants from Uganda's private and government secondary schools, as these schools homogeneously shared the same educational curriculum (Miles et al., 2020). Based on Maxwell's (2013) recommendation, the purposeful sampling of teachers, administrators, and PTA chairpersons from Uganda secondary schools helped produce experiential representation of knowledge on the study phenomenon that was shared by participants. The purposeful sampling helped me target individual respondents who had firsthand experiences of the central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, Maxwell (2013) contended that the use of

purposeful selection helps to “adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population” (p. 98) for representativeness, since I was interested in participants and schools that had the highest grasp of grade repetition phenomenon.

Maxwell (2013) further revealed that the use of purposeful selection would help me as a researcher to identify both the similarities and differences among the cases selected and would help to “illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals” (p. 98). Maxwell postulated that the researcher should be in a position to “select participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships, ones that would enable you to answer your research questions” (p. 99). Following Maxwell’s recommendation that any form of participant selection “should also take into account the feasibility of access and data collection” (p. 99), the current study considered schools with at least 20 years of existence because they had rich archived documents for analysis.

Research Participants

I targeted four secondary schools in Western Uganda that met the criterion of at least 20 years of existence in their educational service delivery. As I considered four targeted schools, the embedded cases—teachers, administrators, and PTA chairpersons who represent key participants—enhanced the study outcomes’ confidence reflective of each school’s position on the grade repetition phenomenon. I focused on administrators, teachers, and PTA chairpersons who were currently serving at the secondary school level in the region. I targeted female and male teachers and administrators with at least 5 years of teaching and/or leadership experience, whose instructional experience helped me to understand the phenomenon.

The study purposively selected 10 participants from targeted secondary schools (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020). Of the 10 participants, two were PTA chairpersons, one

selected from targeted privately owned secondary schools and the second from a government-owned school, to better represent schools by category. The experiential knowledge of these participants about the phenomenon provided valuable data for me to make informed interpretations and conclusions about the research problem. As study participants "made sense of their experiences" (Gibbs, 2018, p. 9), their constructed realities of the research problem deepened the grasp of how selected schools experienced and dealt with the implications of grade repetition within their premises. During participant selection, I kept in mind Maxwell's (2005) reminder that any researcher should be aware of his/her subjectivity when selecting which participants to consider for the study. To avoid traps of subjectivity, I enlisted the help of each headteacher to identify potential teacher participants in their respective schools for the study.

Research Site

With Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation that the researcher should "select a site to study" (p. 153), my study targeted secondary schools from Western Uganda for this research purpose. I selected four schools, following Yin's (2012) recommendation that at least four cases provide a greater certainty through their unique perspective on the same study problem. I selected secondary schools that had existed for at least 20 years, following the Ugandan MoES information in its online database. Such schools had rich archival documents on past and current students' academic progress to help me to access vital information on grade repetition through document analysis. Data from accessible documents helped corroborate the data I obtained from other sources to strengthen the study outcomes through source triangulation (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2003, 2012).

The chosen research site also helped me remain within the meager financial means and the available time necessary to accomplish the research task. Western Ugandan secondary

schools are ranked among the best nationally performing schools by MoES, which gave me a deeper grasp of how such schools viewed and dealt with the phenomenon of grade repetition as they raced for competitive national examination (Otaala et al., 2013).

Data Collection Procedures

Yin (2003) recommends that case study users enrich their studies through the use of numerous data sources that include "documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts" (p. 83). Marshall and Rossman (2006) concur as they point out such methods as "participating in the setting, observing directly, interviewing, in-depth and analysis of documents" (p. 97) that strengthen data collection through triangulation of multiple sources (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2003, 2012). In addition, Creswell (2014) contends that for the qualitative researcher to collect thick and rich data, several research tools, including "interviews, observational" guides (p. 185), would be required to reinforce a better understanding of the participant's experiences of the phenomenon.

During this study, I employed interviews, observation, focus group discussion, and document analysis guides to reinforce my in-depth understanding of the meaning, perspective, and importance that schools ascribed to students' grade repetition at the secondary school level (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Stake, 2010). Creswell (2014) also recommends using audiovisual tools to gather the necessary data to reinforce gathered field notes through observation on research sites and participants. However, I opted for audio recording during data collection as one of the ways to keep the participants' identities anonymously protected.

Observer as Participant

With the need to be presently aware and active in data collection during observation sessions, I assumed the position of "observer as participant" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 144) since the teachers and school administrators were aware of my presence and intent within their school environment. However, I did not actively participate in the instructional activities other than gathering observational data of what goes on outside the instructional period. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), an observer as participant positions himself or herself as an outsider during data collection, and this gives them the upper hand in taking notes from a distance without interfering with the normal activities of the site, and takes advantage of not missing any activity passing by through distant watch.

As a researcher, I observed any critical pointers during the walk-around exercise on the school compound. I was observant of such activities in schools as students interacting with teachers and among themselves. I also took note of any activities connected to understanding how a given school was inclusive of a student's personal and academic life, as reflected in the school's culture and environment. Yin (2016) noted that "focusing on actions that take place in the field as opposed to describing a person or a scene, is one way of noting what is going on while minimizing the stereotyping" (p. 154). Keeping Yin's advocacy in mind provided an opportunity for me to understand how the school culture performed or expressed itself through talking compounds, learning from different activities that engaged students and their lives as learners, and ably watch how students interacted with their teachers outside of the classroom.

With an understanding of student self-efficacy and different areas of life within the school, identifying the indicators of discipline enforcement within the school that made it unique from other schools (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2012) was one of the targets for this observation. Such

activities were seen through talking walls or academic talking compounds that showed how students interacted, in some way, with their school culture outside their classroom environment. During the observation sessions, I included still pictures of signposts I found in the school compounds I considered as research sites. These still pictures focused on compound signages reflecting the school's academic culture, did not include any persons, and only focused on school signposts that indicated what the individual school expected of its school community while within the school premises. Such signages included school missions, goals, clubs, dress codes, and discipline indicators.

Both Creswell (2014) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) further emphasize that my presence as a non-participant observer gave me an uninterrupted opportunity to gather data on the teacher-student interaction and any other educational activities outside the classroom environment using field notes. As a way of benefiting from various data sources, I reinforced the study outcome with walking ethnography as I observed the school set-up and identified activities outside of the classroom environment that pointed toward continuous learning for students beyond the classroom walls (Yin, 2003).

Participant Interviews

Using Marshall and Rossman's (2006) recommendation, the interviews were instrumental for me as I interacted with the school administrators, teachers, and PTA chairpersons, and gave me an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Based on Yin (2003), I developed interview guiding questions to give me a starting point for my inquiry without being rigidly controlled by them while interacting with participants. Such a line of interaction with participants guided me to pursue any cues and leads, based on my conversation with each participant. With the understanding that case study interviews create open interaction between participants and

researcher, I followed Yin's guidance of incorporating participants' viewpoints or opinions on the matter to further my line of inquiry with subsequent participants.

The interview sessions helped to provide firsthand experiences of the participants charged with their students' learning and academic progress as they accompanied them from one grade to the next. This study employed open-ended questions, as recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), to facilitate my engagement with participants in gaining a more descriptive information about the phenomenon. Since I targeted participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon, the open-ended questions allowed them to respond to the questions, as they easily identified with them (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). However, I was mindful of the biases of participants responding to my questions as they focused on sharing what they thought I wanted to hear rather than what the questions might have sought (Yin, 2003). I counteracted such biases through follow-up questions and rephrasing questions during such moments as one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, I deepened the understanding of the phenomenon through prolonged "engagement of participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 182) during interviews and focus group discussions to exhaustively obtain all relevant data on the research problem.

Focus Group Discussion

With the need to enrich the data collection process, I engaged in a focus group discussion with a group of four participants selected from the previously sampled participants of teachers and administrators to benefit from their guided interaction on the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Of the four participants for the focus group discussion, two were teachers and two administrators, each representing one of the four targeted schools. The study benefited from such diverse school-based experiences shared by teachers and administrators responsible

for students' overall welfare in and out of their schools (Johnson & Parry, 2015). According to Johnson and Parry (2015), such multi-school level participants' interaction during the focus group discussion would offer varying perspectives of the same research problem as a way to confirm and relate with what I would have obtained through other data collection methods.

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) observed that focus group discussions enrich the data through each participant's worldview on the same research problem. I further purposefully considered participants' gender inclusion for focus group discussion to bring in nuanced understanding of the problem based on varying personal and school experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since there was a hierarchical level involved in schools, I also focused on creating an equal interactive ground for all group members during the discussion time.

Document Analysis

During the document analysis period, as one of the data collection methods, I only sought to aggregate information regarding the retention and promotion of students based on the records accessible from the school head teacher's office. Such data did not require me to seek parents' consent since it did not focus on each student's academic progress. With Yin's (2003) emphasis on document analysis as one of the valuable sources of case study evidence, I compared and contrasted the data from each school on students' progress. These data helped me draw a line of difference, similarity, or divergence of intent and focus as I explored how schools valued, related or handled grade repetition. I also sought out schemes of work from teachers. Teachers' remarks on schemes of work enabled me to understand how learning took place within each targeted classroom. However, I was mindful of the biases such documents could bear based on each teacher's remarks and how he/she delivered content in the classroom environment (Yin, 2003). Through corroboration of data from different sources, I sieved out such biases to enable me to

develop confident conclusions. I further prepared myself for any surprises in participants' refusal to access such documents due to their sensitive nature or school privacy rules (Yin, 2003, 2012). I compensated for such challenges through other data sources such as field observation, interviews, and focus group discussions.

According to Yin (2003), the presence of documents helps to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 87). The use of varying documents helps researchers identify missing information through data triangulation. Document analysis helped supplement what participants verbally and empirically shared on the nature of the grade repetition phenomenon based on existing records of students' academic progress (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I corroborated participants' experiences with any accessible administrative students' records to ascertain the progressiveness of the problem and how schools dealt with it. Such archived documents, together with teachers' records of schemes of work, helped to reveal what was going on in schools during a student's academic progress as I sought to understand the reasons behind persistent grade repetition at the secondary school level in Western Uganda.

Journaling Exercise

As a qualitative researcher, my position as "an observer of the social world and a part of the same world" (Gibbs, 2018, p. 61) doubled as a research instrument that influenced and was influenced by the data I gathered. Charmaz (2014) revealed how journaling helps a researcher "to engage in reflexivity and to avoid preconceiving your data" (p. 165). With the journaling exercise (Brisola & Cury, 2016), I reflexively became aware of my subjectivity and bias that emerged throughout the data collection process. Journaling helped me relate to the study phenomenon through my experience as an educator in Uganda, from participants, and from other

observable features that helped me grasp the position and influence of grade repetition on the participating schools.

Although Hayman et al. (2012) revealed how the journaling tool was essential for participants to deepen their shared experiences during the study, I instead used this method as a researcher to critically document any new encounters throughout my research process as a way of identifying “specific experiences and feelings” that emerged as I interacted with both the sites and individual participants (p. 27). Moustakas (1994) further viewed journaling as a reflective process that helps a researcher to “construct a full description of his or her conscious experience” during a research process (p. 47). Keeping a journal throughout this data collection exercise helped capture any surprises and new knowledge emerging from my interaction with the data and how it communicated to me as a researcher (Brisola & Cury, 2016). It further helped me to pose and look deeply into what educators took for granted on the phenomenon and how such knowledge formed a deeper understanding of how participants and their schools interacted with the study problem.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, I adopted “open coding” to allow the data to surprise me as I developed codes for the theme formation process (Gibbs, 2018, p. 61). I employed a manual coding process to create personal “control over and ownership of the work” I did in research sites to help me make meaning of the voluminous field data (Saldaña, 2016, p. 29). I employed an inductive data analysis strategy to help keep the participants’ voices alive and reinforced (Caulfield, 2022). Such a process helped me to emphasize verbatim reporting and understand the study phenomenon through the participants’ worldviews. Unlike the deductive method, which focuses on preconceived themes a researcher brings to the analysis process

(Caulfield, 2022), I focused on the views shared by participants during the data collection process to avoid subjective bias during the development of themes.

Adopting the theoretical framework of individualism-collectivism theory (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) helped me strengthen the organization and flow of the outcome of data analysis through the thematic process during the write-up of the manuscript. In preparation for data analysis, I used the Otter.ai app to transcribe the verbally recorded data and transcribed it in a Word document for easy manual coding. Using Gibbs' (2018) view of the qualitative researcher as "an observer of the social world and a part of the same world" (p. 61), the study significantly benefited from my memoing process, an effective tool to facilitate my "analytical thinking" skills as I made meaning of each developed code (Gibbs, 2018, p. 56). I remained open to the emergent meaning of each code as I read and re-read the data scripts to enhance my familiarity and understanding of the gathered data. Such a rigorous process helped me synthesize and make meaning of the study outcome.

I explored the research themes by developing detailed descriptions of each case to establish an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, which Creswell and Poth (2018) called "within case analysis" (p. 100). I benefited from theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) as I related and strengthened the developing sub-categories from each case through an iterative process of looking back at the field data and developed codes. The detailed case accounts helped me develop emerging categories specific to a given independent case that later guided me during cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995, 2006) as a way of developing thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Yin (2003), there are at least five ways of data analysis that include "pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models and cross-case synthesis" (p.

109). I chose cross-case synthesis interchangeably with cross-case analysis (Stake, 2010), since each of the four schools that served as an independent or instrumental case enhanced my understanding of the problem through divergent or conflicting outcomes (Yin, 2003, 2012). I focused data analysis on what seemed to build each school's perspective of the study problem and what rival data emerged as participants shared how their respective schools handled and/or related to grade repetition (Yin, 2003, 2012). For example, when looking at schools' policies on students through document analysis, this study benefited from a cross-case analysis of how each school implemented or interpreted such policies as they used them as pointers toward student life and their wellbeing (Yin, 2003, 2012; Stake, 2006).

I used research questions to guide data analysis without ignoring any divergent or surprising data emerging from each case (Yin, 2012). Yin (2003) remarked that the more a researcher analyzes the rival data emerging from each case, the more s/he would position themselves to question the emerging differences and embrace or appreciate what confidently guides them to make trustworthy conclusions and interpretations. My openness to surprises from any participant sharing how they dealt with, related to, and experienced the concept of grade repetition enriched my in-depth understanding of the study problem of educational stakeholders in Ugandan secondary schools. Out of five data analysis techniques (Yin, 2003), I adopted matrices to group data into tables. The matrix tables helped me identify similar or divergent data whose nuanced perspectives created a deeper grasp of grade repetition as it existed in each targeted school (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). Such instances guided me to identify significant pointers of what kept the research problem in existence among Ugandan educational institutions. The complex nature of each case, as expressed in each Word

table, helped me develop a cross-case analysis leading to overall "cross-case conclusions" and recommendations (Yin, 2003, p. 135).

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a qualitative researcher needs to simultaneously analyze the data as s/he progresses with information gathering from one participant to the next. During the current study, simultaneous data collection and analysis guided me to condense the voluminous data into codes that visibly fostered interconnections among the participants' worldviews. The data coding as "an inductive process of narrowing data into a few themes" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, pp. 243-244) helped me to reinforce my understanding of the phenomenon through each participant's perspective.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that concurrent data collection and analysis guide the researcher to refocus the research questions for the subsequent participants and helps to signal when the researcher reaches data collection saturation. I recursively collected field data as I analyzed each piece of information I received from participants, to keep track of any changes in the data flow and its exhaustion as I sought out the nuances in the data from each participant (Leavy, 2017). Such an iterative process helped me establish whether I needed to seek more information for clarity from previous participants or subsequent ones. As Creswell and Guetterman (2019) urged, the use of coding and theme-developing processes helped me to know when no new information was forthcoming from the new participants and if there would be any need for the follow-up on the previous participants. I was in a position to determine when I should stop collecting more data when the data became repetitive, where no new information was forthcoming from the additional participants.

I conducted the above data analysis process through a manual coding process (Saldana, 2016). I chose this method because Saldaña (2016) viewed the benefits of manual coding for new qualitative researchers as creating personal "control over and ownership of the work" done in the meaning-making of the voluminous field data (p. 29). With the understanding that "data collection, data analysis, and report writing are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185), I enhanced data analysis by creating memos. The memos enabled me "to track the development of ideas" (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 189) throughout data gathering, recording, and transcription.

The development of memos helped me to organize related information into succinct categories as they emerged from codes (Saldaña, 2015, 2016). Memos further help the study reduce the voluminous data into "not more than 25 to 30 categories . . . that would reduce the information down into five to seven families" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 190-194). Through source triangulation, I maintained manageable codes between 20 to 30 to form a basis for "five to seven themes" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 245) for exhaustive data interpretation and making sound conclusions. I was further open to learning from contradictory and contrasting data from the field, as supported by Creswell and Guetterman (2019).

Positionality of Researcher

My knowledge of schools in Western Uganda and being from the same region played an essential role in shaping my interactions with participants and how I perceived what they shared. Creswell and Baez (2021) mentioned that researchers should always "discuss how [one's] past experiences shape [the] interpretation of the phenomenon" (p. 233). During my interactions with participants, I used my experience of the phenomenon and the research site as a doorway to learning from participants' experiences of the phenomenon. Introducing myself as a Ugandan

teacher at every encounter with participants eased their tension when responding to my questions. In this way, I closed the gap between them and me once they knew my education history.

Being an insider in terms of my nationality, culture, language, and level of education could have been another source of influence in blinding me from seeing how my position as a researcher could affect or impact my conversation with the research participants, let alone the outcomes of our conversation. With this in mind, I endeavored to use research questions to guide my line of inquiry. In addition, participants' cues or body language during our conversations guided me to establish what seemed divergent and unfamiliar. Nevertheless, Yin (2012) warns that researcher biases would always interfere with data collection or analysis and interpretation if the researcher ignored their position and influence on the study. Creswell and Baez (2021) concurred that, as a qualitative research instrument, the researcher "should write about biases, values, and experiences [they] bring to a study as well as how the study may affect participants and readers" (p. 233). During data analysis and interpretation, I endeavored to reflect on how my teaching background as a Ugandan registered graduate teacher and being a native in the research site informed my position in conclusions and recommendations emerging from the study. Significantly, I benefited from using the local language as a native as I interacted and connected with schools and participants. I did not need translators for this study.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

For a researcher to remain neutral before, during, and after data collection, Maxwell (2005) recommended a need to be aware of how participants' reactivity was influenced. With the need to uphold research validity, Maxwell (2005) emphasizes that a researcher should not struggle to "eliminate [their reactivity] influence but to understand it and to use it productively"

(p. 109). Since I was aware of the Ugandan education system and the existence of student grade repetition at a secondary school level, I (as a Ugandan secondary school teacher) objectively kept myself neutral during my interaction with the research participants by focusing on the guiding questions.

During data gathering, I endeavored to be aware of my preconceived ideas and personal emotions while interacting with the research participants, as outlined by Maxwell (2005). Maxwell's perspective was supported by Creswell and Creswell (2018) when they contended that the qualitative researcher should be able to point out his/her prior knowledge of the phenomenon and how this prior experience shapes his/her interaction with the participants during data collection. Creswell and Creswell (2018) further recommended that a researcher should reveal how their experience would shape the data interpretation and conclusions. Having been raised and trained in a Ugandan education environment, I endeavored to learn from the participants' worldview of the phenomenon to expand an understanding of the intrinsic value different from what secondary schools attributed to grade repetition.

Based on the perspectives of both Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Maxwell (2005), I emphasized participants' perspective of the phenomenon by constantly cross-checking with them during the interview process and focus group discussion. Such a process enabled me to record and/or transcribe participants' shared experiences correctly, what Maxwell (2005) calls "respondent validation" (p. 111). The member-checking process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2012) also helped to strengthen the credibility and authenticity of the data collected from the respondents on the phenomenon under study. I also used "peer review" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 129) to validate my qualitative research findings for justifiable conclusions. In addition, the embrace of my experience with the research site helped me to connect easily with the

research participants and develop a good rapport. Further, my self-reflexivity favored data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) because of my ability to understand and speak both local and English languages at the research site.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) further observed that qualitative researchers should “limit their discussions about personal experiences so that they do not override the importance of the content or methods in the study” (p. 184). Following Creswell and Crewell’s advice, I focused on the meaning the participants gave to the phenomenon in order to remain as neutral and relevant as possible. The verbatim reporting of participants’ experiences and the meaning of the phenomenon kept the originality of their contributions focused on understanding the research problem (Miles et al., 2020). Creswell and Creswell further remarked that the verbatim reporting of participants’ voices on the phenomenon keeps the study reliable and respectful of the participants’ position and perspective of the research problem (Miles et al., 2020).

Consequently, this current study upheld its “interpretive validity” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 137) on what the research participants shared. I endeavored to listen to what the participants shared and what they implied. My attentiveness to the cues during the respondents’ sharing helped to strengthen my perspective on the phenomenon, using follow-up questions. Considering that individuals interpret the same situation differently based on their world perspective and how the situation affected them, I did not ignore any data that did not seem to amicably agree with other data sets (Maxwell, 2005). In this way, my knowledge of how the same reality impacted each participant differently in the same environment helped to enrich a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. I progressively transcribed each participant’s contributions to enable me to follow up each participant’s contributions through interaction with subsequent respondents (Maxwell, 2005).

Finally, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) observed that a researcher would be able to "gain credibility by thoroughly triangulating the descriptions and interpretations, not just in a single step but continuously throughout the period of study" (pp. 443-444) as they employed the case study design. I used varying perspectives of participants on the study problem to credibly enrich the data gathered from different schools. I improved the reliability of this study by putting the phenomenon into perspective, based on lived experiences of female and male educators who came from government-oriented and private-oriented secondary schools. The perspectives of teachers, administrators, and PTA chairpersons from different school settings on the same phenomenon significantly explored the intrinsic value that private and government schools attached to grade repetition.

Ethical Considerations

As a qualitative researcher, I "demonstrated awareness of the complex ethical issues in qualitative research" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 82) by adhering to different ethical considerations for the trustworthiness of the study and the authenticity of its outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With this in mind, I sought permission and approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at Makerere University-Uganda and the University of the Incarnate Word before going to the field for data collection (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The IRBs' approval provided a layer of protection to the participants since I worked with human beings during data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I further sought approval from each school's head teacher to access their participating schools before collecting data. Such approval helped me gain an entry point to each of the four selected schools.

Furthermore, I sought participants' consent to participate in the study through written invitation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I provided well-detailed consent forms for every participant to sign after reading through and understanding what I expected of them in this study and after they asked questions about where they needed clarity before they officially participated. This step allowed participants to volunteer to participate in this study without being coerced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I responded to their inquiry, I helped participants understand why I was conducting this research and their contribution to understanding the phenomenon. I informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study freely without any consequences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My verbal input respected Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) recommendation that the participants have the "right to be informed about the nature and consequences" (p.144) of the study.

With the need to protect participants' identities without depriving them of their contribution to the study, I masked them using pseudo names during data processing and presentation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was mindful of how my study would likely cause harm (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to the participants if they shared sensitive data that accidentally popped up, due to the rapport I created with them. In order to minimize such harm, I eliminated any sensitive data that could have found its way into the recorded data during our interaction so that I did not abuse their openness and generosity in sharing their perspectives of the phenomenon. I strictly adhered to Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) recommendation to uphold the respondents' privacy. I eliminated all participants' data, such as individual names and locations, so that the consumers of this study could not, in any way, associate all or part of the study with anyone who willingly contributed data to this research report. This study was in agreement with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) emphasis that the

authenticity of the study would depend on the researcher's ability to strictly observe confidentiality during and after conducting the research.

On the other hand, Marshall and Rossman (2006) contended that a researcher should be courteous in planning a smooth transition from the active interaction with participants to exiting the data collection process. Good planning at the end of the interview sessions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) helped bring data collection to a close as respondents and I transitioned from active and interactive sessions. I transitioned from active sessions by offering a word of appreciation to the participants. I also reimbursed them the transport fare and refreshments in appreciation of their willingness to inform my study. Moreover, I upheld justice and fairness and appreciated those who participated in this current study, as recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Marshall and Rossman (2006). During the closing remarks, I also requested participants' willingness to allow for any follow-up if the need arose for more data.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study's focus only on secondary schools in Western Uganda did not give a comprehensive picture of how other secondary schools in other regions of Uganda viewed and/or treated the value of students' grade repetition. This research only aimed to reveal the tip of the iceberg of grade repetition based on respondents' perspectives and experiences from only four selected secondary schools in the Western region of Uganda, which partly represented both government and private secondary schools. In addition to integration and support from the existing literature review, my interpretation and understanding of the magnitude of grade repetition at the secondary school level in Uganda was solely based on each participant's world perspective and experience in this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the implication of grade repetition at a secondary school level in Western Uganda. In this study, I used grade repetition interchangeably with class-level repetition, based on Uganda's British education system. I conducted this study on private-owned and government-aided schools with at least 20 years of education service delivery in the region. Three research sub-questions guided the study: What are parents' and community's perceptions about the cost implications of grade repetition within the secondary education system in Western Uganda? What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the current grade repetition system's impact on students' self-efficacy? What are administrators' and PTA chairpersons' understanding of the impact of social promotion policies on national exam pass rates and related implications?

This study adopted an embedded multiple-case design (Yin, 2003, 2012) to benefit from varying school cultures and how each school perceived the implications of the research phenomenon. In order to aid the inductive thematic analysis process, I transcribed the raw field data using the Otter.ai application to develop verbally recorded data into a Word document for easy editing and coding processes. Using an embedded multiple case study design helped me inductively uncover nuances that each case brought to the surface and explore deeply how school environments, niches, and parent-school involvement aided the understanding of grade repetition. The study aimed to understand the grade repetition implications through the lenses of educational costs, student self-efficacy, and how the national examination pass rates controlled each school's grade repetition system.

During the analysis, I opted for open coding (Gibbs, 2018), and further benefitted from an inductive coding process, as advocated by Charmaz (2014) and Caulfield (2022), to keep

participants' voices, experiences, and perceptions alive and vividly present throughout the document. Such a choice of analysis process deterred me from imposing my interpretations of the data by use of preset codes without building my focus on participants' perspective of the study problem (Gibbs, 2018). Data analysis focused on the data I collected from four secondary schools using such tools as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation methods. I thematically analyzed the data into five themes that responded to the three guiding research sub-questions.

Sampling Procedure and Trustworthiness

The study used purposive sampling (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2020) to recruit 10 participants, who included four school administrators, four teachers, and two PTA chairpersons. I focused on educators whose current educational experience fell within at least 5 years of teaching at a secondary school level. To adhere to ethical research guidelines before I carried out the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossmann, 2006), I sought approval from two ethics review boards, one from a host country, Uganda, through the Makerere University Research Ethics Committee and Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST), where I conducted the study. In addition, I sought IRB approval from the University of the Incarnate Word ethics review board in order to safeguard and protect human participants involved in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To access and recruit the study participants, I used approved recruitment letters to invite the participating schools and human participants to participate in this study.

All participants read and signed consent forms after I made them aware of their position, rights, and freedom to interact with me during data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I shared the transcribed data with each participant as

part of member-checking, through which they confirmed what they had shared before I began the analysis process. To benefit from concurrent data collection and analysis, I ensured that, immediately after each participant's contribution, I used the Otter.ai application to help me transcribe faster, edit, and share it with the respective participant(s). Such a strategy enabled the study to benefit from simultaneous analysis and data collection as I progressed with the data collection process.

During this study, I kept in touch with my dissertation committee, which enabled me to continue benefiting from their expertise through the debriefing process. Being a native of Western Uganda enabled me to easily create rapport with all the participants and the participating schools. Understanding how my previous teaching and administration experience could blind me during data collection, I remained mindful of each participant's shared information without overshadowing them with my preconceived ideas on the guiding questions. The open welcome I received from school administrators made it easier for me to access all the study items I needed to explore the breadth of the implications of grade repetition in each school and its environment. Each interview lasted at least 1 hour, with some participants extending it slightly over an hour. I interacted with each participant outside school premises, for confidentiality. Only the focus group interaction brought together purposively selected participants to interactively share with me, with the help of a focus group discussion guide.

As is shown in Table 1, the study benefited from participants' varying educational experiences with the study issue. For example, the last column indicates the past experiences of each participant as a building block to their current leadership positions. The input from the PTA chairpersons further reinforced my understanding of the magnitude of the study problem.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Gender	Teaching Experience	Research Site	Teaching Subjects	Leadership Experience Present	Past
Francis	Male	13 years	School A		Head teachers	Class teacher & Director of Studies
Pence	Female	18 years	School A	CRE & History	Teacher	
Philip	Male	24 years	School B	History & Geography	Head teacher	
Corinnes	Female	7 years	School B	Physics & Mathematics	Teacher & Senior woman	Class teacher, Health Assistant teacher
Elias	Male	28 years	School C		Head teacher	
Dina	Female	7 years	School C	English Double Main	Teacher & Assistant Director of Studies	Class teacher, Career’s master & Staff relations Officer
James	Male	21 years	School D	Chemistry and Mathematics	Teacher & Deputy Principal in charge of academics	Class teacher and Director of Studies
Arthur	Male	25 years	School D	Art and Design	Teacher & Director of Studies	
Abel	Male	10 years	School B		Chair-PTA	
Aggrey	Male	7 years	School C		Chair-PTA	

Data Analysis

The data collection exercise accumulated voluminous data, which I condensed into manageable codes, categories, and themes to better grasp the depth and breadth of grade repetition implications at the secondary school level in Western Uganda. Using the guidelines outlined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I managed the overall data through simultaneous analysis of emerging data as I progressively gathered data from subsequent participants. Thematic analysis guided the analysis process to decipher a meaningful understanding of the study problem. I processed the data through a multilayered procedure using within-case analysis for each instrumental bounded case (Miles et al., 2020; Stake, 1995), followed by a cross-case analysis that collectively focused on all four schools to make meaning out of their unique cultural perspectives on the implications of grade repetition.

Within-Case Analysis Procedure

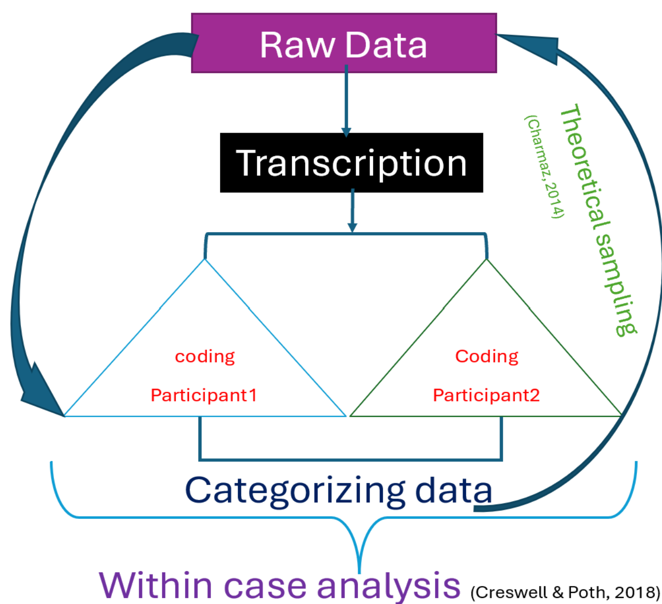
I conducted a within-case analysis of each school, using the guidelines outlined in Miles et al. (2020) and Gibbs (2018), which helped me understand how the research problem impacted each school as an instrumental bounded case (Mills et al., 2010; Stake, 1995). The study focused on how different areas of each school culture, reflected in their mission and vision, deepened the understanding of the study phenomenon (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). The within-case analysis focused on how the perspective of each school administrator on the study problem differed or correlated with that of their teachers, whose positions as educators influenced students' academic progress through instructional activities. The walking-around ethnographic data in the form of still pictures and field observation notes reinforced each school's gathered data to enhance my grasp of the purpose and mission of each school's existence. Viewing each school as a building

block helped to understand the depth and breadth of grade repetition through the school's cultural lens and environment.

I used theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) during the within-case analysis of each school, which helped to strengthen the coding and categorizing processes as I dealt with the data from each participant. As recommended by Charmaz (2014), the back-and-forth process helped compare, relate, and contrast emerging codes and subcategories with the raw data until no new codes emerged. Triangulating participants' information within each school further strengthened the development of codes and subcategories, leading to the overall development of intended themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the within-case analysis procedure undergone by each participating school, represented by two participants.

Figure 2

Within-Case Analysis Process



Data analysis procedures that focused on more than one case benefited from the strengths and differences of each case (Stake, 1995, 2006). The within-case analysis outcome strengthened

the cross-case analysis to identify similarities, differences, and nuances emerging from the comparative process of the four schools for in-depth analysis and understanding of how the participants perceived the implications of grade repetition in Western Ugandan selected government and private secondary schools. The study focused on establishing whether each participant in a given school site had a similar or different understanding of how the school implemented a grade repetition system. Such strategic exploration helped me to understand the school's cultural orientation and how such academic cultures determined students' academic progress (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). My understanding of each school's orientation toward the implications of grade repetition opened doors to knowing how schools were offering similar instructional positions to their students as they focused on maintaining their own academic status at the national level.

Furthermore, the constant reference to the three research sub-questions throughout the study helped me to organize the data analysis procedures for within-case and cross-case analyses following the direction of each research question. Such a focus created a coherent flow of the data analysis outcome for an in-depth grasp of the study problem. The building-on analysis process from one participant to another, and further collectively and interactively dealing with analyses across the cases, reinforced the overall study outcomes as I explored the understanding of the implication of grade repetition from one secondary school to another.

School A: Within-Case Analysis Procedure

School A is one of the private secondary schools in Western Uganda located in Ruhaama District. The school is a co-educational institution with boarding and day scholar services in a semi-urban environment. Administrator Francis and teacher Pence represented School A as study participants. Francis brought over 10 years administrative and instructional experience, while

Pence enriched my understanding of the research problem based on her 18 years of experience as a professional teacher.

During the analysis stages, I aligned the gathered data with research questions to explore how the data responded to each question that guided my study. For example, during the within-case analysis of School A, I dealt with each participant's focus on all three sub-questions to help me prepare for the cross-case analysis stage. The research sub-questions were:

1. What are parents' and community's perceptions about the cost implications of grade repetition within the secondary school education system in Western Uganda?
2. What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the current grade repetition system's impact on students' self-efficacy?
3. What are administrators' and PTA chairpersons' understanding of the impact of social promotion policies on national exam pass rates and related implications?

Participant 1: Francis (Administrator)

During analysis of the data from Francis, Research Sub-Question 1 yielded the category, challenges of grade repetition on stakeholders; Research Sub-Question 2 yielded two categories, inhibitors of students' academic progress, and the school's approach to deter class-level repetition; and Research Sub-Question 3 generated two emerging categories: decision-making to repeat or progress to the next class level, and automatic promotion and students' academic commitment.

Challenges of Grade Repetition for Stakeholders

Parents. When asked about encountered challenges emerging from class-level repetition, Francis acknowledged how financially hard-pressed parents are to meet the financial needs of their children who repeat grades. He observed how:

> Every other time someone repeats, that means more payment. If a student was paying maybe UGX 600,000 per term for the whole of senior two, that will be 1.8 million shillings a year. So, doubling it for the same thing is a challenge.

As they struggled to raise more funds for their repeating students, Francis remarked how "the parents feel that the school has not done its role, [that] the learner was not catered for well, and that is why parents end up changing the students to other schools."

Francis shared how parents trade blame with the school when their children fail to progress from one class to the next. For example, he mentioned how parents thought it was the school's negligence that their children failed to meet the examination pass marks for promotion. They speculate that "maybe the learner had a challenge, and the teachers did not understand." However, Francis did not rule out "the need for money" as one of the school drives for forcing students to repeat their grades.

Students. Even though Francis shared how repeating students feel out of place when asked to repeat classes due to loss of peer rapport, he noted how grade repetition takes a heavy toll on female students when they see themselves becoming "muscular [and] heavy, which leads them to hate themselves." For example, he observed how girls make such comments as "how will people see me? I hate my size and now I am going to study with the kids [who are] my young sisters and brothers." When a student repeats a grade, it indicates that he/she has not achieved the school's academic goals, and such an incident hurts students and their parents. Francis remarks how students hate classes and feel embarrassed when the school asks them to repeat their grades. Francis added that students

> find it challenging when for example, the colleagues have been given an opportunity to go next to class, next level, and for them they are stopped because of less achievement. It embarrasses them and in the long run they begin looking for options.

Lack of academic progress negatively impacts more girls than boys, as they outgrow their class levels faster than their male counterparts. For example, Francis expressed how age and body size become challenging, especially for female students, when they spend more years in high school than anticipated. He remarked how girls “get oversized in body [grow taller and begin to show signs of puberty] and then with time [are] looking like a parent.” According to Francis, the morphological changes among female students have increased emotional distress and low self-esteem, which end up forcing them to drop out of school or “trying USE schools where there is automatic promotion.” Francis indicated how children in Western Uganda tend to “begin school late, [and] you find someone at 7 or 8 years is beginning” primary one. “Imagine if that person repeats a class; s/he is already seeing . . . that s/he is taking more time studying.”

Francis pointed out the significant consequence of grade repetition as affecting the rate of students dropping out of school. He remarked how students developed a habit of refusing to redo tests they failed either during formative or summative assessments, as students vehemently said, “I am not coming back, I am going home if you force me to redo exams.” Francis further shared that “by the time you realize you are calling a parent, [the parent] says ahaa, my son does not want to study anymore because you are stressing him with exams.” Consequently, Francis stressed how “the rate of dropout is on high rise, and it is attributed to, to larger extent, the failing to achieve [school academic expectations] which requires repeating the classes.”

Inhibitors of Students’ Academic Progress

To understand the factors contributing to grade repetition in School A, Francis, a head teacher who brought administrative and instructional experience to this study, shared how “teachers have less time” to reach out to every student due to the unbearable student-teacher ratio. As a former Director of Studies and class teacher, Francis felt that “there are always those

learners whose challenges, whose individual differences are not catered for." In addition to an overwhelming teacher-student ratio, Francis pointed out how the lack of teaching materials constrained teachers who would have encouraged individualized instruction. For example, Francis revealed that "because of the nature of schools, sometimes the teaching materials we have are not enough [and] learning aids we have are not enough to demonstrate the teaching." He acknowledged how students end up taking everything teachers teach them as the "gospel truth" because the students themselves cannot access additional reading resources for personal study.

Francis noted how slow learners get lost in group work activities, fail to read farther than what teachers give them during class instruction and eventually fail their internal examinations. In more than 10 years of teaching service, Francis observed how optimistic parents, wanting their children to be "academically promising," get angry "when the children fail to perform" well in their studies and such parents end up asking their children to leave school. However, Francis observed how academic performance was not the only barrier to student's academic progress. For example, he mentioned how illness keeps some students away from school and they only return "when others have already done [promotion] exams, and [such a student is] not necessarily promoted." Francis, however, revealed how the school face the challenge of older students who, "because someone . . . is aging . . . feels [they] should be promoted because time is leaving him/her."

School's Approach to Deter Class Level Repetition

Francis shared how, regardless of schools' constraint by the lack of instructional materials for students' individualized instruction, his school resorted to counseling and guiding students to advise them and accompany them in their academic journey, and involved their parents/guardians. For example, he said that teachers advise their students that "repeating is not

dangerous [but] it is . . . dangerous to continue when you have not understood [instructional content] rather than staying for an extra year" in the same class. Francis was convinced that "understanding the person [helps him/her to know that] he/she is being nurtured to overcome even other challenges." He believed that "once your [students] do not understand the ideas on the ground level, then it is hard to understand them when things have become complicated."

Within School A, Francis revealed how the administration set examination pass marks to identify students' academic stamina. He asserted that "when a student fails, [they] find out the cause and possibly we realize that the learner does not have notes, which contributes to poor performance." Francis further revealed how his school lays strategies to counteract the repeating of class among students, even when "repeating cases are there." He observed that "even when we lay strategies for performance, there are those students who will still fail. So, when such cases happen, we call the learner to attention [teachers and administrators point out areas for needed improvement to students]."

School Benefits and Student Grade Repetition

Francis guided the discussion, using his school's motto of "transforming students into informed citizens," when he viewed students' failure as a loss to the school because the administration "want this person to be a responsible citizen." He reiterated that, when students fail to meet their academic expectations, the school "will have not hit its target." Francis believed that a student's repetition of a class level is "advantageous to the school [because they] are helping him/her to get better—we are giving him more knowledge."

Determining Who Should Repeat or Progress

According to Francis, deciding when a student should repeat involves both the school and the parents or guardians of the students. Francis shared how, when such cases of academic

failures take place in school, they "call the parent to tell him/her that his/her boy or girl does not perform well, and if the girl or boy continues, there is a likelihood that at some point he/she will fail." When I asked whether there was a standard system governing the repeating process in Western Uganda, Francis remarked that "it depends on each school." With the nature of schools, Francis revealed how "the education system in Uganda encourages automatic promotion." However, he further said that, "but for us private, we do not see that as an achievement."

Even though the Ugandan education system does not allow grade repetition in schools, Francis insisted that his school did not see any academic benefit to students who were only "promoted day and night, yet they are not achieving." Francis further intimated that "every school setting has its own way" of determining who should repeat a grade. However, he revealed how some schools are interested in getting money and ensure students pass through each class level, regardless of whether they have met the academic requirements. When asked how they handle students who refuse to repeat and do not desire to leave the school, Francis shared how the school stands by their its regulation "unless for genuine reasons."

Francis's school sometimes gave a "benefit of the doubt" to some of their students who, for some reason, did not meet school academic expectations, and were allowed to progress. Surprisingly, Francis shared that some students improved significantly in their academic performance once allowed to proceed to the next class; however, others did not. Consequently, Francis shared how the school was mindful of the discrepancies that tended to crop up once in a while when the promotion policy was not fully adhered to by both teachers and administrators. Francis observed how their academic promotion decisions hinge on their philosophy that "we want responsible citizens, and a responsible citizen is an informed citizen; [but] an informed citizen cannot be informed when he lacks knowledge."

Automatic Promotion and Students' Academic Commitment

Francis felt that there is laxity in academic commitment among students who undergo the automatic promotion process because "they know at the end of the day I will be in another classroom." He further acknowledged how automatic promotion policy at an elementary level extends its challenges to the secondary level as he revealed how "they are the same people [students] whom we receive here, who have not performed well but still we want to nurture them into those type of people we want."

As schools implement grade repetition policy locally, Francis shared how his school intervenes in its students' academic life before a school decides that any student repeat. For example, he revealed how the administration inform students that "we know that once you do not perform, like at this school level, we will not allow you to get promoted." Francis shared the current trend of students who, after exiting the automatic promotion policy at the elementary level, find academic difficulties in private schools. "They end up going back to USE . . . schools where they know no one will touch them [with the pretext that] we are aging and [that is why] we are trying USE schools where there is automatic promotion."

Participant 2: Pence (Teacher)

Following the same guidance of research questions during data analysis, the data emerging from Pence yielded five categories. Using Research Sub-Question 1, I generated a single category, the challenges of grade repetition. Research Sub-Question 2 yielded two emerging categories: inhibitors of students' academic progress, and accompanying students; while Research Sub-Question 3 generated the decision for student(s) to repeat or not, understanding grade repetition through automatic promotion policy, and grade repetition through instructional methodologies.

Challenges of Grade Repetition

In view of the impact of grade repetition, Pence did not find any challenge the school would encounter when students repeat classes, saying "I do not think it will encounter any challenge." However, on further probing, Pence shared how the increased student-teacher ratio in a class would burden teachers with "extra workload . . . but we tend to ignore and play our part." Nevertheless, Pence found that repeating a grade negatively impacted girls, saying that "girls have their challenges." She acknowledged how female students are more affected when they repeat grades because they morphologically outgrow their class level and eventually seek out a hand in marriage. Pence observed how such students lose self-esteem as they outgrow their class level and feel isolated when the "students she was ahead of [now] find[s] her in the same class [and] she will not really fit in."

Inhibitors of Students' Academic Progress

Pence was one of the longest-serving teachers of Christian religious education and history in School A. During our interview, Pence indicated how poor academic performance significantly deterred students' academic progress. According to Pence, her school believes that for a student "to be promoted to another class, you are assessed, and if you pass the exams, that is when you are promoted to the next class." Her school's internal system on grade repetition emphasizes that:

> If you [students] fail, we advise them to repeat, . . . it was not a sure deal that at the end of the term [students] have to go to the next class. No, we do exams, and if they pass the exams, they go [to the next academic level].

Pence expressed how grade repetition in her school was a two-edged sword, with "positive and negative" consequences. Regardless of the negative impact of the study problem, Pence believed that "when a student repeats a grade, we believe it is like a comeback thing, [as

the student] masters those concepts and [will] be able to improve." However, Pence remarked how uncooperative parents will force the school to have their children promoted as they expressed their fear of the extra financial burden for a student to repeat a grade twice. According to Pence, "it is the school policy that you [students] are meant to repeat." However, she added that each student needed to consent to the policy for him/her to repeat.

Accompanying Students

In an attempt to accompany female students in unprecedented times of poor performance and physiological challenges, Pence shared how her school emphasizes "continuous counseling," saying:

> I have often talked to my girls telling them about the issue of education, you know, these days, learning does not stop. It is a continuous process. Age may be so important but then we have to look at the future. I keep telling them, you people, if you are not educated, no man will take you as a wife.

Pence further observed how the school encourage students to read and "not to look at themselves as failures." She shared how "no one is a failure in life if you really put in a lot of determination, you can improve your performance." Counseling stood out as the immediate method of accompanying repeating students, as Pence reminded student(s) to "please to not mind what people say about you, for you know what you want. You will be able to do better; just have confidence."

Determining Who Should Repeat or Progress

As I sought to establish how schools determined who among students should repeat or progress, Pence told me how her school recognizes parent-school involvement as they accompany students in their academic journey. If a student has not met the academic expectations of the school, Pence shared how the school invites the parents of affected students and shares with them that "your child has not been able to meet our expectations, but we request

that probably we give her/him another chance so she/he can repeat and internalize and think and maybe he/she can perform better." Nonetheless, Pence shared how "as a school policy, you cannot bend low because the moment you try to be lenient, the standards will drop, [and as a result] we say please if you cannot allow your girl or boy to repeat, try elsewhere."

I asked Pence whether other schools followed the same procedure for students' class-level repetition, but she hesitated to talk about it and said, "I cannot talk about what I do not know. I do not know how they handle their stuff. I know how we handle ours here," as she did not want to commit herself to what was happening in other schools. Since secondary education, similar to School A, is controlled by MoES curriculum, I inquired whether MoES supported such decisions of student repetition. Pence found such a question sensitive, and then said:

> I will not lie to you sincerely, but for us here, our policy, we encourage it. But if some parents are stubborn as I have told you, we say okay, but this is the best we would wish for your girl or boy.

However, she added that when teachers have been closely following a student that "has been so good, those ones, we give them a second chance."

Understanding Grade Repetition Through Automatic Promotion Policy

Pence shared how their school did not entertain automatic promotion, and she believed that APP at an elementary school did not impact students' performance at a secondary school as long as they passed their primary leaving examination (PLE) and qualified for secondary intake. When admitted, Pence shared how APP products "catch up very fast and perform to [their school's] expectations." Pence felt that repeaters were not solely affected by passing through an elementary school that implemented an automatic promotion policy, even when some may not have performed to the school's expectations. Pence's school was mindful of how their instructional services impacted each student.

Grade Repetition Through Instructional Methodologies

Focusing on how instructional methodologies impacted students' academic progress, Pence revealed how her instructional focus "is more student-centered," and she expressed how "teachers only supplement but most of the work is done by students." Pence further mentioned how teachers in her school were always present to guide students who strayed away from their instructional requirements; however, she acknowledged how "students are more involved than their teachers" in their learning process.

According to Pence, teachers mostly play an advisory role as students engage in individualized learning, while teachers are always present to guide, counsel, and direct students where necessary. Pence observed how student group learning was the best way to watch "those who are weak, [and] the mediocre, and you mix them" so that they learn from each other as peers. Pence was critical of teachers who pump students with notes without minding students' varying absorption rates. Pence also said she often found an opportunity in individualized assignments where after students "present their essays, [she is able] to go back and look at them individually, one by one, and then realize that you need to pay more attention to some of them than others who are fast learners."

Within-Case Emerging Categories (School A)

While exploring the understanding of grade repetition through School A based on within-case analysis, five possible categories emerged from comparative coding of two participants of School A. Emerging Categories 1 and 2 responded to the Research Sub-Question 1; Emerging Category 3 provided the understanding of Research Sub-Question 2; while Emerging Categories 4 and 5 responded to Research Sub-Question 3 (Table 2).

Table 2

School A: Within-Case Matrix of Subcategories and Emerging Categories

Pence	Francis	
Sub-Categories	Sub-Categories	Possible categories
Inhibitors of students' academic progress	Inhibitors of students' academic progress	Obstacles to students' academic progress
Challenges of grade repetitions	Challenges of grade repetition to stakeholders • Parents • Students	Impact of grade repetition on stakeholders
Accompanying students	School's approach to deter class-level repetition. • School's benefits and student grade repetition	School's approach to class-level repetition • Benefits of grade repetition
Decision for student(s) to repeat or not	Decision-making to repeat or progress to the next class-level	School decision on students' academic status
Understanding grade repetition through automatic promotion policy • Grade repetition and instructional methodologies	Automatic promotion and students' academic commitment	Automatic promotion and students' academic commitment • Understanding grade repetition through instructional methodologies

Emerging Category 1: Obstacles to Students' Academic Progress

During the exploration of the factors inhibiting students' academic progress in private co-education School A in Western Uganda, two participants had varying perspectives of obstacles to students' academic progress. Pence emphasized how students struggled with academic progress due to their inability to meet the expected school examination pass marks and family financial

challenges. On the other hand, Francis, a school headteacher, viewed such obstacles with a broader perspective, pointing to three challenges emerging from school, family, and nature. Francis noted how individualized student instruction was lost in group activities due to teachers' lack of time to attend to overwhelming student numbers, in addition to the frequency of ill-health among students that served as a stumbling block to students' academic progress. The two participants revealed how financial constraints compounded students' inability to progress as their school struggled to provide instructional materials adequate for all classes in addition to struggling parents to meet their financial obligations.

Emerging Category 2: Impact of Grade Repetition on Stakeholders

Both Francis and Pence acknowledged the effect of grade repetition on stakeholders, although each used a different lens to express them. Francis was more concerned with parents bearing the extra financial burden of tuition for their repeating children amid low-income struggles, while Pence expressed how repetition of class levels had greatly accelerated low self-esteem among female students who, she said, were bothered by outgrowing their class levels compared to their male counterparts. Francis concurred, adding how repeating any class level took a toll on female students because of their body changes, which led to self-hatred.

Even though Pence expressed hesitation in acknowledging other effects caused by grade repetition on her school, she and Francis noted how forced grade repetition failed to account for the extra load teachers carry when the teacher-student ratio overwhelms the limited numbers of instructors. Francis revealed how some schools were driven by money without considering the needs of other stakeholders, such as parents and their children. Additionally, Francis expressed how students lose friends and peer connections and get embarrassed when the internal pass marks become a barrier separating slow learners from quick learners, which affects not only

students but parents too. Francis further observed how students who started their elementary level late suffer more when the secondary examination system does not favor them for continuous promotion, as their age and body structure create a barrier to fitting well in any class environment.

Emerging Category 3: School's Approach to Class-Level Repetition

In exploring how School A accompanied both slow and repeating students, Francis and Pence observed how their school used guidance and counseling to help students build their rigor and esteem in their education journey. However, Pence was more committed to accompanying the female students, reminding them that there would not be any man who would marry an uneducated wife, in case they gave up on their education struggle. Pence was aware of peer discouragement of poor-performing students but emphasized to her students that they build confidence. On the other hand, Francis shared how the school was working closely with parents to journey with slow learners, with a constant reminder that repeating a grade meant more grasp of instructional content, leading to building self-confidence. However, Francis acknowledged how the act of class-level repetition would not save some of the students.

Benefits of Grade Repetition. Francis considered grade repetition a way of enhancing the school's realization of its educational focus of transforming students into responsible citizens. He viewed such an action, or repeating a class level, as helping the school and the student to recapture what the two entities would have missed during the academic year.

Emerging Category 4: School Decision on Students' Academic Status

As a collective responsibility, Francis and Pence observed how School A benefitted from the wisdom and counsel of parents and guardians when making any academic decisions affecting their students. The two participants revealed how their school adhered to the internal academic

performance standards used as a yardstick for student's academic progress. Although Francis and Pence acknowledged how MoES did not allow students to repeat grades, they all supported their school's decision of class level repetition with the conviction that it was the best decision to help slow learners improve academically without compromising the school's standards.

Even though Pence became noncommittal as to whether all schools in Western Ugandan had a similar internal system of grade repetition, the two participants similarly remarked how decisions for students' academic progress depended on each school's internal rules and regulations. For a deeper understanding of how School A exercised its decision on students' academic status, Francis revealed how his school was solely guided by its philosophy of training knowledgeable and responsible citizens.

Emerging Category 5: Automatic Promotion and Students' Academic Commitment

There was disagreement between Francis and Pence on the influence of automatic promotion on students' academic endeavors, especially when Francis observed how automatic promotion created laxity among students in their academic commitment; Pence did not find that such a policy was a challenge to secondary students. Pence believed that any student who passed the primary leaving examination (Uganda national examination that pupils take at the end of elementary cycle) through automatic promotion policy had the ability to sustain his/her academic performance at the secondary level.

Francis based his perspective on students' mentality of knowing they would be promoted without internal examinations holding them back at the end of the year. Francis revealed how the products of automatic promotion policy tended to have students join universal secondary education rather than private schools for fear of being forced to repeat because of private

schools' academic expectations. For Pence, individualized attention to each student was the best remedy for each student's learning ability.

Understanding Grade Repetition Through Instructional Methodologies. In School A, according to Pence, teachers adhered to student-driven instruction as teachers assumed an advisory role whenever students required any guidance or accompaniment. Even though Francis did not solely support group instruction due to its potential to neglect slow learners, Pence expressed support for group learning, explaining how it helped her identify and work with mediocre students after being challenged by peer interactive learning. Nevertheless, Pence felt some teachers who did not adhere to student-centered learning ended up sacrificing individualized learning as they raced through instructional activities with no consideration of each student's learning capacity.

School B: Within-Cases Analysis Procedure

School B is a private secondary school in Ntungamo district, Western Uganda, with mixed boarding and day status. The school enrolls boys and girls at both ordinary and advanced levels. It is within the vicinity of a local town center. The data analysis from each participant of School B followed the order of guiding research questions as I prepared for the within-case analysis process in which the integrating of data from the two participants helped develop emerging categories. Under Research Sub-Question 1, What are parents' and community's perceptions about the cost implications of grade repetition within the secondary schools in Western Uganda, I looked at the consequences of grade repetition with its subset of change in the national curriculum.

Participant 1: Philip (Administrator)

Using the three research sub-questions, the data from Philip yielded seven subcategories. Research Sub-Question 1 generated the consequences of grade repetition category; Research Sub-Question 2 yielded four emerging categories: contributing factors to grade repetition, instructional process and grade repetition, accompanying slow and repeating students, and school's benefits from class level repetition. Research Sub-Question 3 generated two emerging categories: making a decision of who should repeat, or progress and automatic promotion and grade repetition:

Consequences of Grade Repetition

Philip was worried about the time students who repeat grades must spend in school before they are eligible for employment, compared to their counterparts who progress ahead of them. In addition, Philip was concerned with the age consequence where students outgrow their subsequent classes once they repeat them. He gave the example of the national secondary schools' sports competition requirements, where "learners are supposed to be below 20 years. But when a student repeats a level, then this person may go beyond the 20 years and misses the chance of participating in the secondary school games." Because students miss out on so many chances in the future when they repeat classes, Philip narrated why most of the students do not want to repeat in any circumstance.

Philip revealed how they "sit with them and tell them exactly what it means by progressing when they have not attained the required points." Subsequently, Philip further shared how most parents, especially those with financial capacity, hardly allow their children to repeat grades and instead opt to transfer their children to other schools that would allow them to join the next class rather than repeating. Furthermore, Philip expressed how some schools eliminated

from their system all students who did “not get good [enough] marks” that would protect their status in the national academic performance, in case such students refused to repeat in the same schools.

Change in the National Curriculum

According to Philip, many schools were worried about performance status as the MoES rolled out the new curriculum, which does not encourage competitive examinations or repeating grades. Philip shared how, in the new curriculum, “when a student had been assessed at senior one, you cannot again assess him at senior one” as the government introduced new registration of all students to track their academic progress, which would deter schools from forcing their students to repeat classes in this new enrolled curriculum.

Contributing Factors to Grade Repetition

Philip participated in the study as a school administrator. As a head teacher at School B for 14 years, Philip had taught for 10 years before assuming headship at one of the secondary schools in Ntungamo district, Western Uganda. With his teaching specialty in history and geography, Philip shared how he was still committed to teaching the same subjects to keep honing his instructional skills. While exploring the factors forcing students to repeat class levels, Philip observed how “grade repetition was not common” in his school, even though “sometimes it happens.” Philip attributed the challenge of grade repetition to natural factors such as students who fall sick during the promoting term, miss exams, and “are supposed to repeat that very class.”

However, Philip also indicated that financial constraints are one of the factors that force students to repeat their grades. For example, he contended that:

> Once a student does not sit for end-of-year exams, then there is nothing to judge him or her or something to show in order to take him or her to the next level. So, they have to repeat that very level.

Philip further maintained that "there are also those [students] who need to repeat classes because of academic challenges; [they] fail to raise the required percentage." Weighing in on grade repetition, Philip pointed to economic hardships as the most challenging factor since it was less common for students to fail meet the required examination pass mark in their internal examinations.

Instructional Process and Grade Repetition

Philip believed that the type of instructional methodology teachers choose to use contributed to how students perform in their academics. For example, he noted that teachers who use a teacher-centered instructional approach encourage rote learning, and the students "do not use their brains to think critically, and when it comes to exams where they are supposed to produce what they learned by themselves, then they end up failing." Philip lamented that it is often unfortunate that "most teachers end up saying that these people [students] have not yet reached the level we want, and they are made to repeat."

Accompanying Slow and Repeating Students

According to Philip, his school assures its students that "there is no student who is weak as long as the student obtained points to allow him/her to come here. We do not believe that there is any student that is weak." Philip shared how some students do not do well in class "because of several factors, but they are not weak academically." With the conviction that no student is academically weak, especially those who met the school's admission criteria, Philip shared how he seeks to know what bothers students by sitting with them before the school asks

them to repeat, and that is why Philip shared they "find no issues of students repeating grades" in his school.

School Benefits From Class-Level Repetition

Philip expressed his disappointment about how education in Uganda "encourages what a student knows but not what a student can do. It has been in a way that it is encouraging students to know things but not to do things." Philip further described how schools make students repeat to keep their status high as he shared that:

> most schools have been making students repeat levels so they can attain grades so that we can be publicized as schools that perform well in examinations; but when you look at the products, those students who get very good grades, what they do after school, you will not get something good from them.

According to Philip, most schools that have kept their educational stakes higher continue to force students to repeat grades on the pretext that the school needs superb students who "can attain higher grades, because they want to be publicized in the newspapers" for performing well in the national examinations. Philip felt that such schools benefit from such publicity in increasing their student enrolment, as "parents would rather go looking for that school because they want their children to perform well." According to Philip, when schools attain an excellent performance status, they tend to increase tuition because of being competitive and prominent in the area compared to other schools, "and their proprietors get much money from them."

Determining Who Should Repeat or Progress

According to Philip, students who fail to hit the percentage mark for promotion are not failures, but victims of the school's internal system that cuts them off as it determines who progresses and who repeats. In the event of any student repeating a class level, Philip shared how they involve the student's parent from the start before they finally agree to retain the student in school at the same class level. Philip remarked how the school has to involve parents of the

repeating students before the school makes a final decision, during which they "sit with the parents and student [since] the student does not easily accept to repeat because they know the consequences are not good."

Philip suggested that students think "they will have lost time, and a year is too much." Even when the school invites parents, Philip shared how they keep their stand as they sit with them, counsel them, and forthrightly "tell them that they [students] should repeat the level so that we can be sure they are fit to progress." According to Philip, the school holds a straight talk with students as teachers "tell them why they want them to repeat those levels." Philip noted how most repeating cases of students happen when they do not complete their assigned classes.

Philip shared how the school reminds students who missed some essential class that since "you did not get the content that would have got you [into the next class,] we advise you to repeat." A case of reference that Philip shared to reinforce the understanding of the internal repeating system was what happened during the COVID-19 education interruption. Philip noted how his school had to ask all students to repeat their classes "because [the students] knew they had missed and accepted to repeat that year."

Automatic Promotion and Grade Repetition

When asked about the impact of the automatic promotion policy on secondary school students, Philip shared how such a policy did not affect students who had managed to get grades for secondary admission after sitting for Uganda National Examinations and passing them. Philip noted that when an elementary pupil passes the PLE, "we expect that these learners learned and picked something and that is the reason they passed PLE." According to Philip, "secondary schools should not have any excuses for making learners repeat [by] blaming the automatic promotion policy at the primary level."

Participant 2: Corinnes (Teacher)

Teaching as a Calling

Corinnes serves as a school matron and a senior woman in School B. Corinnes shared her experiences as a class teacher and a health assistant teacher. As an alumnus of the school, she teaches physics and mathematics at both ordinary and advanced levels and considers the teaching profession her best career choice. Corinnes expressed that "I should remain a teacher because this profession has helped me in my roles, like supporting a girl through education." Even though Corinnes sees teaching as a calling, she expressed how hard it was to "to deal with old students" who outgrow their class levels.

However, she was moved by her village experience as a girl, describing "how those girls do suffer a lot." Corinnes was passionate about the life and progress of a female student based on her experience. For example, she expressed how her "parents suffered toiling to support [her], and how others are being neglected." As a role model for the girls, Corinnes believed that when they know that you are "doing good things toward them, they also like the education, keep in school, and they achieve." Exploring Corinnes' comprehension of the implications of grade repetition as guided by the three research questions, I followed the same methods of organizing the data analysis outcomes. For example, the data I obtained overlapped Research Sub-Questions 1 and 2, especially as I focused on understanding the contributing factors of grade repetition at a secondary school level in the Ugandan education system. Nevertheless, subcategories on Research Sub-Question 2 dominated the analysis outcome, with only the third research question represented by the impact of automatic promotion policy in students' academic success.

Consequences of Repeating a Class Level

Students, Teachers, and School Administrators. When asked about grade repetition implications for all stakeholders, Corinnes revealed how her school only gets up to two students who repeat their classes, so they do not have the challenges of working with parents in determining the next move for their children. However, Corinnes was not in full support of students repeating grades even when the school had an option of asking students to repeat their classes. For example, Corinnes remarked how "you do not really want to see the students' time being wasted."

Corinnes further noted that "a student repeating a grade is not good at all and no one likes it. You develop this sense of sympathy [and] you feel sorry for him/[her]." She shared how the effect of grade repetition sets teachers and administrators in motion to ask themselves, "whether we are doing enough for the learner. Are we providing enough for him?" Corinnes observed how the school gets concerned about the inevitable challenge of students who are repeating a class level to do it again in the future if they do not improve on what they previously failed.

Parents. Corinnes pointed out how parents and student guardians become hard-pressed to remit school fees more than once for the same class when their children repeat the same grade. Corinnes shared how "parents are already struggling with school fees and now the student is repeating and he [the parent/guardian] has to pay school fees again and the same amount." Corinnes acknowledged how they are "going to struggle again looking for money [and] if he/she is not a strong parent, he may even tell the student to drop out of the school because of school fees."

Factors Contributing to Grade Repetition

School Fees and Scholastic Materials. When asked about the factors inhibiting students' academic progress, Corinnes identified several, including students' humble family background. Corinnes expressed how some "families cannot support students solely whether it is the scholastic, or school fees, and you find a student misses the lessons." She contended that most parents in her school could not manage to raise fees on time to keep their children in school, something that affected their concentration and academic commitment. Corinnes shared that even when the amount of their school fees is manageable compared to other schools, "most of the parents cannot afford [it]" and you find that "the student has failed to do the end of term exams or the end of year exams and automatically he/she would not be promoted."

Course Load and Students' Academic Commitment. As the Ugandan MoES transitions to a new curriculum, Corinnes observed how the old curriculum required students to take many subjects he/she could hardly handle, and the "students cannot raise all marks they wanted for him/[her] to join the next class." According to Corinnes, denying students an opportunity to select subjects they like to do affects their academic performance.

Nevertheless, Corinnes pointed out the lack of seriousness among students as one of the causes of poor academic performance leading to the repeating of class levels. Corinnes wondered whether it was a generational effect, but "most of the learners are not serious as they tend to study lightly as if it is not necessary." She further identified indiscipline as another factor contributing to grade repetition, as Corinnes acknowledged that "the moment a student is undisciplined, he/she will not perform better" in academics.

School's Lack of Instructional Aid. According to Corinnes, among other factors hindering students' academic progress was the school's "lack of materials that cannot support

student large numbers." Corinnes acknowledged how their private school struggles with raising instructional aids, and teachers need to accompany overwhelming student numbers. Corinnes expressed how the school library did not have enough reading materials for teachers and students, and such a challenge keeps slow learners academically affected, as faster learners proactively access and compete for the few available materials. According to Corinnes, regardless of the lack of essential reading materials or computers for students, the school hardly considers such a challenge when deciding who among the students should repeat the class level.

Accompanying Slow and Repeating Students

The accompanying of repeating students at Corinnes' school was two-fold. Corinnes mentioned how teachers give such struggling students extra tests, "and out of the many tests, we are going to get the average." When the students show signs of failure, Corinnes observed how teachers would advise them to double their efforts for subsequent tests. Once the school considers the student's general overall performance toward the end of the year, Corinnes shared how the school determines whether a student should repeat or progress.

As students repeat classes, Corinnes shared how teachers focus on helping each of them improve since they already know their weaknesses. Corinnes further pointed out that the teacher already "knows where they [repeating students] failed and where they can do better." In addition to knowing repeaters' academic weaknesses, Corinnes also mentioned how teachers keep "advising them to choose friends who make a difference in their academic life."

Instructional Process on Grade Repetition

Corinnes considered their teaching methodologies as student-centered and focused on individualized instruction as she explained that "we consider individual differences and we put in much effort and make sure that every student is catered for."

Criteria for Deciding Who Repeats or Progresses

When asked how School B determined when a student should repeat a grade, Corinnes shared how her school considered whether the students met academic expectations and were well disciplined. Corinnes indicated how the school would consider the behavior of "the one who has performed poorly and maybe has repeated the class level for two times" to decide whether to repeat. However, Corinnes shared how, after the student fails, the school "cannot advise him/her to get promoted to the next class; [they] advise him/her to repeat in that he/she can improve on his/her performance."

Corinnes also shared how the school involves parents in deciding whether the student should or should not repeat the class. Corinnes intimated that involving the parents was intended to have the parent to talk to his/her child to find out whether there were any challenges a student did not share with teachers as they accompanied him/her. According to Corinnes, such an arrangement happens during the second term of the academic year, before the students approach the third term, which is a promotion term.

Corinnes observed how, as the school collaborates with parents, "the student would be advised to repeat the class, and not forced to repeat [and] if she/he sees it very necessary, he/she will repeat the class." However, Corinnes shared how she hardly sees any student refusing to repeat, apart from those who decide not to return to their school. Repeating grades, according to Corinnes, depends on the willingness of each student to collaborate with his/her parents or sponsors.

Nevertheless, when I asked Corinnes whether schools in Western Uganda shared the same system of grade repetition, she hesitated: "I cannot say much about that, but as per the Ministry of Education and Sports, our profession, we are advised to always follow the education

procedures." However, Corinnes further shared that "because studying is not easy, you just tell the student and force him to repeat," and she remarked, "I think that even schools out there, they are doing the same thing, [though] I am not sure."

Impact of Automatic Promotion Policy on Students' Academic Success

In the quest to establish the connection between automatic promotion policy at an elementary level and repeating grades at a secondary school level, Corinnes found no correlation between students who repeat and those who passed through schools with an automatic promotion policy. Corinnes said that repeating students form "an independent case" unrelated to the automatic promotion policy. She expressed how they get surprised by admitted students, especially with those in lower grades emerging with better performance compared to students who were admitted on high merit.

Corinnes attributed such improved performance either to a conducive school environment or a student getting more serious than he/she was during elementary time. Corinnes did not believe that automatic promotion had any impact on a student's performance at a secondary school level. However, Corinnes believed that repeating a class can happen to anyone regardless of whether he/she passed through UPE schools, and she further mentioned that "it does not necessarily mean [the student] came when he had failed" in his previous educational cycle.

Within-Case Emerging Categories (School B)

According to Stake (2006), each case has subunits that create a deeper understanding of how the internal environments interact to understand the entire case to cause an in-depth grasp of the study problem. With this in mind, the position of Corinnes as a senior woman and a school matron paints a unique picture of how School B handles and experiences grade repetition compared to how Philip, an administrator, demonstrated its implication to the entire school

community. As I compared the two participants' experiences of the phenomenon following the three research questions, five categories emerged from the within-case analysis process. Emerging Category 1, consequences of repeating a class-level, responded to the Research Sub-question 1. Even though some emerging categories overlapped in responding to all the research questions, Research Sub-Question 2 yielded two emerging categories that included factors contributing to grade repetition, and accompanying slow and repeating students. Research Sub-Question 3 gave rise to two emerging categories: academic decision on who should progress, and the automatic promotion and students' success, as shown in the emerging categories' matrix (Table 3).

Emerging Category 1: Consequences of Repeating a Class-Level

In exploring the factors deterring students from academically progressing from one class to another, Philip and Corinnes concurred on how family financial constraints impeded students' academic concentration and performance. However, with Corinnes' experience as a school alumnus, she added how female students were neglected by their parents as they focused on the education of their sons. She believed that the lack of role models to help girls appreciate the essence of education continued to prevent more girls from embracing formal education. Even though Philip noted how class-level repetition was rare in School B, the two participants acknowledged how missing term examinations made it hard for the school to determine the promotion of such students to the next class level.

Philip attributed missing examinations to the frequency of students' health problems. On the other hand, Corinnes noted how late remittance of school fees kept most students in and out of school with no ample time to prepare for internal examinations. Corinnes wondered whether the school was doing its best for students, while Philip shared how most students refuse to repeat

class levels with the support of their parents, especially for financially stable families. Although Corinnes noted how some financially struggling parents opt for their children to drop out of school because of the challenge of paying twice for the same class level, Philip noted how some schools take advantage of weak students by dismissing them to safeguard their national academic status.

Table 3

School B: Within-Case Matrix of Subcategories and Emerging Categories

Philip	Corinnes	
Possible Categories	Possible Categories	Emerging Categories
Contributing factors to grade repetition	Factors contributing to grade repetition	Factors contributing toward grade repetition. • Instructional process and grade repetition
Instructional process and grade repetition		
Accompanying slow and repeating students	Accompanying slow and repeating students	Accompanying slow and repeating students
Consequences of grade repetition	Consequences of repeating a class-level	Consequences of repeating class-levels
Making a decision of who should repeat or progress	Criteria for deciding who repeats or progresses	Academic decision-making of who should progress. • School benefits from class-level repetition
Schools' benefits from class-level repetition		
Automatic promotion and grade repetition	Impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic success	Automatic promotion and students' academic success

Emerging Category 2: Factors Contributing To Grade Repetition

The data obtained from School B indicated how the school's internal academic policy focused on academically weak students to repeat grades. However, Corinnes did not favor such a school directive as it wasted students' time. Philip concurred, saying that students outgrow their class level and miss out on future opportunities. He gave an example of how students who outgrow their class level often miss out on national educational activities like sports when they exceed the age-limit entrance. Additionally, Philip and Corinnes concurred on how students fail to meet expected promotional pass marks due to missing some of the examinations. Corinnes further noted how more causal factors were at play in grade repetition, such as students' lack of academic seriousness and the course overload with minimal instructional aids, which tend to skip administrators' judgment.

Instructional Process and Grade Repetition. On the other hand, Corinnes and Philp had different perspectives on the typical instruction type in their classroom environment. For example, Philip was concerned with some teachers' lack of individualized instruction, contributing to students' laxity in academic discipline. Philip further acknowledged how some teachers' lack of adherence to student-centered instruction continued to encourage rote learning rather than critical thinking among students. Corinnes' perspective on classroom instruction did not agree with that of Philip; she noted how their teachers adhered to student-centered instruction, with more effort directed to individual student needs. Philip believed that some teachers blame poor academic performance on students when they directly or indirectly promote it through teacher-focused teaching, following school administration directives, rather than involving the needs of each student.

Emerging Category 3: Accompanying Slow and Repeating Students

With reference to how School B attended to an individual student's learning needs, Philip observed that the school considered each student academically capable of succeeding, since the school admitted them all on merit. On the other hand, both Philip and Corinnes expressed how students had varying degrees of learning absorption that required individualized attention. Philip pointed out how they embrace dialogue with weak students in the form of guidance and counseling, and Corinnes added how teachers give a series of tests to such students, encouraging them to double their effort, so that such academically weak students could benefit and join the next class-level. Corinnes shared how teachers' awareness of each repeating student's academic struggles served as a pointer during teacher-student interactive learning. Corinnes also believed that some students fail because of bad peer influence and need advice on the kind of friends they choose.

Emerging Category 4: Academic Decision of Who Should Progress

Philip and Corinnes observed how, as schools focused on following internal academic regulations to the letter, students' ability to progress from one class to the next depended on how they fulfilled the expected pass mark percentages for promotions. Corinnes added that the academic committee also looked at the general student discipline record as a subset of guidelines for final academic decisions. Although Philip and Corinnes pointed to the involvement of parents in making decisions on students' academic progress, Corinnes further explained how the position of parents were only meant to help the school learn more about the challenges that students failed to divulge to the teachers and administrators during that academic year.

Participants disagreed on the timeline of parents' involvement in their children's academic journey. Corinnes stated that the school involved parents during the second term of the

academic year. In contrast, Philip stated they did all year round. Such nuances explain how different positionalities of participants create different interpretations of the same situation. The two participants concurred on the importance of considering the student's willingness to repeat, even though parents had the last say on the way forward. Philip emphasized how School B had a final say during decision-making on students' academic progress to respect the school's guiding regulations. Although Philip and Corinnes remarked that the grade repetition system was localized in each school, Corinnes was hesitant to commit herself on shared commonality among schools in the district and how they deal with the decisions around students repeating classes.

School Benefits From Class-level Repetition. Schools in the region have kept their examination passing percentage high in order to compete favorably in national examinations. Philip expressed his disappointment in education's failure to focus on the implications of this for students. He felt that schools benefit more through students' class level repetition to meet national grades, and this neglected their aiding students to achieve academic independence. Philip revealed how schools' pressure on students to excel at the national level increased the rate of students' grade repetition, and he pointed also to the financial benefit to such schools in the long run.

Emerging Category 5: Automatic Promotion and Students' Academic Success

Corinnes believed that repeating class levels could happen to any student, and she and Philip concurred that automatic promotion did not impact any student's academic success, as long as such automatic promotion from the elementary level remained focused on their secondary school studies. I was surprised by Corinnes' perspective that students who repeated class levels formed an "independent case" from automatically promoted students. This was affirmed by Philip, who observed that student admissions considered only those who merited the

admission criteria. Consequently, Philip and Corinnes noted how schools should not cast blame on automatic promotion policy when their students fail to meet internal academic standards.

School C: Within-Case Analysis Procedure

School C primarily serves subsistence farming populations whose families' income depends on agricultural produce characterized by mixed farming. It is one of the private government-aided secondary schools located in Kamwenge district, Western Uganda. Even though School C just introduced a boarding section for students, most of the student population commutes every day from home. The school enrolls boys and girls at both ordinary and advanced levels. The data analysis of each individual participant followed the three research sub-questions that guided me, to develop the possible categories in preparation for within-case analysis procedure. Two participants, Elias and Dina, represented School C in this study.

Participant 1: Elias (Administrator)

Education Experience and Specialty

Elias participated in this study as a head teacher of a government-aided school in Western Uganda, bringing 28 years' experience in the education field to the study. Elias' data analysis followed the three research sub-questions as I sought to understand his perception of the implications of grade repetition. Research Sub-Question 1 yielded a single possible category, the repercussions of class-level repetition.

Research Sub-Question 2 generated three possible categories: contributing factors to grade repetition, accompanying of slow or repeating students, and the impact of classroom instruction on students' academic progress. These categories raised more awareness of how students struggle from inside and outside of their school environment as they pursue their education. Research Sub-Question 3 yielded two possible categories that helped me understand

the position of grade repetition regarding automatic promotion policy and the schools' academic competition at the national level: criteria for determining who to repeat or progress, and impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic progress.

Repercussions of Class-Level Repetition

When considering how repeating grades impacts stakeholders and schools, Elias noted how parents incur more expenses in order to meet tuition for their repeating children. He also noted how it may cost a parent even lose more money when he/she "gets some teachers to coach the child in the subjects where he/she was very poor." Elias observed how repeating students spend more years in a given educational cycle due to academic performance requirements, and that government-sponsored students lose their entire scholarship for any educational cycle of secondary education if they repeat any class level.

Decision to Repeat From Another School. Elias observed how repeating students "feel humiliated" when they repeat their current class level. He also remarked how repeating students feel out of place when they see that others who came to the same school with lower grades are progressing, even as they themselves are repeating the same class level:

> Once you ask a student to repeat, they feel humiliated. They say, how can I repeat when the others are seeing me? Actually, the majority opt to repeat from another school. They say I will accept to repeat. They ask their parents I will accept to repeat. I've seen my mistake. I've seen my weaknesses. But my father or my mother, I'm requesting that you let me repeat from another school.

Elias noted how most repeaters "opt to repeat . . . [in] another school" in order to save face. He further revealed how some students genuinely know their weaknesses, and such students "will accept even to repeat from here" meaning that they want to repeat from their current schools. However, Elias noted how parents are involved when deciding when a student should repeat or not.

Contributing Factors to Grade Repetition

When asked about the factors contributing to grade repetition in School C, Elias revealed how students' academic performance or ability takes precedence over factors forcing students to repeat grades. Elias pointed out how School C's internal examination system's expected academic pass marks hinder students from smoothly transitioning from one class level to the next. For example, "when a student performs poorly and scores below the required grades, [he/she] is made to repeat as a way of making him/her improve." Nevertheless, Elias noted that "parents who do not normally understand the value of repeating and improving the performance, . . . will say, we do not have money, let him go the next class."

Elias noted how student absenteeism was rampant, due to the rural setting of the school. He stated that frequent absenteeism affected students' academic focus and limited their access to teaching content, resulting in an increased rate of class-level retention. According to Elias's experience in School C, students get distracted by their home chores, as many of the students commute from home rather than staying in the boarding section and end up paying more attention to home activities than school instructional assignments.

Ill-Heath Impact. Elias observed how the frequency of malaria attacks on students and their family members further accounted for increased chances of repeating class levels, as students lost time to concentrate on their studies. Elias stated that many school stakeholders live not only in an environment with less accessible health centers but also under financial constraints. As a result, poverty, combined with sickness, tends to cripple families and their children's education.

Walking Long Distances. Elias noted the challenges of students "walking longer distances" from school and back because of being day scholars. As one of the solutions to poor

academic performance, Elias shared how the school continues to encourage parents of day scholars to have their children join the boarding section, to create more time for them to concentrate on their studies. Elias described how day scholar students arrive late every day, after teachers have covered some instructional activities. He further mentioned that such students lack opportunities for self-study when they return home after school compared to their counterparts who stay in school for evening preparation time. Elias noted that when a student "arrives to school tired . . . [s/he] is not able to study, [in addition to] missing evening lessons."

Misuse of Time Meant for Studies**.** Elias revealed that, for some of the students who repeat, "it is not because they are not clever, but they . . . misuse the time meant for studies," and such students are characterized by "coming late for classes, [not] wanting to wake up early." Elias mentioned how some of the failing students, unfortunately, join his school with good grades, but because they waste time and lose focus, they end up as academic failures. Elias noted how some students "think they are clever without" knowing that the secondary level "is different from that of primary [and] such quick learners never pay attention to the time and only remember to revise for examinations in a promotional term." Elias observed that students "have not been serious in the first term, they have not been serious in the second term, [and] now they want to be serious in the third term, and it is too late, they cannot cover everything."

Determinant Subjects and Peer-Influence. Elias remarked how some students are biased toward subjects like mathematics and other natural sciences. According to Elias, such a biased mentality leads students to do well in some subjects and fail others, not because they are dull but because they have low attachment to the rest. He shared:

> Some students are not weak in all the subjects but in some because of some bias or mentality, [or] somebody will say mathematics is very hard. So, they get that, and you find he is passing all other subjects but he's . . . failing mathematics because of the bias. He's getting, maybe from home or from other students who are studying from other

> schools . . . that mathematics cannot be passed. So . . . he says I will do away with mathematics. I will spend most of my time on other subjects, without knowing that this mathematics contributes to the grade.

Elias noted how peer pressure has affected most students, and that some students are negatively influenced by their fellow students, who discourage them from attempting particular subjects as hard-to-pass subjects. He observed how other students are biased because of their family background. Elias shared how students get poor grades when they concentrate on other subjects and neglect those subjects that account for the expected pass mark percentage, like mathematics and science.

Elias further shared how students tend to discourage one another, especially older students who struggle with particular subjects and give ill advice to those who would have otherwise performed well in the same subjects. Elias shared the experience in his school where a former student hated mathematics and was always failing it. However, when teachers paid close attention to the student and individualized mathematics instruction, he emerged among the best and pursued it as a teaching course at the university. According to Elias, this student is currently the best teacher in this same school and is an example to other struggling students.

Accompanying Slow or Repeating Students

Encouraging Self-Study for Slow Learners. Elias shared how his school accompanies and monitors students throughout the academic year through “frequent class assignments and termly tests, [and] any student who does not perform well in internal assignments becomes a target of guidance” through teachers’ consultations. Elias added that “we call the child and caution and say, your performance in not good, you need to do something” and teachers refer such students to the library for self-study. According to Elias, the school library contains question banks where students are encouraged to attempt questions and take them to their teachers for marking as a

way of refocusing themselves for academic improvement. Elias noted how his school encourages students to take the initiative in their academic journey, to access all they need to succeed. For example, Elias said that the "student is supposed to pick questions, answer [them] and take [them] to the teacher for marking. Then the teacher will guide the student—that here you are doing well, and here you have not performed well."

Impact of Classroom Instruction on Students' Academic Progress

Essence of Individualized Instruction. Elias observed how, during parent-school interaction, the school always reminded the concerned parent that their "child needs extra help [and] we may need to attach your child to a teacher, as a foster teacher-mentor, such that this teacher sits with your child to shows him or her exactly what to do." According to Elias, instructional processes influence students' ability and interest in what teachers teach them. For example, Elias shared how "there are students who learn well when they are involved in hands-on activities, and there are those who will grasp things when they are in theory" form. Based on his many years of teaching experience, Elias shared how class instruction would require an "integration of theory and practice" to accommodate all students with varying learning abilities and interests.

Elias noted how teachers needed to "teach the theory part of it, but also go in for the practical such that those who [do] not grasp during the theory session, they can grasp during the practical session." Elias faulted teachers who employ teacher-centered instruction as if they are teaching themselves, leaving some students sleeping in their lessons. Elias emphasized the need to embrace learner-centered instruction to keep students active, where "you involve students, they answer the questions, do research" to help them feel motivated and engaged. Elias noted

how the instructional methodology a teacher uses may contribute to more students failing the subject and repeating class levels.

Inadequate Instructional Resources and Misuse of Computers and Phones. Elias pointed out the challenge of inadequate instructional materials, especially for teachers teaching computer classes. He used an example where "you find a school with 1000 students having less than 20 computers," and expect students to learn that subject effectively. He added that "not every child will get access to the computer, and our learners don't have money [to] buy those computers." Elias blamed such a challenge on both the government's inability to provide such resources to schools and low-income family backgrounds where students cannot afford to buy personal computers. Worst of all, Elias lamented how MoES does not allow students to bring phones to school, when they would have helped lessen the challenge of fewer computers.

According to Elias, the government's fear of students using phones to coordinate school strikes has continued to constrict the use of such gadgets in schools. Nevertheless, Elias acknowledged how some dubious students use such gadgets with "excitement, and access pornography," which deteriorates students' moral fiber in schools and in their homes. Elias further expressed how students tend to waste time on their phones playing games rather than engaging in productive academic work.

Repeating Students. Elias shared how the school monitors the performance of repeating students through each student's assignments, to help him/her avoid class-level repetition again or discover what could be his/her academic challenges. According to Elias, the school is interested in whether class-level repetition exercise is "assisting the child." Elias further shared how School C "attach[es the] child to a teacher . . . such that this teacher sits with the child and shows him or her exactly what to do."

Criteria For Determining Who to Repeat or Progress

According to Elias, repeating a class level strengthens students' academic performance as they acclimatize themselves with instructional materials. As the school accompanies students in their academic journey, each student comes with personal and academic needs that need integration into one's academic journey. Elias shared how School C uses internal termly examination results as a yardstick to determine the student's academic progress and ability to progress, or remain at the same class level. Elias narrated how teachers consider cumulative grades, based on how a student performed in both term one and term two, so that the promotional term three gives the school administration a picture of how to judge each student's academic progress.

According to Elias, the decision to allow students to progress or remain at the same class level depends on the school's concern about how a student would perform in the next class, if the current grades were demoralizing. As a result, Elias noted how the school ends up asking students to repeat with the consent of their parents or guardians. He expressed that "we don't force people to repeat because it is a government policy that people should not repeat. So, what we normally do, we talk to the parents, we advise that this student, if he goes ahead, will not cope with the syllabus." Because of the government's stance that no student should repeat any class level, Elias shared how the school administration enlists the consent and advice of parents to determine the next course of action for any below-average student to avoid any repercussions from the government. Elias believed that a student who "has failed to score in this class, may not manage the advanced content of the next class."

Furthermore, Elias remarked that, if any parents do not accept the school's advice for his/her child to repeat, the school has no option but to accept the student to progress, because

students sponsored by the government would not receive more tuition when they repeat a class level, and this is especially so in universal secondary education schools. According to Elias, when a parent decides that his/her child has to join the next class with low grades, the school "will let him/her go to the next class and if he/she performs well, will be his/her luck, if he/she fails, we are not bothered."

When asked whether schools in the district have a standard system that guides them when deciding when a student should repeat a class level, Elias noted how it is a localized system determined by each school.

Impact of Automatic Promotion Policy on Students' Academic Progress

When asked whether automatic promotions at an elementary level impeded students' academic focus at a secondary school level, Elias shared how the universal primary education that implemented automatic promotion policy in 2005 prompted the emergence of USE, to allow students' progress without being held up by poor class performance. In justifying the introduction of USE schools, Elias shared how the

> government did not want to part with extra money once you have entered the system. So, I think they thought that if they allow repetition of class, then teachers would make these students repeat who are not performing well, [which] would call for extra money.

Elias noted how government schools find it hard to openly ask poor-performing students to repeat for fear of government reprisal. Elias further noted how such a plan of automatic promotion helped to decongest classrooms, since free education attracted a multitude of students that created overwhelming numbers in the classroom setting. For example, Elias reechoed the government sentiments that

> if you ask some students to repeat, there will be class congestion and they will not fit in those classes. We shall need more money to construct classes. They will need more teachers because they [students] will be many. The teacher-student ratio will not be managed.

Unfortunately, Elias found loopholes in the current government-sponsored education system in that the schools leave academic progress to each student's good or bad luck. Elias noted that "whoever passes through successfully will be his or her luck. One who is already swallowed by the system, that will be his bad luck."

Participant 2: Dina (Teacher)

Teaching Specialty and Leadership

Dina is the assistant director of studies, who formerly served as a class teacher, career teacher, and staff relations officer. Dina has been in the teaching profession for 7 years in a government-aided school. Like Elias's, the data emerging from my interaction with Dina followed the guidance of research questions in developing the possible categories for the within-case analysis process. During data analysis, Research Sub-Question 1 generated a possible category on the implications of grade repetition, with a specific focus on its financial implications borne by education stakeholders. The possible categories generated by Research Sub-Question 2 included the contributing factors to grade repetition, and accompanying slow learners before they repeat, while Research Sub-Question 3 established two possible categories that included the criteria for determining who should repeat or progress, and the impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic progress.

Implications of Grade Repetition

Financial Implications of Grade Repetition. Dina remarked how vital it was to involve parents when deciding for a student to repeat a class level because of the financial constraints parents experience as they make projections about when their children should complete a given education cycle. Dina said the parents must agree or else "the parent will not accept [paying] for the child." She added that "it is the role of the parent to provide the necessities for this person to

pass, like school fees . . . personal needs . . . scholastic materials. And of course, if it is a girl, the pads and whatnot."

A more challenging revelation was how some of the mushrooming schools aim at making money rather than educating Ugandan citizens. Dina used the term "obedeme" for schools whose "sole purpose is to get income," adding

> Uganda is a capitalist country. So, everyone is yawning to get money to get what to eat. In Uganda here, we normally call them "obudeme." It means those are schools that have begun not majorly to educate Ugandans, but their sole purpose is to get income, the source of income.

According to Dina, such schools employ unskilled teachers who only receive low monthly salaries. When addressing benefits of grade repetition to the schools, Dina shared how schools that perform well academically attract high student enrollment, as students seek out schools that do better in national examinations. Dina further pointed out how hard it was for private schools in rural settings to get good, experienced teachers, as they "recruit anyone who can teach."

Minimal Instructional Materials. Dina observed how some schools lack equipped science laboratories where students can practice hands-on skills in manipulating experimental apparatuses. Dina noted how some students only get a chance to use science equipment during the national examinations, a challenge that reduces their chances of performing well.

Dina shared how some students remain unsure of their next step when they struggle to fulfill the requirements of the current level of education due to a lack of assurance from financially struggling parents. In the long run, according to Dina, students give up on what they can do and end up failing. Dina noted how some parents' comments to their children, such as "you are even wasting my money," were discouraging.

Parent-School Involvement. Dina observed how, for the learner to do well in their academic journey, "parents, teachers, and students" should be fully and collectively involved. Unfortunately, Dina noted how only some of the individuals among parents, teachers and students are fully invested in doing due diligence. For example, Dina noted how some students lack scholastic materials and even school fees, which leaves them struggling. Dina also hinted at how female students become isolated when parents fail to send them monthly period materials like pads, and such students end up hating themselves because of physical body changes.

Challenges of Grade Repetition. Dina observed how impactful grade repetition was on female students when they outgrow their class level as they continue repeating and eventually drop out of school. According to Dina, "[female students say] I cannot repeat senior three; how old shall I be in senior four or senior six? And it becomes easier for the student to drop out of school and try something else." Dina acknowledged that the primary focus of grade repetition in her school was to improve student grades, believing that students "can do better" and "it has proved to be of importance to some learners." Still, Dina acknowledged how "some learners are very weak; though they repeat, they cannot improve the grades."

Contributing Factors to Grade Repetition

Quick Learners and Time-Takers. When asked about the factors contributing to students' class retention in School C, Dina pointed out that grade repetition was more pronounced in privately owned schools compared to government-sponsored secondary schools in the region. Dina noted students' academic performance level as a significant factor, and described two categories of students in her school: "quick learners or whom we call the clever learners, and then we have the time-takers," or slow learners. Dina mentioned how time-takers frequently "fail to score the minimum grade [and] there is no reason to promote that student to

another class." Dina remarked that "time-takers" is a polite way of addressing "the weak students or less knowledgeable." Dina described some of her school's promotional determinants:

> Someone who scores 100% will have achieved the maximum expectations of a learner, and we call [him/her] the best learner. So, the one we call the weak learner normally scores below average, which is 50%. So, the person we normally advise to repeat is the person who scores below 36%.

Additionally, Dina noted how "being in a rural school and depending on the social, [and] family background, some students have low self-esteem," which continues to pull them back in their academic endeavors.

Forced Learning Subjects. According to Dina, some students join schools and take some subjects to appease their parents by living the education dream on their behalf. It was an eye-opener to learn from Dina how some parents determine or force their preferred educational career on their children, which contributes to their internal examination failure. For example, Dina noted how "a parent says, I want my child to study and become a doctor [or] I want my child to study and become an engineer." Once that student fails to meet the required pass mark, the parent forces his/her child to repeat the grade.

On the other hand, bad influences force students to make bad decisions that affect their academic concentration. For example, Dina revealed how "some people fail because of the interaction with other learners," and she emphasized "I won't hide this. We have biased learners; we have parents who do not support their children." Such attitude among parents and students is indicative of lack of understanding the essence of supportive interactive learning for students.

Accompanying Slow Learners Before They Repeat

Dina talked of how a teacher's presence in every student's academic journey was significant, based on her experience of helping a weak student who volunteered and sought help:

> Personally, I coached someone in English, but I was lucky the person came herself. [And] she came, and I gave her a number of activities, and she was very weak because for the first time, I looked at her work, she did not even know how to put paragraphs, she did not know the spelling of many words, but I was lucky, she scored a credit six, and she is currently working in Lyantonde.

Dina noted that not all poor performers are dull students, but that “some other students need time, need remedial, more discussions, extra time for them to grasp what you are teaching them.”

Position of Remedial Lessons. Dina shared how remedial classes are part of the school teaching schedule, targeting subjects that students often perform poorly. She noted that remedial lessons “are normally taught after classes [or] sometimes early in the morning or during weekends.” Dina justified the position of remedial classes on their school timetable by saying that, when learners are given “enough time for revision, for consultation, sharing with a teacher, they can perform better.”

Journeying with Slow Learners. Dina shared how the school accompanies slow learners from the first term of the academic year, more especially those who score below 50% in their internal examinations. Dina noted how the school provides academic guidance and remedial assistance to such students, in addition to extra class activities. However, she observed that “if [the student] does not change or improve by the third term, it is easier [for the school] to advise the person to repeat the class.”

Class Instructional System on Grade Repetition. When asked about how school instructional activities played a role in students’ academic progress, Dina pointed to the teacher’s instructional style as a contributing factor toward how students perform in their respective subjects. She noted that when a teacher “gives exercise [and] does not make follow up, does not mark, then it normally makes learners weak.” Consequently, Dina was concerned with some teachers’ competencies “to deliver what is expected of the learners.”

Interactive Learning. Dina mentioned how the school often attaches the slow learner to a teacher and student discussion group to benefit from all available resources through peer interactive learning. She noted how "it is easier for the [students] to interact with their fellow learners and grasp a lot, than hearing from the teacher at all times." Dina further pointed out how some students need help understanding or even discovering why they continue to fail the same subject, even when they repeat the grade. Lack of intervention, the students "continue repeating the same mistakes and end up scoring the same grade or even the worst."

Criteria For Determining Who Should Repeat or Progress

Expected Academic Achievement Level. Dina observed how her school considered 100% as the maximum expected academic performance, with 50% as the minimum expected performance for weaker students, before the school decided on who would repeat the grade. Dina shared how the school logically decides that if "this person has failed to achieve what is expected in the previous class, the performance may be worse in the next class, and for that matter, the learner is advised to repeat the class." According to Dina, once the school has decided on the student's academic status, the school administration involves parents in the academic life of slow learners throughout the year as the school monitors and guides them. Dina remarked how "it is not always the school's decision to make the learner repeat without the consent of the parent." She went on to say that:

> We involve parents because it also requires financial implications. The parent will have made a program, for example, for his child to start senior one in 2020 [and] expects the child by 2023 to be completing a course. And then you come in and say, let your child repeat; you need to agree, otherwise the parent will not accept to pay for this child, and you have done nothing.

Impact Of Automatic Promotion Policy on Students' Academic Progress

When asked about the impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic progress, Dina shared how students who join her school from the universal primary education system come with good grades and maintain such grades throughout their high school level. Dina believed that when a student passes the PLE and joins a secondary school, he/she is smart and can sustain their educational dream regardless of having undergone automatic promotion in their previous education level, "unlike students from private elementary schools who are pumped academically through the question-and-answer method to perform well at the end of the cycle."

As the government is trying to do away with holding students at a class level because of internal examinations, Dina inserted how schools "cannot guarantee that all learners will score the expected grade for them to be promoted." Dina said, "I support the idea of learners repeating classes because when they say these people should have automatic promotion, when it comes to recruitment for jobs, they still leave out those learners [who] scored poorly in their previous classes." Nonetheless, Dina acknowledged how the lack of students' willingness to repeat any grade exacerbates their poor academic performance, "and they do not improve the grades as expected of them."

Government's Position on Grade Repetition

When asked about the government's position on the repeating of class levels, Dina said:

> The government, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, does not encourage teachers to make learners repeat classes. . . . [T]he purpose of beginning those universal secondary education schools was to teach learners basically to read and write. And they believe, from P. 1 to P. 7, someone who can read and write . . . has grasped what is required of the person. So, no need to repeat.

Dina explained how schools try to beat the government system of "no student should repeat a class level" by dismissing such academically weak students from their schools. Dina

noted how private schools not only "want money, they [also] want best graders. So, when these people fail, they cannot force them to repeat, [and] normally what they do, they chop them."

Within-Case Emerging Categories (School C)

The location of School C brought the unique perspective of a government-aided school in a rural setting. Viewing the implications of grade repetition through the experiential lens of Dina's 7 years of teaching and Elias's 28 years of educational service as a teacher and school administrator enriched the in-depth understanding of how School C perceives and handles its students' academic progress. The within-case analysis of this school as an independent bounded case brought forth five emerging categories to help understand the breadth and depth of grade repetition's impact on the school's educational service delivery. Even though the emerging categories overlapped in responding to the guiding research sub-questions, the first emerging category, the implications of grade repetition, focused on responding to Research Sub-Question 1, while the contributing factors of grade repetition and accompanying slow and repeating students emerged from Research Sub-Question 2. Research Sub-Question 3 generated two emerging categories, the criteria for deciding who repeats or progresses, and automatic promotion and students' academic progress.

Study participants Dina and Elias shared their experiences of the school culture, and their experiences highlighted outstanding similarities, differences, and nuances, deepening the grasp of what went on within the school as they academically accompanied their students (Table 4).

Emerging Category 1: Implications of Grade Repetition

As we explored the impact of grade repetition on students, Dina and Elias revealed how students overstay in an educational cycle more than expected. Dina added how such delayed students' progress impacts more female students than their male counterparts, especially girls

who face age and class level incompatibility with their body changes. Elias also observed how repeating students feel alienated from their peers and fail to adjust to their incoming student cohort. According to Elias, such struggles leave repeating students humiliated, so students opt to repeat in other schools. Although Elias noted how some students genuinely know their academic weaknesses and accept repeating, Dina observed how not all students who repeat improve their academic performance.

Table 4

School C: Within-Case Matrix Table of Subcategories and Emerging Categories

Dina	Elias	
Possible Subcategories	Possible Subcategories	Emerging Categories
Contributing factors to grade repetition	Contributing factors to grade repetition	Contributing factors toward grade repetition
Implication of grade repetition	Repercussions of class-level repetition	Implications of grade repetition • Financial implications
Accompanying slow learners before they repeat	Accompanying slow or repeating students	Accompanying slow and repeating students
Criteria for determining who should repeat or progress	Criteria for determining who to repeat or progress	Criteria for deciding who to repeat or progress
Financial implications	……	
Impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic progress	Impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic progress	Automatic promotion and students' academic progress

Financial Implications. With the financial challenges that come with repeating class levels, Dina and Elias concurred about how parents' involvement in deciding the student's

academic progress helps the school to remind parents of the financial repercussions of repeating grades. Even though Dina revealed how the lack of a student's willingness to repeat impacted the student's intended outcomes, she said that parents held financial responsibility for their children in school.

Emerging Category 2: Contributing Factors Toward Grade Repetition

Elias and Dina, who represented School C, acknowledged how students' academic abilities determined, for a big part, the rate of class-level repetition in their school. Elias focused on how the school's internal expected performance draws a judgment line between those students who are to progress and those who are to repeat. Even when Dina revealed how repeating of class levels was more pronounced in private schools, Elias and Dina viewed other contributing factors differently. For example, Elias observed how the frequency of students' absenteeism was a barrier to regular attendance and familiarity with instructional content. In addition, Dina remarked how the school's rural setting and unsupportive family background enhanced low self-esteem among students. Dina further observed how rural schools struggled to recruit experienced teachers, which, coupled with unequipped school libraries and laboratories, negatively impacted students' academic focus.

Elias focused on how ill health due to the lack of health facilities in rural areas further compounded students' inability to concentrate on their studies, and walking daily back and forth from school was a tedious exercise that consumed students' studying time. Although Elias and Dina concurred that hard sciences and mathematics were other determining factors of students' academic success, Dina added how some students focused more on such subjects to please their parents, rather than considering all offered subjects for balanced performance. Dina revealed how some parents force their children to take certain subjects in order to relive their lost dreams,

which impedes students' ability to meet internal expected pass marks. Elias pointed further to bad company that students keep, which does not encourage academic focus. Elias was concerned with the impact of negative peer pressure that leaves some students struggling to fit in with the group, by neglecting what other members do not subscribe to.

Emerging Category 3: Accompanying Slow and Repeating Students

Dina and Elias observed how focused individualized instruction was necessary for slow learners in School C. Dina emphasized that the teacher's presence in students' academic life was vital if the school was to improve each student's learning abilities. She observed that some students required extra learning time through remedial lessons, without prejudice to their performing ability. Elias noted that the school attached each student to a teacher for such individualized attention for mentoring purposes, but also observed how class instruction required hands-on and theoretical perspectives to be all-inclusive.

Elias viewed student academic accompaniment using frequent internal assignments and constant reminders and encouragements to slow students to engage in self-study. However, Elias revealed how teachers and administrators used stern warning through frequent tests and assignments as a wake-up call to remind slow learners of eminent repercussions ahead of the academic year end. Dina was more in favor of creating ample time for students, with guided discussion to uplift the slow learners. Elias concurred with Dina when he shared that each student must attempt questions from library question banks and present answers to teachers for consultation. Although Elias did not mention the expected internal pass mark percentage used to differentiate between quick and slow learners, Dina noted how more focused, individualized attention was given to students scoring below 50%.

Dina and Elias faulted the instructional style of some teachers, whose instructional competencies contributed to students' academic failure. Dina revealed how some teachers hardly made follow-ups on their students' class assignments, but expected students to pass their examinations. Elias concurred that some teachers' instructional methodologies contributed more to students' class-level repetition, and further observed how the lack of instructional resources such as textbooks, computers, and other teaching aids compounded the challenge of grade repetition, making it impossible to achieve individualized learning.

Emerging Category 4: Criteria for Deciding Who Repeats or Progresses

Asked about how the school determines students' academic progress and who should progress or repeat, Elias and Dina revealed how internal examinations guide the school administration in deciding students' academic status. According to Elias, cumulative grades form a yardstick for a student progressing from one class to the next at the end of the academic year. Dina, however, was more specific on how the school sets the highest and lowest examination percentage marks of 100% and 50%, respectively, as pointers for students' success and ability to continue to the next class.

Dina and Elias concurred that allowing a failing student to join the next class would be illogical without a surety of academic improvement. They said that School C encourages students to repeat, especially those who do not meet its internal performance standards. However, Elias expressed how the parent's participation in the decision-making process creates immunity for the school from any future government's interest if it goes against the government's directive of not holding any students in a class because of internal examinations.

Although Elias added that the school is aware of how any government-sponsored student loses funding on repeating a class, the parents' decisions take precedence, as they would bear the

financial burden going forward. Elias noted how the school would not care about students failing at the end of the year in case any parents failed to respect the school's advice regarding their children's academic challenges. When asked whether schools in the region shared the same repeating system, Elias and Dina said that it was localized, based on each school's academic rules and regulations.

Emerging Category 5: Automatic Promotion and Student's Academic Progress

Elias and Dina reflected on the varying perspectives of government-aided and private schools to understand the impact of automatic promotion on students' academic ability to sustain their education. For example, Dina raised a concern about how private schools promote rote learning to create grades at the end of the year, but she negated any challenges automatic promotion has for students, since they all merit secondary education admission.

Elias noted how the emergence of universal secondary schools meant to absorb automatically promoted students from elementary level constrained secondary school administrators from asking any student to repeat, for fear of government retaliation. On the other hand, Dina revealed how schools, especially private ones, dismiss low-performing students to safeguard their academic performance levels and thus attract more students who would sustain their academic status and provide a financial gain to the school. Elias also viewed automatic promotion as a solution to class congestion and lessening the high teacher-student ratio.

School D: Within-Case Analysis Procedure

School D is a city school in Western Uganda. It is among the most prestigious and competitive schools in the nation. It is a single-sex school that has existed for more than 50 years in education service delivery. School D is government-aided, with ordinary and advanced levels, whose students are boarding. Two male participants, James and Arthur, represented the school in

this study. Like the previous three schools, I used the research questions to guide the analysis of the data that emerged from each of the participants. The individual analysis outcome from James and Arthur prepared me for the within-case analysis that brought together their shared ideas and differences, and the uniqueness of their educational experience.

Participant 1: James (Administrator)

Teaching Specialty and Leadership Experience

James has 21 years of valuable educational experience as a teacher of chemistry and mathematics at the secondary school level, with additional experience working as a class teacher and the Director of Studies. During this study, James was serving as Deputy in charge of Academics, which position placed him as one of the purposefully selected participants to represent School D in this study. My interaction with James generated five possible categories. Using Research Sub-Question 1, I generated two categories: repercussions of grade repetition, and the benefits of grade repetition and accountability to stakeholders. Research Sub-Question 2 also generated two possible categories, contributing factors toward grade repetition, and accompanying students for improved academic progress, while Research Sub-Question 3 only generated one possible category, criteria for deciding who progresses or repeats.

Repercussions of Grade Repetition

According to James, any student who fails to meet the promotional score has two choices: "to change the school or, in agreement with the parent, he is advised to repeat the class." However, James expressed how administrators worry about the psychological effects students undergo when repeating class levels. To understand the students' experiences with repeating grades, James explained how repeating students lose connections with their peers and fail to fit in with the newly promoted students into the same class, and "the school does not want to subject

such students to psychological trauma, and that is why the school advises them to try elsewhere where they can create new friends in a new environment." James was mesmerized by those students they advised to try elsewhere, excelling academically in those new schools and eventually returning to their former schools for their upper-class levels.

School Status. James was categorical when he shared that "school status and prestige" dictate what parents and students choose to do. For example, James shared how parents always agree with the school's internal system of repeating class levels, because of the need for their children to identify with such schools because of the school's status. James clarified how parents "would rather have their child repeat in senior one or senior two in School D than being told to move" to other schools. James revealed how parents whose children school administrators ask to leave a high-level status school because of poor performance become "traumatized and demotivated" especially when their neighbors come to learn about it:

> Like most of our parents, you know, we come from different backgrounds; the communities we live in are interested in knowing the details, and it becomes now like a mockery. Some of the families, when they get to know so and so's son from such and such a school has been chopped . . . [this] is traumatizing and demotivational to the parent.

According to James, to avoid such a scenario, parents will seek to retain their children within the same school, regardless of how many times he/she repeats. As a result, James noted that most academically competitive schools create annex campuses to accommodate such low academic performers and to maintain the schools' financial status. He added that, at the same time, the high academic-performing students remain on the main campuses to maintain high examination grades at the national level.

Benefits From Grade Repetition and Accountability to Stakeholders

According to James, the internal system of repeating classes helps schools to “remain accountable to stakeholders,” However, he observed that “when the majority of learners are advised to either repeat or to join other schools,” it exposes the academic weakness of such schools. According to James, the school’s adherence to its accountability to the stakeholders motivates educators to improve their instructional focus to have a smaller number of students who repeat the class level.

James also shared how the school’s financial needs enhanced the rate of class repetition levels. For example, he remarked how “government-aided schools do not get grants from the Ministry of Education and Sports,” which is why James noted that when schools “advise the learners to repeat, [it helps] maintain your enrolment [to] ensure that [the] revenue you realize is able to finance all the votes [categories]in your budget.” James reminded me that “internally generated resources [are] the only main source for school fees” that help the school to run.

Contributing Factors Toward Grade Repetition

School Expected Pass Mark. In establishing what influenced continued class level repetition among students in School D, James described how MoES desired to see “every student move from one level to another until they complete a cycle of education. [In short], the ministry does not encourage repeating.” However, he noted that that was difficult, due to numerous challenges encountered by students, parents, and the schools. As a deputy head teacher in charge of academics, James pointed out how his school sets a pass mark of 60% for every student at the ordinary level, meant to control who progresses or repeats a class level at the end of the year. James believed that academic performance and discipline are inseparable, as he noted how the

school did not tolerate any indiscipline cases when it came to end-of-year promotions. James emphasized that:

> Sometimes those who fail to adhere to the school rules and regulations, having gone through all the relevant committees, up to the Board of Governors level, can be prematurely advised to try elsewhere. Unlike for academic grounds, with discipline, we don't have any compromise. You are indiscipline in senior one, senior two, or senior three, we hardly see you coming back to advanced level.

James further noted how students undergo both internal and individual challenges that are likely to contribute to their poor academic performance. For example, James mentioned how some students waste time on other things, put less emphasis on academics, and fail to meet the pass mark. James explained how the school expects students to do due diligence in meeting their learning goals, as teachers fulfill their instructional part. According to James, students are expected to develop their reading timetables, have independent study and integrate them with study groups, and take the initiative to consult with teachers in their free time. James observed that students who do not adhere to the precepts of their academic regulations "end up being asked to either repeat or try elsewhere." According to James, his school provides all academic necessities, including "competent and qualified teachers, stocked libraries and laboratories to build hands-on experience."

James said that hands-on experience is essential since "science practical contributes a lot to the passing of the learners." According to James, the school offers weekly student formative assessments, which help to establish the level of student academic engagement and determine if a student is fulfilling all academic requirements.

Competitive Prestigious School. From James, I learned that not all students who passed through elementary levels with automatic promotion policy make it to secondary school admission lists because "very many of them fail to get the promotional aggregates to these

schools," which are competitively prestigious. Instead, they end up in the universal secondary education system which continues promoting them without being held up by examination pass marks. According to James, the challenge for students at the elementary level is the "big number of pupils [that] limits the teacher-pupil interaction." According to James, this same problem at an elementary level continues at the USE level "because of bulging numbers [with unimaginable] teacher-student ratio." Thus, the academic performance of a pupil or a student is affected when "not every learner individually is being attended to by teachers."

James pointed out a challenge of some government schools whose teachers hardly sustain their presence in school. He noted how "teachers who have been posted by government to go to those [USE] schools in a week, somebody goes there only for one or two days, and they are getting full government salary." James raised a serious concern that "some head teachers do not have control over teachers in USE schools" when the government has posted them. In addition, James pointed out a myriad challenges that impact students' academic performance at a secondary school level, which include "unavailability of teachers, lack of monitoring and supervision and lack of scholastic materials." With this in mind, James noted how "automatic promotion at UPE affects the performance more, especially at the USE schools."

Accompanying Students for Improved Academic Progress

As schools improvised different ways of passing national examinations, this study inquired from James how School D accompanied its students in their academic endeavors, and he shared how they categorize students according to their academic performance abilities. According to James, the school gives each teacher the academic history of each student to help "account for individual differences of the learners." He said that, "after assessing the performances of term one, and then term two," all slow learners are assigned to different teachers

"so that the extra work, guidance, and counseling are accorded to them" as they progress with academics. James shared that School D "advised the subject teachers to give remedial lessons and [extra] testing outside the normal teaching timetable."

James remarked how the school expected slow learners "to be committed to religiously follow the schedule for remedial teaching." James further observed how his office engages students and parents during the holidays of the second term of each academic year in "academic recovery meetings [where students and parents] come to school, meet subject teachers and administration," who they share the school's expectations and listen to both parents' and students' challenges that hinder their academic life. According to James, parents often take the extra step of contacting individual teachers to arrange private tutoring sessions to help their children improve academics, as holiday coaching in Uganda is discouraged by MoES. James said:

> after some parents have realized . . . that their children are now endangered, they even go ahead [and] contact individual teachers and they are given give some facilitation. So that now such learners are given more, I would even say extra time by those individual teachers, so that they pull up their performances, and even some of the parents go ahead over the holiday, you know. Coaching, should not be pronounced loudly in Uganda. But we know it takes place; some of the parents even engage teachers over the holiday to have the private arrangement to improve the performance of learners.

Criteria For Deciding Who Progresses or Repeats

When asked about how schools determined the fate of each student's academic progress, James said that "when you fail to meet the minimum requirements for promotion, you are advised to change school or to repeat. This is what is happening in all, almost all the schools." According to James, schools are aware that sometimes students may not meet the set pass mark, which would require schools to adjust their pass mark stance to allow more students to get promoted. For example, he revealed how his school's adjusted pass mark had never gone below

50%, even when most students did not perform to the school's expectations. Since the secondary school level has two cycles, James further shared how, at the advanced level, his school sets a pass mark of 8 points out of total required 20 points for those being promoted from senior five to senior six.

Collective Responsibility. James shared how School D created an internal system that considers repeating students as "a special project that needs special attention," and how the school involves parents of repeating students in order to forge a way to accompany these students for desired improvement. James remarked that the stakeholders who work closely with students, especially teachers who interact with students daily, are tasked with keeping close attention on students who have been earmarked for repeating or are repeating, aiming to see them overcome their academic challenges. James further said that, by the time teachers start accompanying students, they already know what the students are experiencing, since they have shared their challenges in the academic recovery meetings.

Shared System of Students' Academic Progress. When asked whether Western Ugandan schools had a shared system of determining when a student should repeat, James remarked that "in the education sector, teaching and learning, assessment are expected in every school, and in almost every school, we have fast and slow learners." James further indicated that as they advise slow learners "to change school or repeat, this happens in almost all the schools [and he affirmed that his school does not] act differently from other schools." Nevertheless, James noted of other schools that

> standards might vary, promotional average and points might vary, but there is that point at the end of the year where those who qualify move to the next level, those who do not are advised to either repeat or transfer elsewhere.

James shared how, with the introduction of the new curriculum, MoES counteracted each school's internal promotional system when it directed all secondary schools to have all senior three students progress to senior four without fail, to ease the classroom congestion caused by the new curriculum's policy of automatic promotion. However, James revealed how schools that were strict on their internal promotional standard devised means of eliminating slow learners "by tactfully advising them to move to the next level but in a different school." Even when schools set internal pass marks and admission cut-off points, James revealed how sometimes his school goes further to consider the school's location, where a potential student completed his primary school, and what he obtained at the PLE. For example, James noted how "somebody who comes with aggregate 12 is admitted based on the location of [their] former school" even when his school sets a cut-off point for admission at seven aggregates.

Participant 2: Arthur (Teacher)

Teaching Specialty and Leadership Position

Arthur has an interwoven experience of private and government-owned schools, an experience that is vital to understanding the depth and breadth of grade repetition at secondary schools in both education systems in Western Uganda. An alumnus of School D, where he teaches fine art and design, Arthur has been in the teaching field for the last 25 years, since 1999. As a teacher of art and design, Arthur was interested in hands-on subjects that strengthen the motor system of learning among students. He shared how he had spent more years teaching in a private school before joining his current school in 2018.

Arthur noted how students' attitude toward art-based subjects such as art and design was not good, and he intentionally fostered the spirit and love of the subject, which now has more students embrace it, and he shared that "there was a challenge in learners doing art and the

standards were low." Arthur was thankful to the school administrators for their profound support for his efforts to reinvigorate the students' appreciation of the hands-on experience emerging from such art subjects. Because of his invested time and energy in what he was doing as a teacher, Arthur was asked to become the head of the Department of Art and Design, and later, he was raised to be the director of studies.

Using the research questions, I analyzed the data from my interaction with Arthur to establish his grasp of the implications of grade repetition through the lenses of education costs, students' well-being, and national exam pass rates. Although the possible categories overlapped in responding to each of the three guiding research sub-questions, my analysis of the data emerging from Arthur using Research Sub-Question 1 generated one possible category, the repercussions of class-level repetition. Using Research Sub-Question 2, I accrued two possible categories, factors contributing towards repeating of class levels, and accompanying students for academic improvement. Research Sub-Question 3 generated two possible categories: criteria for deciding whom to repeat, and accompanying repeaters and the impact of automatic promotion on students' academic progress.

Repercussions of Class-Level Repetition

Arthur observed that "repeating students often share how they feel out of place, belittled, and express fear of being laughed at by other students, and live in shame." According to Arthur, repeating students "feel they have become academic dwarfs, and they opt out" of school. Although students feel demoralized, Arthur shared that some repeating students surprised the schools with outstanding performance at the end of the education cycle. For example, Arthur noted how one of the students who had previously repeated a class level "made it this year, 2022,

[as] he sat for his UCE [Uganda Certificate of Education] and scored his first grade after having repeated."

Arthur believed that most students are not slow learners, but they are swallowed up by the environment and become overwhelmed and can only benefit from counseling to lessen their challenges. He, however, noted that if students want to improve through counseling, they need to "take it in good faith." Arthur remarked how students lose sponsors willing to financially support them when such financial aid comes in late, when the school has already advised the students to repeat because "nobody would love to see colleagues move on, and then you are left behind." He further pointed out how students who persistently fail to raise tuition feel "somehow tortured [even when] parents are the ones paying fees."

Desire to Identify with School's Status. According to Arthur, parents desire to identify with the school status by bringing their children to prestigious and expensive schools, "yet their resources at home are not enough" to sustain tuition, fees, and upkeep of their children. Arthur pointed out that it was a common phenomenon among families to want to identify with successful and prestigious schools, and desire them for their children. Nevertheless, the location and status of such schools continue to push more families to the periphery of society and widen the gap between haves and have-nots, as low-income families struggle to access good educational services for their children and grandchildren.

Prestigious schools maintain internal conditions that create competitive advantage for the well-to-do families, as Arthur further noted:

> In a school of our status if you miss an exam that is already a low grade, [and failure to raise expected average] definitely the learner is going to repeat the class [and at] every end of the year we advise learners to either repeat or we advise them to go to schools where they pay little money or less fees compared to ours.

Arthur further pointed out that the school does not have enough bursaries to offer to all students, and students end up either performing poorly because of frequently being asked to go home and pick up tuition, or get stressed and lose hope in themselves and fail to concentrate. According to Arthur, such economic hardships among parents continues to affect how they remit tuition for their children in School D.

Factors Contributing To Repeating Class Levels

When asked about the issues leading to the persistence of grade repetition at a secondary school level in Western Uganda, Arthur pointed out how repeating classes was not only emphasized at a secondary school level but also at an elementary level, especially during his school time, even before UPE. Arthur shared how, in his time, "you would repeat three times to graduate to a secondary school." For example, Arthur's father could not allow him to progress to another class until he satisfied him with outstanding grades, regardless of his having met his school's internal pass mark. Arthur further noted how time constraints work against the slow learners, saying that "you find the pace they are moving at needs a lot of time, which you cannot have." In addition, some students repeat classes because of frequent illness that keeps them out of the class quite often, and "you cannot simply take on a learner on sympathy, they have to go through the system."

Environmental Shock and Adjustment. Arthur intimated that most students who fail to raise their pass mark percentage are not dull. However, he mentioned that, for some of them, this is their first time attending a town or city school with a different environment than their village schools. According to Arthur, the excitement that comes with the change of environment tends to overwhelm them and distract them from academic concentration. Environmental familiarization can be one of the remedies for some of the distracted students. Arthur also noted how students

who repeat or progress to other schools that are lower in status than their former schools, tend to perform better.

Even though this study did not focus on how schools oriented their students at admission, it is vital to ascertain the impact such a new change in the school environment can create in students, and how it reflects on the rate of grade repetition among students. Arthur gave an example of his cousin who was in School D, but who could not keep up with the academic pace. On advising him to join a rural school, Arthur was surprised by the tremendous academic strides his cousin made because of the conducive environment.

Attitude Change. Arthur's experience as an alumnus of the school revealed how students' attitude toward art-based and science subject was low. According to Arthur, students pay less attention to the subjects they do not like, putting themselves at risk of not meeting the internal percentage pass mark average, especially as students had a phobia of science subjects "and particularly chemistry," which led to more failures in both internal and national examinations. To make matters worse, Arthur noted how the government decided to make all science subjects compulsory, increasingly making students' fear real and vivid, it was like "putting a burden on them." Arthur further noted how some students give all they have to so-called complicated subjects, like the sciences, and end up suffocating the subjects that would have strengthened their ability to meet the pass mark.

According to Arthur, the neglected subjects "are supposed to be boosters to ensure that they give you a better grade to progress to the next level." Arthur remarked how much academic negligence was due to "some bit of pride from students" who think they are pure scientists when they neglect the booster subjects. Nevertheless, Arthur observed how "some students come from families with medical doctors, and when they join our school, they tend to emulate their family

background" by paying less attention to art subjects. Arthur revealed how students' pride and family influence tended to see few students embrace subjects like art and design, where Arthur, as a fine art and design teacher, intentionally fostered the spirit and love of the subject among students and has seen more students embrace it. Arthur shared that "there was a challenge in learners doing art and the standards were low." Arthur praised this department for providing skills through art and design to every student passing through his school, and observed how those subjects "are selling in the school because most parents want to see their children really get a skill."

Accompanying Students for Academic Improvement

Arthur believed that teachers "cannot run away from counseling learners [as many students] present a lot of challenges, some from home, others from within the school." According to Arthur, teachers should be open to not only cognitively accompany students but to also be present to listen to the personal and individual challenges emerging from their families and from within the school, to enable students to concentrate fully on their studies. Arthur suggested that student guidance and counseling has often focused on such questions as "What is their mission? What are they training to be? What is going to be their career?" He further shared how it was not by accident that he chose to become a teacher, as he said, "for me, it was a choice, and that is why I am able to serve without any reservation."

Position of Instructional Process on Grade Repetition. Arthur shared how instructional methodologies have no relationship with the rate of students' grade repetition, and he affirmed that they have plenty of teachers readily available for students' learning. However, Arthur pointed out how the teacher-student ratio was high, which would slightly cause strains in individualized instruction. Arthur acknowledged the possibility of different personalities among

teachers and how they deliver their class content, which could hinder students' rate of grasping and would eventually affect a number of students.

Criteria For Deciding Who to Repeat, and Accompanying Repeaters

When asked about how School D made academic decisions that affected the progress of their students, Arthur shared how the school's standard "has always been, we do not just exclude learners, we give you two options. You either progress to another school, or we retain you and you repeat a class." Although Arthur noted how few students decided to repeat in the same school, more students opted to repeat or progress from other schools. However, Arthur noted how the school's decision on students' academic progress involved different stakeholders, such as school administrators, class teachers, parents, and students themselves. Arthur pointed out how such academic decisions were preceded by "recovery academic meetings [intended] to bring the parents on board . . . and the learners who have failed to raise the grades."

Consequently, Arthur observed how his school puts a promotion pass mark at 60%, and anyone below such a mark qualifies to attend the recovery academic meetings. According to Arthur, when parents attend such recovery meetings, they often suggest remedial classes for their children. Arthur said that, during the remedial classes, "we attach these learners to what we call mentor teachers [for support] specifically to give them guidance and instill hope." Before recovery academic meetings happen, the school keeps parents informed through the children's class teachers, whom the school mandates to frequently contact parents to update them on their children's academic progress. Arthur explained the rationale of class teachers being in touch with parents, as the school "found it important not to surprise the parents with report cards, yet you have never told them that your child has been weak."

Impact of Automatic Promotion on Students' Academic Progress

Arthur acknowledged the impact the automatic promotion policy has on students' grade repetition at a secondary school level, especially as secondary schools now admit students as young as 12 years old because of massive promotions at a primary level. Arthur shared how, in his secondary school experience, teachers "would ensure that at least you leave a class when you are already conversant or when you have covered all the materials" or exhibited the readiness for the next class level.

Within-Case Emerging Categories (School D)

Two participants, James and Arthur, represented School D, and their extensive teaching and leadership experiences informed this study. James' position as deputy headteacher in charge of academics with 21 years of professional experience provided an invaluable and informative perspective on the study phenomenon. The presence of Arthur brought the intertwined experience of 25 years working in private and government schools. In addition, Arthur brought his experience as a director of studies who oversees the academic regulation of student's learning success. Arthur added the value of being an alumnus of School D, whose experience as a student and now as a teacher and a leader reinforced my understanding of the depth of the grade repetition phenomenon in the school.

When asked about the perception of educational stakeholders on the implications of grade repetition in School D, Arthur set the stage with his experience of the art and design subject matter, whose students struggled with a negative attitude to the subject due to its art-based rather than science-based position. The internal comparison of each participant's experience of the study problem yielded four emerging categories, as shown in Table 5.

The within-case analysis indicated how each educator's experience of the implications of grade repetition brought in a common understanding of the impact of the phenomenon, which reinforced my understanding of it in the context of School D. It also showed differences based on each participant's position in school and how they interacted with the study phenomenon.

Table 5

School D: Within-Case Matrix of Subcategories and Emerging Categories

Arthur	James	
Possible Subcategories	Possible Subcategories	Emerging Categories
Factors contributing toward repeating of class-levels	Contributing factors to grade repetition	Factors contributing to class-level repetition. • Impact of automatic promotion on students' academic progress
	Benefits from grade repetition and accountability to stakeholders	
Repercussions of class level repetition	Repercussions of grade repetition	Repercussions of grade repetition
Accompanying students for academic improvement	Accompanying students for improved academic progress	Accompanying students for academic improvement • Grade repetition and accountability to stakeholders
Criteria for deciding who to repeat and accompanying repeaters	Criteria for deciding who to repeat or progress	Decision criteria for class level repetition
Impact of automatic promotion on students' academic progress		

Although various categories emerged from each research question, there was an intersecting of analysis outcomes in each category that collectively responded to the three

research sub-questions. Research Sub-Question 1 generated a single category, the repercussions of grade repetition. Research Sub-Question 2 brought forth two emerging categories, factors contributing to class-level repetition, and accompanying students for academic improvement, while Research Sub-Question 3 generated two other emerging categories: decision criteria for class-level repetition, and the impact of automatic promotion on students' academic progress.

Emerging Category 1: Repercussions of Grade Repetition

James and Arthur concurred on the psychological impact on their students of repeating grades. Even though the they both viewed repeating class levels as having benefits for some students but not all, James revealed that the repeating students who seek admission to other schools avoid the isolation that comes with peer separation or the feeling of being demeaned they encounter when repeating in the same school. Arthur revealed how repeating students' feelings of belittlement and shame affected their self-esteem, because they viewed themselves as academic dwarfs or failures compared to their counterparts and peers.

James expressed concern about how repeating students become loners, which plunges them into academic isolation and self-hate. While Arthur suggested counseling as the best tool to help slow learners and boost their self-esteem, James suggested the option of students repeating in other schools as the remedy for the psychological effects and for facilitating their academic improvement. Arthur did note how counseling could only be helpful when students took the initiative to embrace it in good faith.

As Arthur focused on how financial struggles kept students worried about their performance and fear repeating class levels, James observed how parents' need to identify with the school's status further exacerbated the impact of grade repetition on students, as their parents struggled to remit tuition and fees to keep their children in school. James further noted how such

parents, whose interest was to associate themselves with the school's prestigious name, tended to force their children to repeat classes as often as possible to safeguard their family names and save face and status in their homesteads.

Emerging Category 2: Factors Contributing to Class-Level Repetition

Arthur and James observed how it was a necessary evil for schools to implement grade repetition due to academic competition in the Ugandan education system. As James pointed out, School D sets an internal cutoff performance percentage for end-year promotions at 60%, even though Arthur noted how not meeting the internal pass mark did not indicate the dullness of a student. Although Arthur remarked how schools, for many years, have been enforcing the repetition of class levels from elementary to high school, he noted how most schools tended to ignore the impact of a new environment on some students, even as teachers accompany them through teaching and learning processes.

According to James, poor academic performance goes hand-in-hand with individual students' discipline, as he asserted that School D did not tolerate any indiscipline cases, which formed a basis for refusing some students progress to the following class levels. However, Arthur revealed how some parents further reinforced repeating classes by demanding that School D not use mediocre pass mark percentages to promote their children. According to Arthur, most elite parents demanded an increase in internal pass marks to above 60%.

Even though James acknowledged how students wasted their academic time on different things that contributed to their academic failure, Arthur was more specific. He pointed out how students from rural schools joining urban schools took more time to familiarize themselves with their new school environment, impeding their academic journey. Both James and Arthur concurred on how school status determined the type of students retained, promoted, or admitted.

For example, James noted how most students under automatic promotion programs at the elementary level hardly achieve the needed examination grades for School D because of its academic competitiveness.

Arthur observed how parents wanting to identify with prestigious schools ignore their financial situation as they desire for their children to identify with high-status schools and end up failing to meet tuition and fee demands, interrupting the academic performance of their children. He added that prestigious schools, such as School D, set high internal expectations that encourage academic competition and, most times, eliminate low performers by repeating class levels or advising them to seek admission elsewhere.

James noted how most students end up repeating because of a lack of individualized instruction due to the high student-to-teacher ratio and high teacher absenteeism, mostly in elementary and universal secondary schools. Arthur added that students' lack of equal attention to all science and art-based subjects continue to increase student failures and repetition of class levels. For example, Arthur noted how many students had a phobia around natural sciences, when such subjects were at the forefront of determining their overall academic performance.

Emerging Category 3: Accompanying Students for Academic Improvement

The study revealed how School D accompanied repeating and slow learners to enhance their academic progress. James and Arthur concurred on how guidance and counseling took precedence in helping students realize their academic duties and endeavors. However, Arthur remarked how teachers needed to go beyond cognitive empowerment to holistic attention to students' needs to help them overcome external barriers to their academic life. On the same note, James re-echoed how School D involve parents in academic recovery meetings and establishing remedial lessons targeting poorly performing students.

Even though Arthur mentioned how some teachers' personalities and instructional activities could hinder students' academic progress, James and Arthur concurred that most teachers were committed to doing their jobs, as they focused on individualized learning. However, James noted how parents went beyond internal class remedial classes and contacted individual teachers for external academic coaching, even when it was going against MoES regulations. Moreover, James shared how School D followed up on each student's academic progress annually and shared such individualized reports with respective teachers mandated by the school to examine such students' academic lives closely.

Grade Repetition and Accountability to Stakeholders. Although James positively viewed class-level repetition as the school's attempt to create academic accountability for the stakeholders, he further noted how schools encourage repetition to sustain their financial gains and break even their budget. In contrast, Arthur blamed students' pride and show-off as science geniuses, which ended up suffocating other nonscience subjects. According to Arthur, such pride emanates from a student's family background, especially if parents were interested in science rather than arts subjects.

Emerging Category 4: Decision Criteria for Class Level Repetition

When asked how School D made its academic decisions on repeating students, James and Arthur said that internal academic guidelines set a yardstick for judging each student's ability to progress to or remain in the same class environment. For example, as James noted how internal examination pass marks guided them to filter out low student performers, Arthur noted how School D followed a two-way decision to allow students to repeat or be dismissed because of internal examination outcomes and discipline. James added how School D sometimes became lenient to students when most students failed examinations by lowering the internal pass mark at

both ordinary and advanced levels. Both participants concurred that the decisions to repeat class levels involved several stakeholders, including parents and students, administrators, and class teachers.

In addition to a collective decision among stakeholders, James and Arthur further concurred on how the school created a system focused on helping those repeating or intended to repeat. Although James described the concept of a special project that needed special attention, Arthur and James described and referred to the same recovery academic meeting system, and they both believed in the value of student academic accompaniment. They mentioned how the school attached slow learners and repeaters to mentor teachers for individualized help focused on each student's academic improvement. When asked about how other schools implemented such academic promotion decisions, James noted how schools in the region had varying academic standards based on their status, and thus implemented differently their decisions on grade repetition.

Impact of Automatic Promotion on Students' Academic Progress. According to James, many students who pass through an automatic promotion system at the elementary level often fail to raise the required entry points for prestigious schools, a factor that continues to affect their internal academic performance. Arthur expressed concern about the lack of academic readiness among the automatically promoted students who passed through the elementary level without being held accountable by internal examinations. Even though James viewed automatic promotion as helping to decongest classrooms, he also blamed the overwhelming number of students in each class. James noted how student bulging numbers in the universal secondary schools and elementary schools made it impossible for individualized learning. He further shared

how the schools lessened the essence of internal examinations in determining students' progress from one class to the next as they adhered to the strictness of automatic promotion policy.

Analysis of Field Observation and Document Analysis Data

School A: Talking Compound

School A is a co-educational institution for girls and boys. Its students engage in different educational clubs as part of student-to-student interaction and collaborative learning. Different compound signages indicated the students' level of engagement in different academic endeavors outside of their classroom. For example, as the school implemented learning technologies based on MoES requirements, the visible Information and Communication Technology (ICT) signage invited the community "to fight digital divide" (Figure 3). The school keeps connections with its former students (alumni) with its mission of "establishing a strong, active community" and with its vision of "bettering the best" (Figure 3).

Figure 3

ICT and Alumni Club Signage

The school fosters a scientific spirit among its students using the motto, "aspire to inspire with science" and a mission "to discover scientific citizens." Figure 4 demonstrates students' science club spirit.

Beyond the teacher-student interaction in a classroom environment, the school further encouraged students to engage with other regional and national schools through debating clubs. Based on the signage, the interactive debating time and scientific rigor fostered respect and dialogue among the youth and opened doors for their exposure to and expansion of collaborative engagement. With the various educational signages in the school compound, School A was at the forefront of actively encouraging its students to continue learning from and challenging each other to better their education pursuits. For example, the debating club encouraged students to hone their speaking and critical thinking skills beyond teachers' supervised learning.

Figure 4

Science Club Signage, School A

The school debate club's mission guided students "to enhance public speaking and academic excellence via ideology and eloquence." The school further integrated faith with academics as an integral part of keeping school families appreciative of God's providence in what they do. The motto of a scripture union, "we must live like people who belong to the light,"

focused on strengthening students' well-being in their quest for God, while the signpost of the geography club emphasized protection of the environment (Figure 5). However, during the walk-around ethnography, I discovered that the school proprietors had built the school's advanced-level section in a wetland, contrary to the call for environmental protection. Even though I was lucky to meet one of the school proprietors who guided my walk-around observation, she thought I had come to close the school because of its location in a wetland. My conversation with her revealed how she had been arrested on different occasions by the National Environmental Management Authority for breaching wetland laws.

Figure 5

Various School A Signage

School B: Talking Compound

As a requirement from the MoES, signs about COVID 19 are well displayed throughout the school to raise awareness of the dangers of COVID 19 to the school and its surrounding communities. The compact nature of the school setting and steep gradient did not create a conducive environment for students to enjoy basking in the sun outside the classrooms. It was also evident that some signages were not firmly planted in the compound, as some only leaned against walls. For example, the signage for the scripture union, even though meant to welcome visitors into school, was leaning at the front of the dormitory behind the school canteen.

The school's signage encouraging its students to embrace the notion of saving lives through groups like the Uganda Red Cross Society was vividly visible in the compound. The school motto, "educate for a difference," led the school's mission to bring desired academic change in students and their families. The school also upheld the students' need to critically engage in issues important to them and their surrounding communities through debating clubs. Figures 6 and 7 show some of the signage expressing School B's talking compound.

Figure 6

COVID-19 Signage, School B

Figure 7

Various School B Signage

School C: Talking Compound

At the school entrance, the motto, "Action, not words" welcomed anyone entering the school premises. Such a signage implied how the school focused on helping students translate

what they learn into action. Like other schools, educational signages littered School C's compound, acting as educational guides to the school community and to visitors. The Kiswahili club encouraged respect for female education by inviting others to support girls attending formal education. The school's vision, "a center for quality education and exemplary discipline," and its mission, "to provide cost-effective, purposeful co-education for self-reliance and national development," put more emphasis on communal and individual responsibility in pursuing formal education. In order to train students to care for the environment, signposts such as "Don't litter the school environment" constantly reminded the school community and visitors to respect their surroundings by keeping the environment clean.

Additionally, the school administration provided venues in the compound, such as permanent benches with desks, where teachers and students would informally meet and interact. The presence of water tanks for clear water in the compound signified how School C was mindful of students' health and good hygiene. Such provision prioritized "sanitation and hygiene," as indicated on the signage. Even though the debating club considered its motto "the battle of gifted tongues," it reechoed the need to sharpen one's critical thinking and be articulate in interacting with others on any given learning topic. The school further encouraged its students to become patriotic for their country through the patriotism club, which would help them build Uganda as a collective entity. The school also encouraged students to embrace their faith through the scripture union, whose signpost symbolized God as the light of their educational path. Figures 8 and 9 portray how School C kept its students engaged, even outside the classroom walls.

Figure 8

Various School C Instructional Signage

Figure 9

Various School C Recreational and Inspirational Signage

School D: Talking Compound

School D is a faith-based secondary school in a city area, with faith values vividly showing at every corner of its compound, expressing what the school community stood for regarding its academics and student well-being. For example, instructional signage such as "to be a great person, be a great student, behavior pronounces your future, and extraordinary efforts bring extraordinary results" indicated how the school encouraged its students to take charge of their education. I also came to appreciate how School D strengthened African identity through the Pan-African Student Association, which embraced the strength of African unity.

Being a faith-based school, most of its signposts indicated the divine relationship among school community members through "the fear of the Lord [as] the beginning of wisdom." The talking compound indicated students' involvement in the scripture union movement, keeping them close to God in all their learning endeavors. I was not surprised to see a signpost that read, "Prayer is a powerful weapon," because of the school's faith foundation. School D's signpost reading "education transforms families" highlighted the belief in communal living, and the school further advocated eliminating any stigma in the school by creating a conducive learning environment where students felt at home. Such an idea extended the familial relationship beyond the school community.

School D had a place for parents in their learning community, as indicated by the signage "Respect your parents," which reflected a collaborative nature between the school and the students' families. Some of the inscriptions further indicated the communal learning style, like "we are here to pass," which indicated how, collectively, not one student was to remain unattended academically. The school also embraced individual responsibility through such inscription as "after this year, I will not blame anyone for my failure." School D encouraged

students to focus beyond their current state of life to appreciate what education could bring them. For example, the signpost "See far" invited the student community to consider their current educational embrace as preparing them for tomorrow.

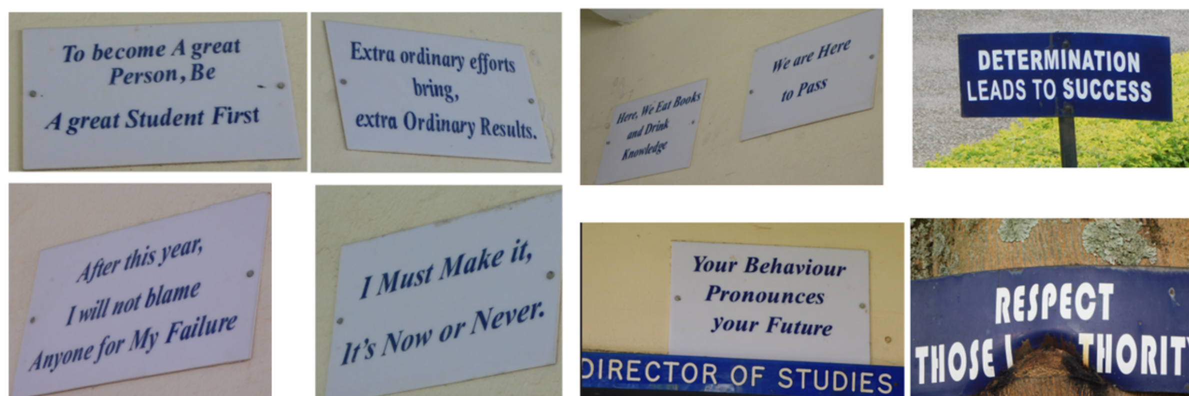
School signposts indicated that each student took personal responsibility to achieve what brought them to school, and had a conviction that they would succeed. The school was mindful of student discipline reminding students "Your behavior pronounces your future." Seeing such signage infused with the "Director of Studies" placard further confirmed how the school believed that academics and discipline went hand in hand for students' success. Consequently, the school was morally responsible in calling the attention of its students to the dangers of promiscuity and the consequences of HIV and AIDS. Figures 10 and 11 show how School D's signage engaged its students in appreciating being part of the education community through a constant reminder of their duties as knowledge seekers.

Figure 10

Various School D Instructional Signage

Figure 11

Various School D Inspirational Signage



Analysis of Field Observation Data

All four schools embraced the power of talking compounds as a constant reminder to their education communities of what the schools expected of them. What was common in all schools was the emphasis on faith, through scripture union as a faith-based club that brought all students of all faiths to worship together. Whether the school was government-aided or privately owned, the presence of the scripture union signpost signified how God was at the forefront of everything such school communities did. Apart from School D, whose compound did not indicate a signpost for a debating club, the schools fronted debate for students' critical and logical thinking engagement. For instance, anyone could read the school's mind on the essence of a debating club through phrases such as "the battle of gifted tongues" (School C) or "via dialogue, be the best" (School A). School A was more elaborate as it articulated its debating mission "to enhance public speaking and academic excellence via dialogue and eloquence." Even though School B had a signpost indicating the presence of a debating club, the signage did not carry any inscription.

Schools B and D encouraged their students to embrace good humanitarian causes through the Uganda Red Cross Society, while School C strengthened its students' African unity and

identity through the patriotic club. There were similarities between schools A and C on care for the environment. School A embraced the geography club, while School C reminded the school community and visitors to "avoid littering" the school compound as part of protecting the environment. Overall, School D's talking walks and compound focused more on students' academic discipline through personal and collective responsibility. What appeared unique to School C was its advocacy for young girls' formal education and its emphasis on "action, not words" through its succinct motto. Lastly, even though all schools talked about guidance and counseling being at the forefront of accompanying students, only School D displayed such a sign in its compound to emphasize its essence.

Analysis of Data Emerging from Document Analysis Guide

Ugandan secondary school education conducts national examinations at two levels: Ordinary (senior four) and Advanced (senior six). After the national examinations, no school controls who among their former senior four students [alumni]would return to the same school unless they choose to return to the advanced level. Therefore, this analysis eliminated senior enrollment, leading to senior five, because such data fell out of each school's control as students sought to attend schools of their choice based on their national academic performance. The data from the document analysis of Schools B, C, and D presented student enrollment and progression from 2021 through 2024. I chose stable data after COVID-19 (which affected academic rhythm between 2019 through 2020) to better grasp students' academic progress within the participating schools. Table 6 reflects only three schools since the administrator of the fourth school hesitated to share student enrollment data.

As James, explains, schools at this level of education, such as School D, did not recruit during this period. Instead, James noted how School D forced students at all levels to repeat their

classes, leading to identical data for 2020 and 2021. This decision went against the advice from MoES, which recommended that schools promote all students rather than eliminating any. Therefore, understanding the unique circumstances schools faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was crucial for this study.

Table 6 serves a crucial role in visualizing students' academic progress within the 3 academic years of 2021 through 2024. It highlights key areas where student numbers either remained static or drastically dropped based on the internal cut-off points per school. This visualization aids in understanding the trends and patterns in student enrollment and progression. The table further shows undulating numbers in School C.

Table 6

Trends in Student Enrollment and Progress in Schools B, C and D

		School B- Student Enrollment and Progress from 2021 to 2024 (Private)												
2021 Class Enrolment		Dropped	Promoted to 2022		2022 Class Enrolment		**Dropped**	Promoted to 2023		2023 Class Enrolment		**Dropped**	Promoted to 2024	
S1	364	-68	S2	296	S2	296	**0**	S3	296	S3	232	**-5**	S4	227
S2	221	-18	S3	203	S3	203	**-7**	S4	196	S5	189		S6	----
S3	197	-7	S4	190	S5	58	**-5**	S6	53					
S5	42	0	S6	42										
	School C-Student Enrollment and Progress from 2021 to 2024 (USE School)													
S1	92	0	S2	92	S2	93	**+1** *then* **-2**	S3	95	S3	107	**+12** *then* **-1**	S4	106
S2	98	0	S3	98	S3	110	**+12** *then* **-2**	S4	108	S5	129	**0**	S6	129
S3	118	0	S4	118	S5	60	**-3**	S6	57					
S5	50	0	S6	50										
	School D- Student Enrollment and Progress from 2021 to 2024 (Government-Aided)													
S1	300	-11	S2	289	S2	289	**-8**	S3	281	S3	281		S4	-----
S2	309	-2	S3	307	S3	307	**-88**	S4	219	S5	219		S6	-----
S3	262	-57	S4	205	S5	227	**-31**	S6	196					
S5	169	0	S6	169										

Table 6 shows the trend of students' enrollment and academic progress, based on whether the school was privately owned or government aided. School B, a private school, indicated a drop of 68 students as they progressed from senior one in 2021 to senior two in 2022. Even though the data showed enrollment stability from 2022 to 2023 for senior two to three, only five students dropped out as students progressed to senior four in 2024. A more significant number of students did not progress to upper classes in 2021, compared to students' progress in 2023.

The trend in students' progress changed with School C, reflecting its status as a universal secondary education school that the government established to absorb students from elementary levels who studied under an automatic promotion policy. Table 6 reveals how student promotional numbers remained static from 2021 to 2022. However, School C was open to enrolling more students in all class levels, and Table 6 shows slight increments and a slight drop in student enrollment between 2022 and 2023. Moreover, School C's enrollment and promotions between 2023 and 2024 reflected the same trend. This student enrollment trend in USE schools indicates the rigidity and strictness of government regulations against the individualized internal promotion systems of secondary schools that benefit from the government's financial support.

School D presented a different case altogether, as dropping student numbers were higher compared to Schools B and C. School D was among the prestigious schools in the region and in a city setting that gave it more strength in determining how to control its student enrollment to remain relevant to the public without losing face. James, a study participant from School D, explained the enrollment and academic progress trends in his school as a deputy head teacher in charge of academics. According to James, the significant drop in student numbers from senior three to senior four and then senior five to senior six was due to the internal filtering system, as

School D determined who among the students was fit for candidacy to achieve desired outcomes at the national level.

While comparing the number of students who did not progress from senior three to four between 2021 and 2022 in School D with the student enrollment of School C in the same class level, I discovered how half of the students in senior three in School C were not promoted to the next class level. School D had the highest student enrollment numbers in all three considered years compared to schools B and C (Table 6). It also eliminated more students from its system yearly compared to the other two schools. Even though School D was government-aided, its prestigious nature controlled its internal academic decisions due to its competitive nature.

Analytical Summary of Within-Case Analysis Stage

The three research sub-questions guided my data analysis process of four schools, in turn guided by the purpose statement, exploring how education stakeholders understood the implications of grade repetition at the secondary school level, and using the lens of individualism-collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) as my theoretical framework. The four participating secondary schools in Western Uganda included two privately owned schools (Schools A & B) and two government-aided schools (Schools C & D).

Research Sub-Question 1 asked, What are parents and the community's perceptions about the cost implications of grade repetition within Western Uganda's secondary school education system? Guided by data from 2021 through 2024, the information on students' grade repetition indicated how School D eliminated more students each year compared to other schools because of its competitive, prestigious status and strict internal promotional system. Although Schools D and C were government-aided, School C followed the government regulations on promotions more closely, as indicated in the document analysis data. Unlike privately owned schools, School

C found it hard to dismiss or force a student to repeat any grade for fear of government reprisal. The three schools (A, B & D) only involved parents in promotional decision-making for informational purposes rather than equal participation in the student's academic fate.

School C strictly followed the guidance of parents, for fear that parents would bear extra financial burden if the government withdrew the tuition funding for their repeating children. Also, the school used parents as a shield against any negative response from the government through MoES. All participants concurred that repeating grades caused financial burdens to parents/guardians and schools and further emotionally impacted students due to their separation from peers and classmates. As School D promoted tutoring or holiday academic coaching of students regardless of its financial impact, School C embraced more remedial lessons taught at awkward hours, inconveniencing students before morning assembly and after regular day class hours in late evening or after dinner. Although Dina justified that such remedial lessons gave students ample time to revise and consult with teachers, she did not mention how hectic it was for students to endure and sustain such a tight instructional schedule.

All participants concurred that the Ugandan education system was examination-oriented and controlled every school's instructional methodology. Such a challenge encouraged academic competition and accelerated grade repetition among schools. However, most participants shared how prestigious schools made it even worse due to their strict admission criteria and internal promotional systems. Only School C emphasized the parental position in promotional decision-making for two reasons: students' loss of government sponsorship and government reprisals. Otherwise, School D, a government-aided school, did not put a financial perspective into their grade repetition decisions. Like School D, other private schools only considered the parental position as informative rather than decisional binding.

Like the study participants from schools B and C, School A's Francis complained about the constraining instructional resources that did not allow individualized instruction. Moreover, as study participants from School C expressed how students struggled with rural settling challenges of financial incapacitation, study participants from School B added how female students experienced a greater impact from grade repetition because of age, body size, and family gender discrimination. Consequently, as all schools considered the teacher's position vital in individualized instruction, study participants from Schools B and D expressed worries about the teachers' personalities and instructional styles as part of academic challenges for students. Unlike in other government-aided schools that used discipline to evade government reprisals for repeating or dismissing students, James noted how his school (School D) did not compromise with student discipline. School D upheld student discipline seriously as a cornerstone of their academic performance.

Research Sub-Question 2 was, What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the impact of the current grade repetition system on students' self-efficacy? When I asked study participants how schools considered the impact of grade repetition on students' self-efficacy through data analysis, I learned how all schools believed in students' learning from inside and outside the classroom. Even though all participants shared that their schools accompanied their students mainly through guidance and counseling, it was only School D that vividly showed its commitment to it, both through physical indicators of signage on guidance and counseling but also through the formation of recovery meetings with struggling students in the company of teachers and parents. However, all schools recommended remedial lessons, guidance, and counseling to remedy poor academic achievement. Although Schools D and B emphasized more

of the student's individualized learning needs, School D encouraged holiday coaching/tutoring despite going against the education ministry's mandate.

All schools expressed their deep faith connection in educational service delivery. However, School D's faith was more pronounced in its talking compound signposts. Even though all schools expressed how they cared about the struggling students but remained firm in their promotional decisions, School C's head teacher left weak students to luck whenever their parents disagreed with the school's repeating decisions. An expression of the "I do not care" tendency of the head teacher at School C overshadowed the students' educational accomplishments. Although School D was the only single-sex school, it was only in schools A and B that participants pointed out the impact of repeating class levels on female students than their male counterparts.

While Dina noted how some students in School C were weak, and that even repeating classes would hardly grant them academic improvement, Corinnes (School B) concurred and added that any student was prone to fail exams. Nevertheless, most participants hinted at the challenge of bias among students toward natural science subjects. Other participants, however, expressed bias to have impacted more female students, as most male teachers hardly believed girls could compete favorably with their male counterparts. Dina viewed student-student interaction as vital for facilitating free interaction without fear of being judged.

Francis worried about the repercussions of repeating grades rather than the act of class-level repetition itself. Even though Francis supported the repetition of grades, he acknowledged how students became laughingstocks, and consequently embarrassed and isolated. Worse still, Francis mentioned how some parents mocked their children for repeating class levels.

Nevertheless, Francis said that some students felt entitled to promotion even when their grades did not warrant it.

Research Sub-Question 3 was, What are administrators' and PTA chairpersons' understanding of the impact of social promotion policies on national exam pass rates and related implications? This study revealed how each school had a promotional policy based on an internal examination pass mark percentage. Data analysis revealed that School D had the highest cutoff of 60%, while the rest of the schools considered their minimum cutoff as 50%. However, there was a lack of uniformity among participating schools in implementing grade repetition procedures.

Four of the 10 study participants viewed automatic promotion policy at the elementary level as having nothing to do with grade repetition at the secondary school level, and they argued that all secondary school students merited admission to their respective schools. Nevertheless, all participants agreed that laxity in academic commitment, due to the lower impact of internal examinations at the elementary level, led to more students joining USE schools because they could not raise the required admission points for prestigious schools like School D.

Although Francis revealed how most students who struggled with restrictive internal examinations in private schools sought admission in USE schools, James noted how most students emerging from elementary schools with automatic promotion policies ended up in USE schools for failing to meet the competitive admission grades for prestigious schools. Dina noted that, because of government regulations, the grade repetition concept happened more in private than in government-aided schools. Nevertheless, like most participants, Dina advocated for grade repetition to help struggling students overcome possible endemic class repetition problems.

Although School C had an internal promotion system, parents' decisions took precedence for fear of government reprisal.

Even if the government did not subject School A to the automatic promotion policy, Francis would not support it, as he expressed that "for us, we do not see an achievement of getting promoted day and night, yet they are not achieving" anything. Unlike Francis, Dina, and Corinnes, who only advocated for students to repeat within the same school, James' and Arthur's of School D believed that when students repeat from other schools, they perform better as a result of a change of environment as long as the parents and students embraced it in good faith. Additionally, Dina and Francis disagreed with the government's decision not to allow students to repeat, as students needed more academic improvement through repeating class levels.

Stage One and Stage Two of Cross-Case Analysis

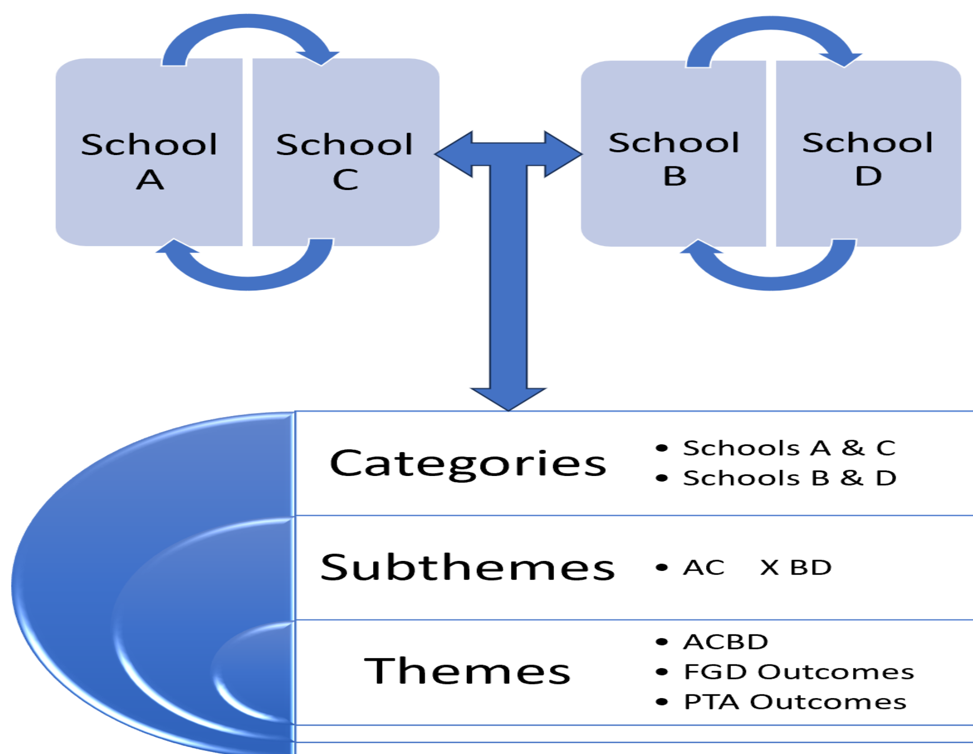
As I synthesized the depth and breadth of the implications of grade repetition on four secondary schools in Western Uganda, this stage one of cross-case analysis benefited from the varying perspectives of study participants from each school, and how those participants expressed their schools' differences and similarities on how they experienced and handled the study phenomenon. This study benefited from each school's status as either privately owned or government-aided and how they implemented their internal academic systems that determined each student's academic progress.

This first stage of cross-case analysis focused on the duo interaction of Schools AC and BD (government-aided and privately owned schools, respectively) that culminated into the overall quadrupled interaction of ACBD to create emerging subthemes. In order to obtain the themes that governed the overall understanding of the study problem in all four secondary schools as the second stage of the cross-case analysis, I analyzed the interactive nature of the

outcome of ACBD, focus group discussions, and two PTA chairpersons to create a comprehensive understanding of the depth and breadth of the implications of grade repetition on educational stakeholders with the focus on educational costs, student self-efficacy, and the national examination pass rates. Figure 12 shows the graphical representation of cross-case analysis procedures.

Figure 12

Graphical Layout of Cross-Case Analysis



Stage One of Cross-Case Analysis

The overall analysis of cumulative participants' experiences from four schools followed the guidance of the three main research sub-questions to help deepen my understanding of how all the schools shared similar or different experiences of the implications of grade repetition, but also to establish surprising nuances each school brought to the study.

Schools A and C: Cross-Case Analysis

The analysis across the cases benefited from private and government-oriented schools as the participants shared their experiences of the implications of grade repetition in their schools' environments. I used this first step of cross-case analysis progress to ascertain the outstanding differences and similarities across private and government-aided schools as a step to learning across all four schools. During this analysis process, Category 1, the impact of grade repetition on educational stakeholders responded to Research Sub-Question 1, while Categories 2 and 3 (factors contributing to students' grade repetition, and schools' approach to the needs of slow and repeating students) emerged under Research Sub-Question 2. I developed Categories 4 and 5 (schools' criteria for deciding on students' academic status, and the impact of automatic promotion on students' academic progress) from Research Sub-Question 3.

Category 1: Impact of Grade Repetition on Educational Stakeholders

Notwithstanding each school's concern with parents' low-income status and their struggle to remit their children's school dues, study participants at Schools A and B further acknowledged the struggles of age and body changes female students encountered when they continued to repeat classes, compared to male students. School A participants also revealed how the late school entry of some students whose age bracket had outgrown the secondary school level became a barrier to such students who repeated classes and could hardly fit in subsequent class levels because of age and personal wants.

Schools A and C participants observed how repeating students felt isolated, humiliated, and could hardly fit among their peer groups, which forced more female students into self-hatred. Participants at School A further pointed out how teachers' instructional input hardly helped students because of overwhelming numbers in a classroom environment. They also noted that

repeating class levels at Schools A and C did not guarantee that students would improve, even when they emphasized how students often expressed willingness to repeat.

Category 2: Factors Contributing to Students' Grade Repetition

Schools A and C participants suggested that there was a variation in schools' environments, serving as catchment areas for their targeted student recruitment. School A was in a semi-urban area with access to road networks for easy school access. On the other hand, School C's location placed it in a hard-to-reach zone with remote surroundings as the catchment area for student recruitment. Different school locations resulted in differences in how the two schools encountered the implications of students' repeating class levels. The two schools' participants expressed how students' inability to meet schools' targeted internal pass mark percentages played a significant role in determining the schools' course of action on their academic status.

However, School C participants pointed out how repeating class levels was more pronounced in private schools than in government-aided schools, due to stringent rules from MoES that spotlighted government schools. Even though the two schools painted a picture of financial constraints among their parents, School A was concerned with overwhelming student-teacher ratios that suffocated individualized instruction, as teachers lacked ample time to meet each student's needs. School C participants pointed out frequent absenteeism among its students due to the rural setting, which was quite different from School A, whose students' infrequent class attendance resulted from ill-health among students. Only School C participants pointed out the challenge of unequipped libraries and laboratories that failed to support compulsory subjects such as science and mathematics, which determined, for a large part, the promotional pass marks.

Category 3: Schools' Approach to the Needs of Slow and Repeating Students

As School A focused more on guidance and counseling to strengthen students' self-confidence, School C emphasized the importance of teachers' presence in each student's academic life for improved academic achievement. Even though School A participants viewed repeating class levels as vital for students to strategically refocus their academic attention, School C participants saw the need for more remedial lessons, teacher-mentoring, and frequent internal quizzes and tests as boosters to students' academic stride.

However, School A participants viewed the collaboration between the school and parents as a building block to students' regaining academic confidence through collective support and intervention. Even though School C participants viewed integrating theory and practice as a step to helping students appreciate what they learned, the school embraced group discussions for interactive learning. However, School C participants pointed out how some teachers needed to change their instructional methodologies to meet each student's needs.

Category 4: Schools' Criteria for Deciding on Students' Academic Status

In exploring how schools decide for a student to either progress or repeat a given class level, Schools A and C participants pointed out the importance of parents' or guardians' participation in determining the next step of each student's educational journey. However, School C used the parents' position as a shield to protect itself from government blame for going against the MoES directive of not repeating any grade, since it is a government-aided school. The two schools had similar academic yardstick of internal examination pass marks that guided the academic offices in making final decisions on each student's progress.

Even though Schools A and C supported repeating class levels as necessary, School A did not want to compromise its standards. School C considered it illogical to promote students

without an assurance of their ability to succeed in the subsequent class levels. The two schools concurred on how repeating decisions depended on each school's internal rules and regulations, even though School C was further mindful of the potential loss of school fees by the government-sponsored students if they repeated any class level.

Category 5: Implications of Automatic Promotion on Students' Academic Progress

Varying perspectives on the position of automatic promotion on students' academic progress emerged among the four participants from Schools A and C. In School A, one of the participants, who served as a head teacher, noted how academic laxity characterized students who underwent automatic promotion program, which concurred with the head teacher at School C, who pointed out how students emerging from automatic promotion programs at the elementary level could only fit well in universal secondary schools but not in private secondary schools because of their lack of academic commitment.

The head teacher at School A further concurred that most of the students who passed through universal primary education with an automatic promotion policy opted for universal secondary schools, as many could not meet competitive admissions points to private schools. The participants from both schools had different views of the impact of automatic promotion on students' academic progress than their administrators did. The two teacher-participants' agreed that each student who merited secondary school admission had the academic ability to progress, regardless of passing through the automatic promotion system at the elementary level.

Schools B and D: Cross-Case Analysis

To grasp the underlying factors fostering the existence of grade repetition at the secondary school level in Western Uganda, this first level of cross-case analysis drew an in-depth understanding from Schools B and D. Each teacher participant from each school, having

double experience of teaching and having studied at the same schools, brought strength to the breadth of the study phenomenon. Like in Schools AC, I used the research sub-questions to guide the analysis outcomes and the development of categories. With the nature of the research design, the categories had an overlap in responding to the three research sub-questions: Category 1 (repercussions of grad repetition on educational stakeholders) focused on Research Sub-Question 1, Categories 2 and 3 (factors contributing to grade repetition, and accompanying students for academic improvement) responded to Research Sub-Question 2, while Research Sub-Question 3 generated Categories 4 and 5 (schools' criteria on class-level repetition, and automatic promotion and students' academic success).

Category 1: Repercussions of Grade Repetition on Educational Stakeholders

The two schools (B & D) had different public images not only as private and government-aided, respectively, but School D also carried a higher prestigious status among schools in Western Uganda. Mindful of this, the participants in School D expressed how parents influenced students to repeat, compared to the parents in School B. As School D participants observed how repeating students suffered varying psychological traumas such as feelings of isolation, loneliness, and loss of self-esteem; School B participants added how students overgrew their subsequent class levels and missed out on several opportunities due to delays in a given educational cycle.

The two schools embraced grade repetition as their internal policy. However, the teacher participant in School B noted how it wasted students' time and eventually led most repeating students to try other schools that would allow them to progress. Although School D used guidance and counseling as a strategy to overcome repetition effects on students, the two schools concurred that there was a need for students to willingly accept and embrace repeating their

classes for such a system to benefit them. Furthermore, the two schools' participants noted how most prestigious schools forced their students to repeat or try elsewhere to protect their national name and status.

Category 2: Factors Contributing to Grade Repetition

As School D participants expressed how Ugandan education created examination competition among schools, both schools' (B & D) participants noted how each school's internal examination passing strategies posed promotional challenges to slow learners. The failure of School C to factor in the impact of the new environment on students, coupled with the prestigious nature of the school, created barriers for some students to successfully progress from one class level to the next. School B re-echoed such challenges as the school alum and teacher participant revealed how gender discrimination among families with a lack of female-educated role models hampered female students' ability to sustain the school's daily attendance, eventually negatively impacting their internal academic performance.

However, due to School's D status, some parents' pressure to raise the internal percentage pass beyond 60%, coupled with students' indiscipline, further complicated students' ability to meet the promotional needs of their school. School B participants concurred that laxity in student discipline also affected their academic adherence. Nevertheless, the teacher participant from School D noted how a student's failure to meet a cutoff percentage mark did not justify his/her academic dullness. On the other hand, School B participants expressed how ill health among students due to the rural setup made it harder for them to sustain their regular classroom attendance, and some students missed examinations.

Conversely, the two schools' participants' perspectives on financial constraints among parents concurred, as they stressed how hard it was for some students to remain in school

because of parental hardships in remitting their tuition on time. On the same note, School D participants expressed how some parents registered their children in such prestigious schools when they lacked the long-term ability to meet all their financial needs. Although School B participants pointed out how laxity in academic commitment among some students deterred their academic performance, they further noted how instructional course overload and lack of instructional resources complicated students' focus on their academic achievements. Consequently, School D participants also revealed internal challenges of overwhelmingly high student numbers in the classroom and infrequent teacher attendance at the primary school level, further exacerbating the already challenging situation at the secondary school level.

Additionally, School D participants noted how students' fear of hard sciences, which MoES made compulsory, further worsened students' ability to meet internal examination pass marks for promotion. The two schools' participants concurred that the lack of individualized instruction further created a setback for students' improved performance and contributed to the frequency of class-level repetition. Although School D used grade repetition as accountability to other stakeholders on their academic commitment, they noted how some schools encouraged it to gain financial support for their budget categories. On the other hand, School B participants expressed concern that, as schools exerted academic performance pressure on their students for national excellence, they paid a blind eye to the theoretical nature of Ugandan education that impacted hands-on subjects like hard sciences, due to a lack of instructional resources.

Category 3: Accompanying Students for Academic Improvement

Schools B and D were mindful of each student's learning needs, though their methods varied from school to school. For example, School D used recovery meetings that involved school administrators, parents, teachers, and repeating students to forge the way forward for

students' improved academic focus. On the other hand, School B employed a series of internal tests, which the school used through their averages to determine the academic fate of each student at the end of each academic year, in addition to engaging in dialogue with slow learners to help them determine their academic path. Schools B and D also employed guidance and counseling to boost each student's self-esteem, as School D participants emphasized how its teachers needed to go beyond focusing on cognitive to holistic attention to students' wellbeing.

Although Schools B and D embraced cumulative data on each student's academic history to help them refocus their academic attention, School D participants expressed how it allowed teachers to interact with parents directly to keep them updated on their children's progress. In addition, School D participants remarked how parents paid extra money to teachers to coach their academically weak students, even when such a move was against the MoES directive. School B participants added how the school continuously advised students to distance themselves from bad peer groups and only join academically disciplined groups.

Category 4: Schools' Criteria on Class-Level Repetition

Both Schools B and D embraced internal examinations as a yardstick for promotional decisions that judged each student's academic abilities. They also focused on each student's annual behavioral records as a supplement to academic performance. However, School D participants expressed how often it would lower internal pass marks if most students failed to meet the cutoff percentage. Although the two schools involved parents and students in making the final decision on students' academic status, School B further noted how the presence of parents was not to change the course of the school's decision on students' repetition but to add more information that students could have failed to divulge to the school over the year.

Furthermore, School D participants noted how the school created a mentorship strategy for its students for individualized attention, while School B participants emphasized the willingness of students to repeat as vital in alleviating their poor academic performance. However, Schools B and D participants concurred that the decision on students' grade repetition was based on each school's internal rules, regulations, and standards rather than being shared regionally.

Category 5: Automatic Promotion and Students' Academic Success

A divergence in perspectives emerged between Schools B and D on the impact of automatic promotion policy on students' academic performance. Even though School B participants believed that any student could repeat class levels with or without the influence of the automatic promotion policy, they categorically expressed how automatic promotion did not impact students' internal academic performance, as they merited admission to the secondary level of education. However, School D participants noted how the products of the automatic promotion policy could not meet admission points to such prestigious schools. It further increased academic failures in schools that took them in for lack of academic commitment and readiness. School D participants praised the automatic promotion policy in decongesting classrooms of overwhelming student enrolment, while School B participants viewed the students who repeated class levels as an independent case.

Stage Two of Cross-Case Analysis

A deep dive into schools' strategic differences raised unique perspectives of how their education missions expressed the essence of their existence and the people they served. Stage two of cross-case analysis made it possible to learn from participants' experiences of the implications of grade repetition on students across these four schools. It created an awareness of

how private and government school participants understood, handled, and implemented grade repetition as they accomplished the needs of the national education curriculum. This stage created an opportunity to establish differences and similarities across schools, understand how school administrators and their teachers interact, and execute the rules governing each student's academic progress.

Emerging Themes from Schools AC and BD Cross-Case Analysis

With the need to develop a more comprehensive grasp of how secondary schools experience and deal with grade repetition and its implications, I conducted a second stage of cross-case analysis that revealed the similarities, differences, and unique ways each school handled students' class-level repetition. Such an analysis yielded five emerging themes in preparation for developing themes (Table 7).

The emerging themes followed the guidance of the three main research sub-questions, keeping in mind the intersectional nature of the analysis encouraged by the embedded multiple-case study design. In responding to Research Sub-Question 1, I generated an emerging theme on the repercussions of grade repetition as experienced by educational stakeholders. Research Sub-Question 2 fostered the emerging themes, factors contributing to students' grade-level repetition, and the schools' strategies for students' academic improvement; while the Research Sub-Question 3 accrued two more emerging themes, the criteria of schools' decision on students' academic status, and the position of automatic promotion policy on students' academic commitment.

Table 7

A Matrix Table Showing Outcome of Schools' Cross-Case Analysis

Schools AC	Schools BD	Emerging Themes from Schools ACBD
Impact of grade repetition on educational stakeholders	Repercussions of grade repetition on educational stakeholders	Repercussions of Grade Repetition on Educational Stakeholders
Factors contributing to students' grade repetition	Factors contributing toward grade repetition	Factors Contributing to Students' Grade Repetition
Schools' approach to the needs of slow and repeating students	Accompanying students for academic improvement	Schools' Strategies for Students' academic Improvement
Schools' criteria of deciding on students' academic status	Schools' criteria on class-level repetition	Criteria of Schools' Decision on Students' academic status
Implications of automatic promotion on students' academic progress	Automatic promotion and students' academic success	Position of Automatic Promotion Policy on Students' Academic Commitment

Emerging Theme 1: Repercussion of Grade Repetition on Educational Stakeholders

Participants from four schools shared their concerns about the impact of grade-level repetitions, especially on students. The participants acknowledged the psychological effects students go through when forced or asked to repeat class levels. For example, the four schools' participants concurred on the feeling of isolation that came with students' separation from their agemates or classmates. Schools A and C participants noted the feeling of humiliation and self-hatred as other effects. At the same time, B and D participants said that loneliness and overgrowth of subsequent class levels were contributors toward low self-esteem among repeating

students. They also noted that female students were prone to more personal and academic challenges than their male counterparts.

Nevertheless, it was only in School D that parents forced their children to repeat class levels to sustain their public image of their children being in prestigious schools. Although three schools, BCD, expressed how it was important for students to express willingness to repeat for them to benefit from such academic activity, Schools A and C participants noted how repeating was not an automatic assurance of students' improved academic performance. However, all the schools embraced an internal repeating system based on their respective rules and regulations. School A participants expressed concern about overwhelming student numbers that did not allow teachers to individualize instructional activities. As uniquely expressed by School C participants, repeating students were prone to losing government tuition support in repeated and subsequent classes. Moreover, it was only in Schools B and D that the participants pointed out how high-ranking schools in the region and country tended to enforce strict repeating rules that forced some of their students to seek admission to other schools.

Emerging Theme 2: Factors Contributing to Students' Grade-Level Repetition

The four schools' interactive analytical outcomes indicated how their environment and surrounding areas impacted students' academic commitment differently. For example, Schools A and D in semi-urban and urban settings needed school administrators to be mindful of how students adjusted during their orientation and familiarization with the school, to avoid being distracted in the new environment. This was different for Schools B and C, whose rural settings dictated the frequency of students' class attendance due to long travel distances. On the other hand, in Schools BD's analytical outcome, female students experienced cultural discrimination

due to a male-dominated society and hardly sustained their pursuit of education and daily class attendance compared to their male counterparts.

The internal examination system that determined students' academic progress cut across all four schools. Even though Schools A and C participants noted how repeating grades was common in private schools, the prestigious status of schools such as School D set a competitive platform for any student to progress from one class to the next based on internal percentage pass marks. The four schools' participants expressed financial constraints as one of the factors contributing to class-level repetition.

Additionally, inadequate instructional resources such as libraries and laboratories affected the other three schools more than School D. However, the challenge of compulsory science subjects impacted students in all four schools, as more students had a natural fear of hard sciences, which contributed to constant failure to meet the internal percentage pass mark, as sciences took precedence in pass mark determination. However, the three schools expressed how a lack of individualized instruction hindered students' academic achievement. School A participants specified how the teachers' lack of time and high student: teacher ratio hampered each student's academic focus.

On the other hand, the BD analysis revealed that schools used repeating grades as part of accounting for their educational service delivery to their stakeholders. Although all four schools acknowledged the examination pressures for academic excellence on a national level, the analysis on BD schools noted how some schools forced students to repeat for financial gain rather than for academic improvement. Furthermore, the BD analysis pointed out how the heavily theoretical classroom instruction suffocated students' success in hands-on subjects like hard sciences.

Emerging Theme 3: Schools' Strategies for Students' Academic Improvement

All schools embraced guidance and counseling as the main tools to help weak or slow learners improve their academics by gaining self-confidence. Almost every school had a unique way of attending to their students' needs that differed from other schools. While Schools B and C engaged their students in group discussions, dialogue, remedial work, and frequent class tests to keep students focused, Schools A and D further benefited their students through working with parents and students for collective academic guidance. What was unique to School D was how the school administrators gave their teachers open access to parents to work collaboratively to improve students' performance. Teachers in this school not only engaged in extra class instruction with slow learners but also received extra financial gain from parents for their children's private tutoring, contrary to MoES rules.

Emerging Theme 4: Criteria of Schools' Decision on Students' Academic Status

The four schools embraced internal examination percentage pass marks as a determinant for each student's academic progress. Although all four schools involved parents in making decisions on the academic status of each student, School B participants expressed how parents' participation had no impact on the already made school decision. All schools supported repeating class levels through their internal academic systems, even though all participants expressed how each school implemented it based on their academic guiding regulations. Nevertheless, Schools A and C participants added that mass promotion of students not only impacted schools' standards but also lacked an assurance that such weak students would manage more advanced instructional activities compared to what they had failed.

Emerging Theme 5: Impact of Automatic Promotion Policy on Students' Academic Commitment

Although Schools A and C participants viewed automatic promotion as a genesis of academic laxity and lack of commitment among students at a secondary school level, Schools B and D participants disagreed with such a perspective. Schools B and D participants believed that students repeated their class levels for varying reasons and that any student who merited admission to their schools was capable of performing to their expectations. However, all participants from the four schools concurred that most students from elementary schools with automatic promotion joined universal secondary education as they did not raise required admission grades to such competitive schools. On the other hand, School D participants viewed automatic promotion as a helping tool to lessen classroom congestion.

Emerging Themes from Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions targeted 4 out of 10 participants purposively selected from the four research site schools. I considered gender and teaching experience while selecting one participant from each school to for the focus group discussion. In my interaction with the focus group participants, using the focus group discussion guide, five subthemes emerged. The free-flow discussion guided by the research questions yielded an in-depth understanding of how secondary schools viewed, responded, and dealt with the existence of class-level repetition as they accompanied their students through teaching and learning processes. The focus group participants agreed that repeating grades had more challenges for education stakeholders than it would have benefits. Guided by the three research sub-questions, the financial component overlapped with other challenges of grade repetition as I dealt with the first research sub-question through the emergence of theme one, consequences of repeating class-levels on

educational stakeholders. Emerging themes two (causes of class-level repetition) and three (strategies for students' academic improvement) focused on the second research question while the third research question helped me develop emerging themes four (schools' decision on students' repeating of class levels) and five (Automatic Promotion Impacts Students' Academic Commitment).

Emerging Theme 1: Consequences of Repeating Class Levels on Educational Stakeholders

Focus group participants (School A's Pence, School B's Corrines, School C's Elias, and School D's Arthur) pointed out how grade repetition impacted students and their parents in varying ways.

Students. ***Embarrassment and Loss of Self-Confidence.*** The group discussion outcomes pointed to how students lose socialization benefits from interacting with their fellow students when schools isolate them due to poor academic performance. Focus group participants suggested that class-level repetition among students adversely impact their confidence, as they feel embarrassed before their peers and fail to fit in socially in their student age groups. The group agreed that when students are socially isolated, their instructional concentration deteriorates. For example, Pence re-echoed how repeating students "lose self-esteem" as they see themselves incapable of performing well in class work. The participants concurred that repeating students tend to compare themselves with those who have continued to the following class levels, which deteriorates their self-esteem.

Pence and Corinnes expressed how female students suffer more than their male counterparts when schools force them to repeat. Corinnes shared her academic story of how she became sick in senior three but could hardly sleep without forcing herself to read for examinations to avoid missing a 60% pass mark. She shared how, in her case, a female student

feared she "would remain at home" if she failed to achieve the 60% pass mark, or would be forced to repeat. The discussion revealed how female students could lose opportunities to be in school when such incidents of repeating class levels happened to them, compared to their male counterparts.

Some Students Feel Rejected. The focus group participants agreed that repeating classes did not equally help all students, and Pence pointed out how some students encountered devastating experiences as they repeated their class levels. Even though other participants did not refute such a perspective, Arthur added how students "feel disappointed, lose morale . . . and some of them feel rejected." Arthur also shared how students with "weak hearts may end up committing suicide [or] others run away from their families." The group participants concurred that different students react differently to repeating decisions, and that schools must consider individual cases with each student's academic abilities.

Parents. Participants observed how parents absorb the financial burden when their children repeat classes. Elias shared how parents lose an equivalent of three cows a year when a student repeats, which he called "a big financial loss." The participants concurred that financial challenges affected parents and students, as students continued to miss classes while their parents sought more funds to keep them in school. Corinnes expressed how difficult it was for students to concentrate in class when their "parents struggle with school fees."

Arthur noted how parents tended to lose trust in their children as they continued to lose more funds because of their children's inability to perform academically to the school's expectations. Like Arthur, other participants agreed that the student's academic performance served as the accountability for the money their parents spent on them, especially in private schools where parents pay a hefty amount of tuition and fees for their children.

Emerging Theme 2: Causes of Class-Level Repetition

Student-Based Causes of Class Level Repetition. The focus group discussed how factors contributing to students' grade repetition could be seen at different levels, ranging from challenges with individual students to school-community involvement. Even though the participants pointed to grade repetition as a constant reminder to students to rethink how they were performing and to improvise ways of improving in their future academic endeavors, Elias believed that students' poor performance "did not mean dullness, but the self-deviations due to the interference of age, or pressure from peer groups." He further added how other factors such as sickness, family problems, or environmental changes like landslides impacted students' academic progress and increased class level repetition.

Some Students Opt to Repeat Classes Due to Sickness. Even though the participants believed that school tuition and fees were a stumbling block to the students' uninterrupted academic concentration, Pence noted how some students opted for class-level repetition when they missed some tests or classes while sick. The participants concurred that students faced challenges beyond their control, and as Pence and Corinnes revealed, sickness held up some students in classes as they missed some instructional content.

Most participants agreed that it became hard for such a student to pass internal and external examinations without struggling. On the other hand, the group pointed out the indiscipline among some students as another factor that deterred them from progressing from one class level to the next. All participants concurred that student discipline went hand in hand with their academic performance and was among the criteria for schools' decisions about their academic status.

Teacher-Based Causes of Class-Level Repetition. Group participants observed how the examination-focused curriculum dictated how teachers delivered their instructional activities, creating a teacher-centered instruction style. Corinnes revealed how teachers often contributed to the rate of class-level repetition when they failed to attend to the needs of slow learners because of their teacher-centered instructional approach, which mostly accommodated quick learners. She further noted how teachers often threatened slow learners with repeating grades without discovering the learning challenges that bothered them. Pence shared how she became interested in why one student was always absentminded, only to discover that his family had mistreated him for a long time, thus affecting his class concentration and performance.

School-Based Causes of Repeating Grades. The participants expressed concern about schools that taught for examinations as they raced through the teaching syllabus without minding the absorption rate of each student. For example, Arthur observed how teachers' focus on covering the syllabi forced them to rush the instructional content:

> because you want students to finish the syllabus, you want them to be able to answer the questions from UNEB [Uganda National Examination Board] and pass. It forces some schools to even [get] involved in cheating because they want to meet the expectations of the public contrary to our ethics.

The group concurred that most schools aimed to make their names famous and increase student enrolment for financial gain. Corinnes observed how most private schools focused on financial gain more than the student's academic achievement. She revealed that such schools admitted students without caring much about the students' entry points because they were looking for numbers. Most participants concurred that prestigious schools focused more on top-performing students during their admission process to keep their academic performance nationally recognized rather than minding the financial gain.

Consequently, Elias observed how schools preserve their names by focusing on examination passing marks for national examinations, determining which students should be filtered out. All participants agreed that the Uganda National Examination Board does not grant a certificate to any student who fails his/her national examination without considering any challenges faced by students, their parents, or the schools themselves.

External Factors Influencing Repeating of Class Levels. During the group interactive discussion, Pence revealed how education officials and school-surrounding communities controlled the internal school system, and how instructional processes pointed toward academic results rather than how teachers have implemented their instructional methodologies. In effect, public expectations negatively influence teaching methodologies. The remaining participants concurred with Pence's opinion that, when national examination results are out, different people would start asking, "How many students has your school got [in division one], to the extent that some are called and threatened that they can even demote them" for failure to produce enough passing grades.

Arthur re-echoed what Pence pointed out as he noted that "the expectation of the public was opposed to the methodology in teaching because for them they expect your students to pass [even though] we must balance between following the right methodologies and meeting the expectations of the public." According to the group, the more pressure teachers get from outside for grades, the more they focus on quick learners and leave slow learners to fend for themselves. The participants concurred that the concern for creating super grades suffocated individualized attention due to lack of time, as teachers raced for national examination recognition.

Emerging Theme 3: Strategies for Students' Academic Improvement

Focusing on how schools accompanied their students for academic improvement, all participants observed how their schools engaged their slow learners in guidance and counseling as their primary approach to deterring grade repetition. Even though they all agreed on how student discipline and their performance went hand in hand, they acknowledged how each student needed mentors for personal and academic growth. For example, School A (Pence) and School B (Arthur) embraced the system of attaching students to specific teachers based on each student's academic needs. Arthur said that School B tagged such teachers as Godfathers to struggling students.

Arthur further noted how his school's decision to have a student repeat a class level was meant to remind students to become more committed to their studies, for improved performance. The participants agreed that teachers' keen interest in students' learning was vital to improving their academic performance. They pointed out such methods as creating learning groups with varying learning capacities to help slow learners benefit from quick learners, increasing interactive learning, and offering extra classes as remedial lessons.

Emerging Theme 4: Schools' Decisions on Students' Academic Status

Collective Decision Between Parents, Students, And Schools**.** When asked about how schools made decisions on students' ability to progress or repeat their classes, most of the participants concurred that decisions for repeating students were made between parents and schools, with the consent of the students. Elias and Corinnes agreed on how often some schools call parents to deliver their verdict on their child's academic progress, even when schools use polite language to convey the message to parents. Corinnes added that most private schools never involved parents when deciding students' academic progress.

Furthermore, Elias shared how schools coined nonlegal threatening statements such as "you are advised to repeat," meaning "try elsewhere" for fear of being drawn to legal courts for their decisions. He further shared how his school asked repeating students and their parents to commit themselves in writing and explain how "they think they are going to improve, and in some cases, these become yardsticks, motivators, guidelines for those repeaters to work toward targeted goals." The group discussion outcome indicated that each school had its internal system of determining the fate of its students' academic status.

The participants concurred that determinants such as school name, status, location, and size were some indicators of how schools safeguarded their internal and external performances. Even though Elias noted how government directives focused on each student's promotion to subsequent class levels without hesitation, he acknowledged how, in most cases, these schools advised their slow learners to try elsewhere to safeguard the school's status. Elias raised an important point when he remarked that schools said, "repeating [of class levels] may not guarantee that you are going to pass."

When asked about the government's stance on students' academic progress, the participants shared how the government does not allow students to repeat grades, especially in government-owned schools. However, the group participants noted that some schools tended to implement internal systems outside the purview of the government's influence and forced some government students to repeat, using the pretext of indiscipline to avoid losing face before the government's legal arm.

Emerging Theme 5: Automatic Promotion Impacts Students' Academic Commitment

As we discussed the government's stance on repeating class levels, the participants observed how MoES did not allow or recommend any class-level repetition. Even though they

acknowledged that the government's implementation of automatic promotion helped more youth access education, it also negatively impacted students' academic commitment since internal schools' examinations do not affect students in any grade. For example, Elias noted how automatic promotion policy at an elementary level had "a serious impact" on students at a high school level, which was echoed by other participants who concurred that the effect of automatic promotion at primary level was seen in many failures at senior four, especially for universal secondary schools and for the private schools that did not commit to the government's admission requirements.

Although Corinnes and Pence believed that automatic promotion had less impact on students at a secondary school level, other participants noted how teachers and administrators in some of the secondary schools with automatic promotion policies struggled with students' class attendance and commitment to self-study, which eventually contributed to their low academic performance. Arthur remarked how teachers in schools with automatic promotion policies tended to be reluctant to attend to individual student needs because they knew all students would progress from one class to the next with or without the teachers' help. As a result, teachers ignored the learning challenges of most students.

PTA Chairpersons Cross-Case Analysis Outcomes

The two PTA chairpersons, Aggrey and Abel, each representing a different school category of privately-owned or government-aided secondary schools, contributed to this study based on their leadership experience, which was invaluable for my understanding of the study problem. During the analysis of the data that emerged from the two PTA chairpersons, I used the three research sub-questions as a yardstick to develop four emerging themes. Theme one, challenges of repeating class levels, responded to the first research sub-question; theme two,

causes of student's class level repetition, emerged in response to Research Sub-Questions 2 and 3; while emerging theme three, school decision on repeating class levels, responded to the third research sub-question.

Emerging Theme 1: Challenges of Repeating Class Levels

To understand the challenges of repeating grade levels, Aggrey (School C PTA Chairperson) and Abel (School B PTA Chairperson) had different perspectives based on who experienced a more significant impact among the stakeholders. For example, Abel focused more on parents' positions, while Aggrey concerned himself with students' challenges. While Abel pointed out how uneducated parents did not understand the essence of repeating a class level and lost hope and trust in their poor-performing children, Aggrey raised concern about how the repeating students experienced stigma and isolation due to being cut off from their classmates.

Aggrey believed that such consequences enhanced students' low self-esteem. Although Abel supported class-level repetition for academic improvement, Aggrey opposed it unless MoES closed weaker gaps in its education dissemination process. While Abel noted how repeating students outgrew their subsequent class levels and lost confidence in formal education, Aggrey remarked how school parents lost faith in the education system due to being left out of many of the policies that directly affected them and their children.

Emerging Theme 2: Causes of Student's Class Level Repetition

Based on comments by Aggrey (School C) and Abel (School B), there were varying causes of grade repetition in their schools. Aggrey and Abel viewed low-income families as hindering students' unwavering presence in school. Aggrey added that rural life settings constrained students from accessing some necessities to keep them in school. Abel noted how the PTA encouraged parents to embrace class-level repetition to help their struggling children

improve academically. Even though the two PTA chairpersons concurred that students wasted more time covering long distances between school and their homes, Aggrey further pointed out how teacher-student rapport played an essential role in encouraging or discouraging students' academic commitment. Aggrey observed how teachers' lack of morale discouraged students from committing to their subjects, eventually leading to poor performance.

Impact of Automatic Promotion on Grade Repetition. Aggrey and Abel concurred on the government's position on students' academic progress not being held back by the school's internal examinations. However, Aggrey expressed the challenge his school encountered, as the public held them accountable for any academic failures at the end of the school year. Aggrey and Abel found the automatic promotion policy challenging for their schools, especially in making internal academic decisions specific to each school. Although Aggrey revealed how some students from automatic promotion schools showed academic rigor for secondary education, he blamed rampant academic failures on students who emerged from the umbrella of automatic promotion policy and lacked academic commitment, leading to his school's lowered overall academic percentage pass.

Emerging Theme 3: School Decision on Repeating Class Levels

When asked about how schools made decisions on students' academic progress, the two PTA chairpersons concurred that parents' position and input were vital, based on their positions as sponsors and guardians, and whose position would also be affected by any school decision about their children. While Aggrey shared how the school could not swap parental positions, Abel believed that the collective decision-making involving students was well-placed to serve educational stakeholders. The difference in school status between Schools B and C further explained how government-aided and privately owned schools implemented grade repetition

differently. For example, Aggrey said that parents' decision about their children's academic progress was considered final by the school, for fear of government retaliation, while Abel's private school minded more on the school's academic status and, without wavering, it followed its internal grading system regardless of parents' input.

When asked about how schools in Western Uganda implemented the grade repeating system, Aggrey and Abel said that each school had internal regulations that governed how they implemented their academic progress. Aggrey and Abel concurred that the government, through MoES, did not support repeating class levels and condoned such a move in private and government-aided schools. Aggrey also mentioned how his school only decided that a student repeat a grade after trying guidance and counseling to eliminate any doubt of the lack of individualized attention.

Theme Development—ACBD and PTA Participant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussion

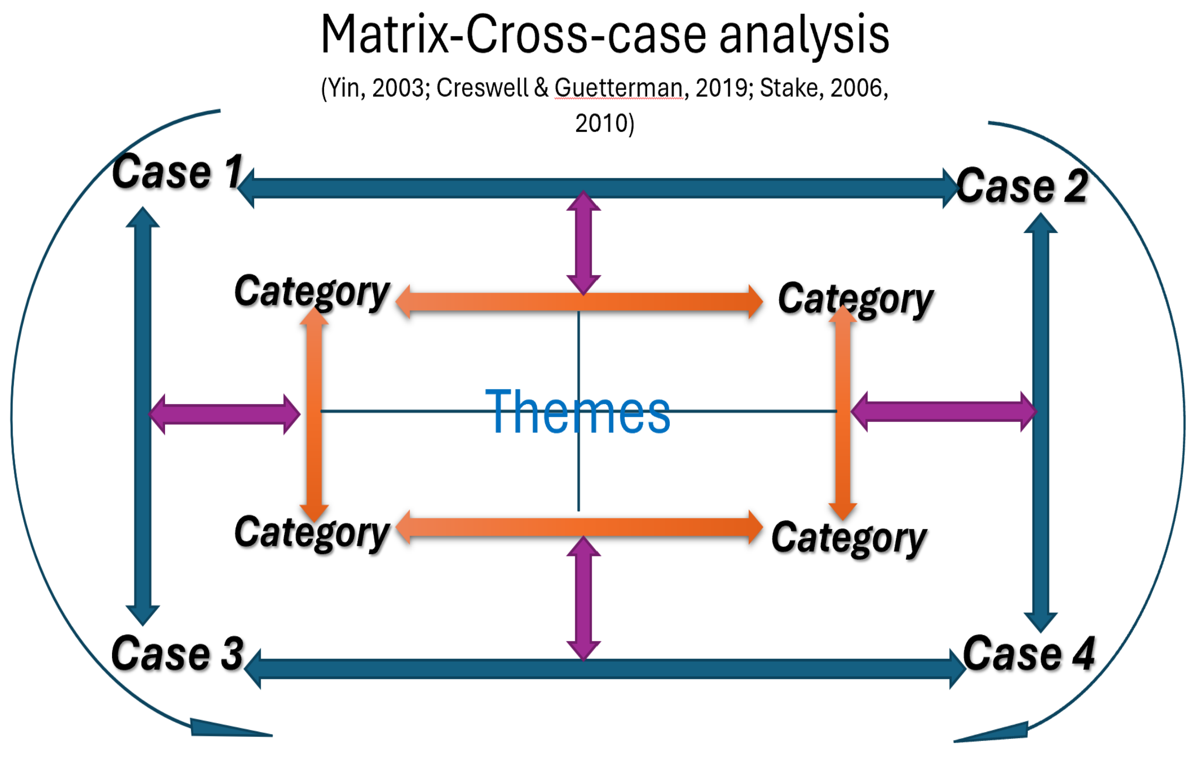
Using the back-and-forth analytical process during the within-case analysis stage (Charmaz, 2014) laid a foundation for developing the cross-case analysis stage. The iterative process of relating and comparing government-aided and privately owned secondary schools generated categories across the cases, which collectively facilitated the development of the final five themes (Figure 13).

The development of themes emerged from the interactive cross-case analysis of the outcomes of PTA chairpersons, the focus group discussions, and the ACBD schools' product. Five themes arose from an in-depth analysis of how all research parts worked and interacted together, to ascertain the breadth and depth of the implications of grade repetition at the secondary school level in Western Uganda. Table 8 is a by-product of all the groups that

participated in the study through their similarities, differences, and nuances, as learned from every stage of the data collection process.

Figure 13

Graphical Representation of Cross-Case Analysis Procedure



Based on Table 8, the first research sub-question helped to generate the first theme, repercussion of repeating class-levels, while the second research sub-question guided my cross-case analysis to generate the second and third themes, causes of students' class-level repetition, and schools' strategies for students' academic improvement. Using the third research sub-question, I developed the fourth and fifth themes: criteria for schools' decision on students' repeating class-levels, and the position of automatic promotion on students' academic commitment.

Table 8

A Matrix Showing Developed Themes

PTA Subthemes	Focus Group Discussion Subthemes	ACBD Subthemes	Themes
Challenges of repeating class levels	Consequences of repeating class levels on educational stakeholders	Repercussions of grade repetition on educational stakeholders	Repercussions of Repeating class levels
Causes of students' class level repetition	Causes of class level repetition	Factors contributing to students' grade level repetition	Causes of Students' Class Level Repetition
	Strategies of students' academic improvement	Schools' Strategies for Students' Academic Improvement	Schools' Strategies for Students' Academic Improvement
School decision on repeating of class levels	Schools' decision on students' academic status	Criteria of schools' decision on students' academic status	Criteria of Schools' Decision on Students' Repeating of Class Levels
Position of automatic promotion on grade repetition	Position of automatic promotion policy on students' academic commitment	Automatic promotion impact on students' academic commitment	Position of Automatic Promotion on Students' Academic Commitment

Theme 1: Repercussions of Repeating Class Levels

The overall shared experiences of all participants pointed to how parents and students were the main stakeholders who experienced the most challenges as a result of repeating grade levels in secondary school in Western Uganda. These challenges fell under psychological, financial, and physical separation.

Parents. The focus group participants and PTA chairpersons noted how parents continued to lose hope and trust in their children as a result of poor academic performance, and the PTA chairpersons further noted how such loss of trust was common among uneducated parents who failed to see the impact of grade repetition on their children. As all participants

pointed out, parents faced the financial burden of paying more tuition and fees for their repeating children, and even losing financial sponsorship for those students in government-aided schools. Even though the PTAs noted how parents felt left out of the development and implementation of educational policies that impacted their children's academic performance, the outcome of the ACBD analysis indicated that parents faced the burden of sustaining a better public image by having their children in high-status schools, even by continuously forcing them to repeat grades in the same schools.

Students. The analysis outcome of the ACBD, PTA and Focus Group Discussion participants' experiences all pointed to numerous challenges students underwent because of repeating class levels. Participants concurred that class-level repeaters' loss of self-confidence kept them on the periphery of their academic life, as they felt isolated or separated from their classmates with whom they had established rapport. Participants further revealed how grade repetition impacted female students more than their male counterparts due to rapid physiological changes in their bodies and the cultural preferences that males access schools more than girls.

The ACBD and PTA participants pointed to how female students lost the confidence in continuing their education when they often repeat as they look at themselves outgrowing their respective class levels. Consequently, all the groups concurred that male and female students outgrow their subsequent class levels the more they repeat their current classes. Stage one cross-case analysis revealed how psychologically, repeating students felt humiliated being joined by students preceding them, as they felt cut off from their peers. Such separation left them embarrassed and affected their academic concentration.

Theme 2: Causes of Students' Class Level Repetition

In exploring the factors contributing to grade level repetition in Western Ugandan secondary schools, the outcomes of the four schools, PTA chairpersons, and focus group discussion revealed many factors at play. The first two groups (ABDC schools and PTA participants) noted how financial constraints among low-income families posed challenges to students' academic concentration, as schools often asked them to return home to collect fee balances. Such action left many students missing classes and eventually performing poorly in internal examinations. The focus group added that some schools used the high frequency of class repetition to continue making more money from parents and student sponsors. As schools whose rural catchment areas contributed to high rates of sicknesses among daily commuting students, the outcome of focus discussions also echoed how sickness affected students, deterring them from sustaining daily school attendance.

All the groups concurred that schools' internal examination systems affected students differently. They acknowledged how such a system contributed to more students repeating grade levels on the pretext of preparing for the national examinations. It was a common thread among the participants that schools focused more on producing results as accountability to the public than focusing on individualized instruction. Such an academic system, focused on passing national examinations, left slow learners struggling under the weight of academic competition. The focus group participants revealed how schools resorted to examination malpractices to keep their public performance high, and the ACBD group added how schools mounted pressure on their students to pass national examinations. While the focus group participants noted how school administrators kept tight control of teachers' classroom instruction in order to complete the syllabi, the cross-case analysis outcomes of ACBD schools revealed how the fear of hard

sciences among the students contributed to more students failing to meet internal pass mark percentages.

Even though PTA chairpersons noted how the lack of academic commitment among students, especially those from automatic promotion policy schools, deterred them from performing well, the other two groups emphasized how schools' lack of factoring in how their school environments impacted new students in their initial years continued to account for more class level repeaters as students adjusted from within and from without. Additionally, focus group participants revealed how some schools aimed at high student enrolments without minding the admission requirements for financial gains, while the remaining groups indicated how overwhelming the student-teacher ratio left teachers with no time to individualize instruct. The PTA chairpersons added that teachers' lack of interest in their professional activities left students behind in their academic commitment.

Theme 3: Schools' Strategies for Students' Academic Commitment

When asked about how schools support their students, including slow learners and class-level repeaters, all participants agreed that guidance and counseling were crucial in helping students build inner confidence and self-awareness, essential for embracing their educational endeavors. Focus group participants noted the role of student discipline in academic progress, but different schools also employed additional methods. For instance, the analytical outcome of ACBD schools revealed that various schools utilized group discussions, private tutoring, and remedial lessons.

The outcome of the focus group discussion further highlighted the effectiveness of mentorship, where students were attached to different teachers. However, one school viewed extra tutoring as a financial opportunity for teachers rather than a means to enhance student

academics. Such financial arrangements fostered a strong relationship between teachers and parents, with school administrators allowing teachers to collaborate with parents to enhance their children's academic stamina.

Theme 4: Criteria for Schools' Decision on Students' Repeating Class Levels

All participants and groups expressed how vital the parents' position was in implementing student-repeating decisions in their schools. One of the PTA chairpersons noted that parental position was irreplaceable when making academic decisions for their children. However, the parents' presence meant different things to different schools based on whether the school was government-aided or privately owned. The focus group discussion concurred that schools only invited parents to tell them the school verdict rather than seeking their prior approval.

Consequently, the three groups revealed how all schools had internal systems of grade-level repetition but implemented them differently, based on each school's academic regulations. Aggrey, one of the PTA chairpersons, noted how government schools only seek parents' guidance on whether the children repeat so that their acceptance became the school's shield against any government reprimands for going against students' automatic promotion. The focus group pointed out that, when a government school wished to force a student to repeat, parents and their children signed commitment letters that included ways such students would improve in subsequent academic terms.

The stage one cross-case analysis revealed how Schools A and C found automatic promotion challenging for both schools' and students' academic standards, due to a lack of assurance that such students would eventually improve their academic performance. All schools used internal academic standards to determine each student's academic progress, with some

schools focusing more on the academic status they had created at the national level. However, according to focus group discussion outcomes, some government schools used an indiscipline pretext to eliminate slow-performing students, as MoES did not support any student repeating any class level.

Theme 5: Position of Automatic Promotion on Students' Academic Commitment

Although all schools pointed out how MoES did not support grade-level repetition at the secondary level, different schools improvised ways to counteract the ministry's directive. For example, PTA chairpersons viewed repeating classes as one of the strategies to call their students to academic commitment, to account to the public what they do in school with students' academic outcomes. According to the analytical outcomes of schools' ACBD, the focus group discussion, and even the PTA chairpersons' input, implementing automatic promotion at an elementary level encouraged laxity and lack of academic commitment among the students who progressed to secondary schools.

Even though some participants considered students of automatic promotion schools who merited secondary school admission capable of sustaining the academic pressure at the secondary school levels, all participants concurred that most automatic promotion students failed to raise required admission points to competitive secondary schools. Participants noted how such students ended up joining universal secondary schools that did not strictly adhere to admission criteria. Although the outcome of the focus group discussion pointed out how teachers in automatic promotion schools neglected individualized instruction because they did not see its contribution to students' progress from one class level to another, the analytical outcome of Schools ACBD noted how automatic promotion helped decongest classrooms so that teachers could sustain their instructional activities without being deterred by extra repeating students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Teaching is like any other personal calling, which manifests in teachers as a vocation. Interacting with Pence at School A made this clear, as she affirmed her teaching vocation by identifying with her school as “this is my school.” In comparison, Corinnes (School B) expressed how the teaching profession was her best career choice as it allowed her to model young girls into loving and embracing formal education, while Arthur (School D), engaged in hands-on instruction that helped him attract more students to learn from what he loved most, art and design. Such a positive attitude went beyond the need for remuneration for a job well done, and these participants felt at home within their teaching professions.

This confirmed what Moreau (1856), the Founder of the Holy Cross Congregation of Priests and Brothers, emphasized in his call for teachers, that our joys only radiate from the holistic facilitation of our students to their complete growth through their quest for knowledge. However, the cultural subordination of Ugandan education puts each school in the spotlight on how they academically perform at the national level, following the directives of the Ugandan National Examination Board (UNEB), without putting into perspective the needs of each student in their respective schools (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). This educational culture dictates how each school improvises ways of passing national examinations by creating internal measures unique to each school (Otaala et al., 2013).

The theoretical framework of individualism-collectivism theory (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) pointed out the consequences of such educational culture that included but was not limited to the development of in-and-out groups, due to academic competition among schools emerging from a need for autonomy without losing interdependence on the national education level through MoES. Based on the guidance of three research sub-questions, the data that emerged

from triangulating the research methods of focus group discussion, interviews, document analysis, and observations, indicated different factors that played a role in students' grade repetition, ranging from but not limited to costs, self-worth, indiscipline, sickness, and financial constraints. It was, however, impressive to learn from Corinnes the desirable instructional changes that would accommodate all students for improved academic performance. She suggested that if teachers changed their teacher-centered instruction system and "focused on satisfying at least 50 students out of 70 during each instructional period," such a strategy would meet each student's academic needs by the end of each week.

Discussion

My reception at each school was different, but mostly warm and welcoming. However, the sensitive nature of the topic made some of the participants feel uneasy, especially in responding to the question about the position of the Ugandan MoES on holding students in the same class instead of progressing them to the next level. Pence, a female participant who had served for over 15 years in the same school, openly dodged the question, only to respond to it off the recorded interview, since the school was going against the ministry's regulations and she did not want to be implicated.

James, a participant from School D, also found it challenging to respond to the MoES' stance on grade repetition because he wanted to avoid committing himself to matters of law and education regulations. For example, he expressed how "that was a difficult question [and] even very sensitive." Nevertheless, he shared how the Ministry of Education "emphasizes every learner to be placed somewhere, whether that learner has gotten division three, or four, there is where he[she] fits." James noted that "the Ministry would want to see every learner moving from one level to another, [and] the ministry does not encourage repeating." However, I was

captivated by how each school dealt with or viewed grade repetition differently during data collection. Some schools focused on grade repetition for financial gains and academic excellence, but a few focused on its implications on an individual student's life.

It is vital to note that different categories of secondary schools developed different means of sustaining their academic standards and competitiveness. This was re-echoed by Otaala et al. (2013), who maintained that Ugandan secondary schools improvised different means to sustain their academic excellence, both at school and the national level. Dina shared how private schools would let go of their students who did not meet their internal academic pass mark, even though such schools would want to sustain themselves financially through school fees. James added how schools with strict internal promotional standards devised means of eliminating slow learners "by tactfully advise[ing] them to move to the next level but in a different school." Such measures indicated embedded factors, known to individual schools as internal safeguards.

Three main research sub-questions guided the data analysis process, through which five themes emerged under the lens of each question. Research Sub-Question 1 yielded the theme, repercussions of repeating class levels, and Research Sub-question 2 generated two themes, causes of students' class level repetition, and schools' strategies for students' academic improvement. Research Sub-Question 3 gave rise to two more themes, criteria of schools' decision on students' repeating of lass levels, and position of automatic promotion on students' academic commitment. These five themes reinforced the understanding of the grade repetition implications through the experiences and perspectives of each participating school.

Theme 1: Repercussions of Repeating Class Levels

Financial Implications

The issue of the cost implication of grade repetition and how it made formal education highly costly to the parents and guardians but lucrative for some schools interested in financial gains, was echoed by all participants. As schools competed for recognition, there was a silent monster of financial exploitation of students and parents, requiring them to remit extra funds for academic coaching, tutoring (School D), or remediation (Schools A, B, C and D) in addition to the regular tuition and fees. Even though Otaala et al. (2013) did not directly refer to the financial implications of grade repetition, they pointed to how schools devised means to succeed in the national examinations. Like Fredriksen and Fossberg's (2014) observation on how parents with financial constraints bear increased "opportunity costs and direct costs of education" (p. 239), the study participants further expressed financial fatigue among parents whose students continued to repeat class levels.

Elias (School C) pointed out the loss of tuition and fees due to class-level repetition, and Arthur (School D) noted how parents lost trust in their academically struggling children. Elias equated the parents' continued financial loss to losing three cows every time a student repeated a grade. Abel, a PTA chairperson for School B, also noted how trust between parents and their children dwindled primarily with uneducated parents, who struggled to embrace the essence of formal education for their children. According to Aggrey, a PTA chairperson for School C, such an attitude isolated more students from their school communities and family ties. This confirmed Arthur's (School D) sentiment of suicidal tendencies and thoughts among students. Brophy (2006) and Mansouri and Moumine (2017) concurred with Arthur's sentiment noting how

students feel stigmatized and bear it as punishment when schools force them to repeat grades because of their academic inability to meet internal pass mark percentages.

Philip, Elias, and Corinnes concurred that grade repetition did not equate to student dullness. Instead, the school's internal academic system only focused on its academic aggrandizement as it prepared its students for external competition. Such narrow-focused competition overlooked individualized instructional challenges among students. Pence noted that most students carried family burdens to their classrooms and only performed poorly academically when teachers failed to notice them as individual students. Pence's experience concurred with Grimm et al. (1999), who stated that students have emotional breakdowns when they fail to fit in or perform to the expectations of their groups.

According to Elias, who had experience as a head teacher at secondary School C, parents' decisions for their children's academic progress were based on whether they understood the value of education. Such a factor determined the parents' course of action for students' academic progress, as parents weighed the pros and cons of financial impact versus the students' benefits in repeating class levels. Akkari (2004) supported such a perspective as he asserted how families, especially in third-world countries, struggled financially to support their children's education.

James observed how most schools that did not benefit from government funding put all their financial hopes into students' tuition and fees to cover the school's annual budget. The failure of these schools to hit the ceiling of their targeted enrollment meant that some of the school budget would go unfunded. James observed how schools resorted to bending their internal rules where those students who would qualify for dismissal for poor academic performance were instead asked to repeat within their schools to sustain the school's yearly budget. Additionally, one of the ways schools evaded government policies on class-level repetition was by creating

annex school campuses that absorbed slow learners to keep the strong-performing students in the main campus for their recognition in the national examination results.

Through focus group discussion, this study revealed how schools created annexes to separate low-performing from high-performing students, something that Tyrosoutis (2016) condemned in Myanmar's educational system. Annexing schools to separate students revealed existing bias against the average students, and Stewart (2019) warned of increased emotional isolation and physical separation that affect more students' general performance.

Overwhelming Teacher-Student Ratio

One of the significant hurdles that schools must navigate is the bulging student numbers, where the teacher-student ratio is next to impossible when students continue to repeat grades. Kelly (2013) argued how the government policy of USE overlooked student numbers versus needing teachers for instruction. This study's data revealed the need for more planning among government and private schools in dealing with the overwhelming numbers of students. Consequently, as more pupils opt for USE schools (James and Francis), the overwhelming teacher-student ratio poses severe challenges to school authorities (Arthur and James). Such a challenge leaves slow learners more impacted as teachers overlook the individualized instructions as they race for syllabus competition (Mackatiani, 2017; Valijarvi & Sahlberg, 2008).

Even though James revealed how students' self-efficacy tended to suffer a blow under the weight of the schools' need to maintain a high pass mark percentage without considering the students' personal and academic needs, Stewart (2019) strongly emphasized that teachers' awareness of students' learning dispositions was the best remedy for their wellbeing and improved academic success. Chen (2007) concurred that for students to excel in their

instructional activities, teachers should fully understand and involve their students by integrating students' needs into their learning activities. Nevertheless, this study revealed how schools got interested in passing examinations to keep their public status at the national level instead of caring for students' needs. For instance, Francis (School A) shared how students' lack of involvement in accepting internal examination safeguards caused some students to resent retaking internal examinations due to failing to meet the internal pass marks. Although students come to seek education in our Ugandan schools, one of the teachers' tasks should be to help them appreciate what schools offer as they support them in their quest for learning.

Overgrowing Class Level and Emotional Well-Being

Elias, Francis, Pence, and Philip revealed that students outgrow their class levels as they repeat their grades. Grossen et al. (2017) noted how student age and class levels correlated and formed a basis for students' academic performance. Grossen et al. further revealed how the academic performance of repeating students decreased with time spent in the same class level. Such a challenge of outgrowing the class level does not only affect students' ability to fit within the classes, but also affects the parents who remit extra funds to pay for their continued education. Eventually it creates a setback for both students and their parents/guardians. Elias and Philip added how repeating students would never catch up with their former peers at any subsequent education levels, which created a barrier, a relational gap, between them.

Corinnes (School B), Pence (School A), Francis (School A), and Dina (School C) were more concerned about female students and the negative impact class-level repetition created for them. They said that repeating class levels further overlooked female students' challenges of outgrowing classes. Based on the data analysis, it became worse when schools failed to account for students' differences in implementing internal promotional percentages and the bias that

impacted students. This negated Jones's (2011) observation of how grade repetition impacted more female students than their male counterparts. Uys and Alat (2015) echoed my study participants' challenges on how students tended to outgrow their subsequent class levels when forced to do continuous class-level repetition. School administrators need to begin reflecting on how schools' systems accommodate gender differences as they implement their internal promotional policies. Such a move would create an inclusive learning environment for female and male students and challenge the notion of gender discrimination.

Dessel et al. (2017) discouraged and condemned any discriminatory education, especially the biased attitude towards female students, as it promoted self-pity, self-hate, and low self-esteem among such students. Corinnes (School B) further noted how society and families sidelined girls' education as they focused on boys as future family heirs. This concurred with Jones' (2011) observation that society and families viewed girls as less ambitious for education than their male counterparts. There was a general failure among schools to recognize each student's needs beyond the cognitive level.

James was conscious that repeating students felt out of place whenever new students found them in their current class levels because of their inability to progress academically. James shared how School D tried avoiding further student recurring repetition by setting up an internal accompanying system to keep watch on each repeating student. The study revealed how embarrassing it was for students to see themselves repeat class levels after losing their peer connection and socialization. Kabay (2016) revealed how grade repetition impacted students' emotional and physical well-being, forcing some of them to drop out of school because of shame and loss of self-esteem.

Many of the participants agreed that students lost confidence when they lost the company of their classmates, as they endured being joined by those students progressing from lower classes. Such a scenario implied that students felt isolated and even lost academic concentration to improve their subjects' performance. Even though some participants acknowledged antisocial behavior or emotional distress among repeaters, as noted by Ikeda and Garcia (2014), no school expressed any remedy to such students' challenge apart from relying on general guidance and counseling, only strongly expressed in School D.

Theme 2: Causes of Students' Class-Level Repetition

Career Choice and Public Image

The focus on formal education as a platform to get rich based on which career choice you make was a common phenomenon among the factors contributing to the high rate of grade repetition at the secondary school level. Dina revealed how some parents determined or forced their preferred educational career on their children, which contributed to their internal examination failure. Dina noted, "a parent says, I want my child to study and become a doctor [or] I want my child to study and become an engineer." Once that student failed to meet the required pass mark, the parent would force his/her child to repeat the grade.

Pence and Arthur concurred that teaching for a good public image created an uphill task for schools to keep up with their internal and external academic performance. All study participants agreed that each school focused on being the best in the region, strengthening its in-group identity (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). However, the external influence of academic competition for national recognition created divisions among schools as well-performing and underperforming schools. Unfortunately, the students, the primary education recipients, became

the shock absorbers for competing educational forces among schools seeking national recognition.

According to Mackatiani (2017), when a school aims to satisfy the public, its classroom instruction only focuses on examination results rather than education. This reflected what Valijarvi and Sahlberg (2008) noted, that setting academic standards without individualized support for each student fails to strengthen each student's academic achievement. I learned from participants how schools pushed teachers to complete teaching syllabi in preparation for national examinations without considering the rate of students' absorption. Teaching for exams negated Chen's (2007) perspective of how teachers should fully be present to satisfy their students' learning needs. Such examination-focused instruction only encouraged teacher-centered instruction and left behind slow and struggling students. According to Arthur, teachers should be open to not only cognitively accompany students but also be present to listen to the personal and individual challenges emerging from their families and from within the school if students have to devote total concentration to their studies.

According to focus group members Arthur and Pence, teachers' focus on syllabi competition, producing results, and satisfying the academic demands of public and school administrators suffocated teachers' adherence to student-centered instruction. Using the theory of individualism-collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011), this study revealed how inside and outside factors dictated each school's educational culture. As James and Arthur noted, instead of schools focusing on realizing educational missions, they yielded to the public pressure for performance, monetary needs, and status safeguards, which overwhelmed school authorities and prevented them from taking charge of their educational goals. Mackatiani (2017) revealed how the school curriculum encouraged examination-driven instruction, where teachers focus their

instruction on quick learners at the expense of slow and struggling students. Mackatiani stated that teacher-centered pedagogical methods deny interpersonal and individual active class engagement during instructional activities.

Dina was concerned with the need for teachers to be more responsive to students for their national examination. She observed how students needed more preparation during their academic years to avoid teachers racing them as they approached their national examination period. Adherence to external academic demands from the public, and examination regulations under MoES, exemplified how internal school cultures tended to suffocate individualized learning under the guise of satisfying external examination pressure, at the expense of each school's mission of serving its students and parents community. As informed by the theory of individualism-collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011), the centralized nature of Ugandan education imposes control on each school's academic freedom (expressed through each school's mission, vision, and values). Gundlach et al. (2006) reflected on such cultural influence on education as a challenge and an interplay of individualistic and collectivistic interaction between schools and MoES. Dina lamented that if the current instructional system went unchecked, it would continue to contribute to poor academic performance among the students.

Comparative Academic Standard System

During this study, I learned that, as schools compete for national performance positions in the national examinations, they individualize their academic process and control the internal performance of their students. Elias (School C) shared how the grade repetition system depended on each school and based on how administrators knew their students. However, such a system could not compare each student's performance with other students in other schools at the same academic level before administrators forced their students to repeat or progress. A case in point

was the varying promotional minimum percentages each school considered. For instance, School D set it at 60% (James and Arthur) while the remaining schools had it at 50%. Although Schools C and D adjusted their minimum percentage pass based on general performance each year, School D eliminated bright students who performed even better than students in schools A, B, and C.

The autonomy of each school to decide the fate of every student impacted slow learners. It further disparaged the average students who struggled to meet the academic yardstick for promotional purposes. Most prestigious schools continued to benefit from internal promotion policies as they filtered out struggling students they considered nonacademic performers who would not keep their schools on the national academic radar. During the review of document analysis obtained from School D, James revealed how the significant drop in student numbers from senior three to senior four, and then senior five to senior six, was due to the internal filtering system, as School D determined who among the students was fit for candidacy to achieve desired outcomes at the national level. Such a move confirmed Otaala et al.'s (2013) observation that schools purposefully dismissed or forced students deemed weak to repeat.

More challenging was how students bore the consequences of time constraints as schools raced to complete their syllabi for the national examination expectations. Otaala et al. (2013) confirmed such a challenge when they noted how schools were always under pressure to complete teaching syllabi to prepare their students for competitive national examinations. As a result, Pence (School A) observed how teachers tended to "mostly pump, pump, and pump students" as they raced for syllabus completion. Arthur (School D) noted how schools suffocated individualized instructions while the academic-inquisitive students tagged as "slow learners" ended up repeating class levels and, even worse, the schools asked them to try elsewhere.

The pumping of students creates academic pressure, which goes against the advocacy of Claessens et al. (2017), where students should take charge of their learning, rather than a controlling curriculum. Pence's observation of schools in Western Uganda revealed the challenge of non-student-centralized pedagogy that denied students' active engagement (Mackatiani, 2017). However, I acknowledge that many schools I interacted with during the study struggled with instructional resources, including a lack of laboratory necessities to run science subjects satisfactorily. The lack of science facilities and students' phobia of science subjects worsened academic performance challenges. With schools being hellbent on passing mark percentages, Arthur warned that the compulsory subjects continued to increase the chances of academic failures and, thus, a high rate of class-level repetition.

Examination Focus and Job Protection

Focus group participants talked of how school administrators worked under pressure to save their jobs by yielding to external pressure on the number of grades they should attain at the end of each year's national examinations. Arthur revealed how schools resorted to teaching quick learners who can perform better in national examinations and are well-positioned to save teachers' and head teachers' jobs at the end of the year. As Ohajunwa (2022) revealed, the education system was not confined to the school classroom walls but involved the entire community. According to the theory of individualism-collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011), the pressure administrators and teachers experienced for higher academic performance explained how the interplay of school and surrounding community cultures posed enormous challenges to schools and students.

According to the gathered data, the overall culture of MoES further subordinated each school's educational culture, which the surrounding community demands had already suffocated

(Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). Mackatiani (2017) and Tyrosvoutis (2016) noted that teaching for exams encouraged rote learning among students rather than learning to understand. Otaala et al. (2013) noted that schools improvised ways to pass Uganda national examinations, and Philip and Corinnes (School B) concurred how Ugandan education had become more commercialized than holistic for students as a result of academic competition among schools at the national level. This is why Elias (School C), James (School D), and Philip (School B) concurred that most secondary schools, mainly privately owned, advised students on a massive level to try other schools or repeat classes. Elias and Corinnes (School B) further concurred that most prestigious schools tended to set high cutoff pass mark percentages that left many students out of possible promotions.

The question remains: How would the faculty/teachers freely instruct students, and how would all students benefit from their hard-earned school fees? Students and their parents become the losers; average students must repeat, or administrators ask them to try other schools. Based on each school's system of meeting national pass marks for competitive advantage, school administrators focus more on completing the teaching syllabus rather than on each student's needs (Otaala et al., 2013). Corinnes noted that teacher-centered instruction left slow learners unattended and made them prone to repeating class levels. Altinyelken (2010) observed how students miss out on supportive instruction that would have enhanced their inquisitive learning discovery through student-centered instruction. The rigidity of syllabus competition became a stumbling block to students' academic progress. Glick and Sahn (2010) expressed how grade repetition exposed academically struggling students to high risks of school dropout.

Theme 3: Schools' Strategies for Students' Academic Improvement

Classroom Environment and Emotional Stress

Considering differentials in academic absorption rate among students, teachers and administrators must focus on repeaters without neglecting the freshly promoted students whose interaction with repeaters is likely to create an emotional ripple effect of isolation and low self-esteem among those repeaters. Brophy (2006) asserted that repeating students tend to develop antisocial behavior as they struggle to adjust to a new but familiar classroom environment with other new students. While Pence's school promoted the system of grade repetition among low-performing students, I wondered how secondary schools attended to the individual needs of repeating students alongside the new incoming students in the same class.

Philip (School B) believed that when teachers pick an interest in each student, they establish their challenges beyond academics. This concurred with Zhou's (2012) perspective that teachers' knowledge of their students creates a basis for instructional methodology that eliminates learning barriers among them. Watanapokakul (2016) contended that teachers' knowledge of their students promoted teachers' ability to tailor their classroom instruction to students' needs. Courey et al. (2012) supported such a perspective when they revealed how lesson planning focused on students' learning needs was more stimulating and engaging. Even though Philip contended that knowing each student reduced repetition numbers among his students, there was not any justification in his shared experience that pointed to it. On the other hand, Pence (School A) revealed how students had varying rates of learning absorption and noted that "when you divide these ones into groups, of course, you look at those ones who are weak, the mediocre, and you mix them."

Pence advocated for individualized instruction through group teaching in that

> when they (students) present their essays, you have to go back and look at them individually, one by one, one by one. And then you realize that you need to pay more attention to some of them than others who are fast learners.

The more we focus on grouping students to learn from each other to strengthen their academic journey, the more teachers need collegial teaching to strengthen each other's instructional skills. Students would inevitably be able to learn from the collaborative nature of teachers and apply it to their new groups of quick and slow learners. Zhou and Guo (2016) concurred with this perspective when they revealed how using the imitation process as an instructional methodology strengthened students' encounters with teachers, eventually building their future selves based on their mentors' influence.

Student Accompaniment

During the study, all schools shared how counseling and guidance was the best accompanying tool to help both repeaters and new students adjust in their academic focus. Francis (School A) noted how guidance and counseling helped accompany struggling students, while James noted how School D provided each class teacher with each student's academic history for a better accompaniment process. James also shared how School D distributed slow learners among teachers who would act as their godfathers/mothers through guidance and counseling. Although all schools hinted at the essence of guidance and counseling toward students' academic well-being, it was only vivid in School D's talking compound that the school emphasized it for its student community.

Consequently, Arthur (School D) believed counseling and guidance were part of teachers' duties in order to accompany students and that it was important for teachers to go beyond cognitive focus to affective interaction and establish student challenges. Frisby and

Martin (2010) supported such a venture when they expressed that when students feel they belong, they participate fully in their academic endeavors. Elias noted how School C gave frequent internal tests to help point out weak students who needed extra attention.

Elias revealed how School C expected students to be proactive in taking the initiative for their academic improvement through using the library and attempting extra questions from the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) question banks in the library. What School C ignored as it invested in testing and retesting students was teacher-student rapport (Altinyelken, 2010; Toste et al., 2010) that would lessen learning barriers and facilitate students' ownership of their learning, rather than teachers subjecting students to the pressure of frequent tests. Kocyigit and Jones (2019) added that the emphasis on creating a learning relationship between teachers and students would encourage a positive and conducive classroom environment.

School D also offered remedial lessons and extra tests, though, like School C, expected students to be self-driven. Such a system comes with negative and positive impacts, with self-driven students fully investing time and energy into their academic duties, leaving the laissez-faire students longing and wishing. Based on data from School D, the school culture of accompanying struggling students encouraged academic ownership among students, lessening dependence and fostering self-reliance (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). James (School D) observed how the school engaged parents and students in recovery meetings during holidays to keep abreast of their progress. He also noted how parents further paid teachers privately for extra tutoring outside the school schedule, especially during holidays.

Although School D was aware of how such student-coaching arrangements were illegal under MoES, they still embraced and encouraged them. According to Tyrosvoutis (2016), in Myanmar's education system, the Ugandan MoES would equate such an arrangement to bribing

teachers. However, I found it interesting that School D empowered teachers to use delegated powers to remain in touch with the student's parents on behalf of the school administration as they accompanied students in academic improvement.

Personality, Culture of Trust, and Teacher-Student Rapport

This study established how some of the participants did not find a challenge with minimal student numbers repeating class levels, since they were used to handling more student numbers in their classrooms. Pence (School A) did not see any burden in just a handful of repeating students: "If I am handling 100 students, then five more [repeating students] is not really a big number." Such an attitude ignores the critical needs of repeating students who get lost among other high-performing students. Contrary to Pence, Arthur (School D) was worried about swelling student numbers that overwhelmed teachers, and hinted that teachers' different personalities mattered during individualized instruction. Like Corinnes (School B), Dina (School C) was concerned about some of their teachers' instructional competencies to guide students for better performance, saying that each teacher's instructional style influenced students' academic performance.

Accompanying students struggling with academic performance requires patience, a positive attitude, and self-conviction so that such students are in a position to improve. For instance, Francis (School A) was mindful of teachers knowing their students' needs as a way to overcome or fulfill them. Toste et al. (2010) concurred that teachers should focus on their relationship with students as a way to improve their instruction, and further revealed how trust and mutual respect created a conducive learning environment for students to thrive for academic success. This was echoed by Dina (School C) when she noted that she did not believe academically struggling students were dull, but needed specialized attention to improve.

Although most participants used the term “weak students” interchangeably with “academically struggling students,” Philip (School B) considered the term “weak students” misplaced, since secondary head teachers only admitted such students on academic merit.

What was unique about School D was how James acknowledged how often the school could adjust promotional pass marks to allow more students to progress, in case more students failed to meet the school’s academic expectations. James noted that, with the school’s pass mark at 60%, the school would not go below 50% for the adjusted pass mark percentage. James further noted that School D considered repeating students as “a special project” and involved parents in establishing a way to improve their academic performance. According to James, administrators assigned the struggling students to teachers who worked hand-in-hand with parents during academic accompaniment. Like James, Arthur (School D) mentioned the “recovery academic meetings” as a special project for students who had to repeat a year. He noted how anyone scoring below 60% was eligible to attend these meetings to remain in school. Arthur disclosed that these meetings proposed remedial lessons, guidance, and counseling as methods to assist struggling students.

As assistant director of studies, Dina (School C) explained how remedial classes included all students regardless of their performance status and created a conducive atmosphere of academic confidence and trust. Dessel et al. (2017) pointed out how biased instructional language created barriers to students’ academic improvement, and Elias said that School C expressed a lack of mindfulness for any students whose parents refused to allow him/her to repeat, contrary to the school’s academic recommendation. He also shared how the administrators of School C did not pay attention to the performance of any student who refused to repeat.

Although the four participating schools considered repeating class levels as one of the ways for students to improve their academic performance, they did not factor in Ikeda and Garcia' (2014) observation that repeating students tended to develop academic fatigue, lose morale, and become less competitive. The participating schools further ignored how repeating class levels displaced the equilibrium between student age and corresponding class levels (Uys & Alat, 2015) and how academic performance decreased with the number of times students repeated grades (Grossen et al., 2017). Even though Glick and Sahn (2010) considered repeating class levels as emotionally distressing for students, the authors did not believe that grade repetition significantly impacted students' academic achievement.

Schools need to help students become aware of how their teachers care about them through increased teacher-student contact hours and strengthening student-student rapport, strengthening collaborative academic support to overcome the repercussions of class-level repetition. Kocyigit and Jones (2019) supported educational interaction that strengthened teacher-student rapport with the idea that teachers' knowledge of their students enhanced individualized instruction. Additionally, the awareness of academically struggling students about how their schools shield them from isolation, self-hatred, and self-pity, without singling them out from among other students, becomes a basis for instilling confidence and regaining self-efficacy.

Instructional Evaluation and Teachers' Intentional Awareness. In ideal situations, teachers' evaluation of each of their instructional periods would help determine the extent to which students grasp the taught content. Student-focused evaluations would form a basis for remedial classes, based on general and individual student performance. Consequently, I learned from the focus group discussion and individual interactions that student class evaluations should focus on student achievement levels rather than how much the teacher taught them to cover the

syllabus. Focusing on students helps them benefit from a more student-centered instructional system.

Teachers serve as cornerstones of hope and affirmation for students who do not believe in themselves. As participants from School A shared, helping students believe that they have the potential to kickstart their performance required intentional and individualized counseling and guidance. For teachers to win the hearts of such students, they need to walk in the shoes of their students. Having empathy for such students without teachers' intentional encounter would only worsen the students' performance by further lowering their self-esteem.

According to Dina, the more time students are in contact with necessary reading materials and consultations with teachers, the more chances they have of improved academic performance. She emphasized the essential subjects of English and mathematics, which were determinants of the national grading system and university admissions. Even though her school targeted poorly performed subjects during students' academic accompaniment, Dina (School C) noted that the school also accompanied slow learners through extra class exercises and routine academic activities.

School D taught remedial lessons before morning classes and after students' dinner time, leaving students exhausted and needing more time to prepare for the next day's lessons. It confirmed the challenges Otaala et al. (2013) observed, that schools taught extra lessons at dawn and dusk without paying attention to other students' needs. Kelly (2013) revealed how schools' focus on the national examination controlled every class instructional method, forcing teachers to teach only for the national examination instead of focusing on individualized instruction.

Valijarvi and Sahlberg (2008) expressed concern about the challenges of examination-oriented instruction, as it led more to failing students than promoting better academic

performance among students, due to a lack of individualized instruction. Chen (2007) advocated for instruction where students felt that teachers were fully attentive to their learning needs. Even when schools set internal pass marks for continuing students or admission cut-off points for incoming students, some schools created flexible school systems to accommodate exceptional students who, because of their school backgrounds, showed potential for future outstanding academic performance. This was obvious in School D, where James shared how the school overlooked their aggregate seven cut-off point, to admit students from remotely located rural schools they considered having obtained 12 genuine aggregates. This portrayed how schools often cheated national examinations for their students to keep their schools' names on the national list of best performers in the country.

Theme 4: Criteria for Schools' Decisions on Students Repeating Class Levels

Collective Responsibility

When exploring how schools decided when students were due to repeat or progress from one class level to the next, I was captivated by Arthur's story about his cousin who was in School D, where Arthur currently teaches, but could not keep up with the academic pace. On being advised to join a rural school, Arthur was surprised by the tremendous academic stride his cousin made because of the conducive environment. Arthur's decision may not fully agree with Brophy's (2006) assertion that school educators and some parents preferred to have students repeat classes to promoting them, believing that such action would strengthen their academic improvement. Like Arthur's decision to take his cousin to a different school, the data analysis revealed how students' academic progress decisions involved different stakeholders.

Gathered data revealed how participating schools embraced collective decisions on students' academic progress based on each school's status, cultural environment, and guiding

missions. Varying decisional stances emerged more due to the prestigious nature of the schools and whether the school was government-aided or privately owned. Nevertheless, all participating schools revealed that school authorities worked collaboratively with parents and guardians for final academic decisions on students' academic progress. Philip and Corinnes detailed how School B's promotional decisions hinged on its collaboration with parents throughout the academic year. However, Francis (School A) and James (School D) revealed how the schools' involvement of parents/guardians in promotional decisions did not deter the schools from determining their decision as final, not only to safeguard their mission but also to uphold their schools' status (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011). Francis believed there was no sense in promoting failing students simply because the government directed, or parents wanted it.

Fear of Reprisal and Attitude

Like in Schools A and B, Elias (School C) indicated how parents or guardians participated in the decision about whether students should repeat or progress and avoid a backlash from the government for breaching its promotional regulations as a government-aided school. Elias shared how School C would hardly go against parents' decisions on whether their children should repeat or progress, as the parents would bear the financial burden once the government cut off students' financial sponsorship due to repeating class levels. Elias' "I do not care" attitude towards students whose parents forced them to progress showed how the government's regulation on automatic promotion policy constricted schools ability to execute their internal promotion systems.

Santamaria-Garcia (2017) noted that teachers' attitudes and instructional tones impact students' ability to concentrate, a perspective that seemed missing in School C. Santamaria-Garcia emphasized that teachers should be mindful of how they present themselves to their

students in school and classroom environments. In this study, different administrators' tones and attitudes on promotional decisions indicated how parents' presence was informative, rather than decisional. Francis noted how School A stood by its decision that whoever refused to repeat would be sent away, regardless of parent's intervention, unless there was a "benefit of the doubt" for exceptional student cases. Like Francis, Pence noted how School A did not bend its academic decision on weak students to avoid lowering its academic standards.

According to Dina (School C), the decision for a student to repeat any grade depended on his or her parents or guardians. She said that some parents preferred their students to progress to the upper-class levels, even though they were academically weak, and schools did not have the power to hold such students back in the same class. Nevertheless, Dina shared how School C advised parents of the repercussions of forcing the student to progress with such bad grades, although the school left the final decisions in the parents' hands. Elias observed how students in private schools faced the same problem differently, since students in private schools are entirely responsible for tuition and fees.

Internal Promotional System

Corinnes explained that School B used discipline and academics to determine students' academic promotional status. Like James and Arthur (School D), Corinnes revealed that repeating a class was often seen as a means to bolster students' academic resilience for future improvement. Corinnes noted that parents' involvement was primarily done so the school administration could understand their students better, rather than have parents participate in promotional decisions. James and Corinnes believed that repeating classes could benefit students, provided the student agreed. Glick and Sahn (2010) and Grossen et al. (2017) did not agree with James' and Corrine's support of repeating grades, because repeating grades affected

students emotionally, cognitively, and physically. Corinnes refrained from commenting on whether other schools shared a standard internal repeating system. Pence (School A) also hesitated to discuss the standard internal promotion system among other regional schools. They both also dodged a question on whether MoES encouraged the repeating of class levels.

Philip's (School B) said that a student failing to meet a year's academic standards did not necessarily indicate a weak student, and he expressed disappointment in prestigious schools that forced students to repeat classes to maintain their status, rather than addressing individual learning needs. Philip pointed out that such practices, while boosting enrollment and financial gain, did not necessarily serve the students' best interests.

James (School D) pointed out that each school in the region had its internal academic control system tailored to its specific academic focus and status. Such a perspective concurred with Otaala et al. (2013) on how schools create different means to facilitate their internal and external examination success. James further emphasized that School D was unafraid to take drastic measures, such as expulsion, against students who failed to meet the internal pass mark percentage. Francis (School A) revealed how some schools used internal systems to make more money rather than care for students' academic well-being by allowing failures and performers to progress.

Theme 5: Impact of Automatic Promotion on Students' Academic Commitment

All study participants concurred that MoES did not allow students to repeat elementary and secondary school grades. However, more emphasis was placed on government-aided schools than privately owned ones. Dina (School C) revealed how the government was interested in empowering school-age youth to write and read through APP and USE policies, without minding

about the scores. This perspective agreed with MoES's (2004) aim to empower young citizens with skills in numeracy and literacy for self-development and awareness (Okurut, 2018).

Participants had differing views on the impact of the automatic promotion policy on grade repetition and academic commitment. Philip and Corinnes from School B and Pence from School A argued that schools should not blame the policy for grade repetition at the secondary level. Even though Pence hesitantly shared how pupils from UPE schools with automatic promotion hardly had common traits with repeating students at a secondary school level, she acknowledged how some of the repeating students shared some of the characteristics. She remarked that "some may have, but not all of them [but] some of them don't really keep up or catch up very fast." Additionally, Corinnes noted that "any student could be prone to repeating class levels regardless of automatic promotion effect." Dina (School C) agreed that students who had been through the elementary APP system could succeed at the secondary level, but advocated for grade repetition to prepare students for future challenges.

While James (School D) asserted that private schools aimed at making more money through increased student enrollment, Dina (School C) stated that government schools secretly expelled academically weak students by working with each student's parents or guardians to evade blame from the education ministry. James concurred with Elias on how their schools used discipline as an umbrella to eliminate academically weak students. It was unsurprising to learn from Dina (School C) and Philip (School B), among other participants, that private schools went beyond advising their academic-weak students to repeat classes to trying elsewhere. Dina noted how most government-aided schools compromised their internal performance system to accommodate any student dismissed from private schools because of poor academic performance.

According to Elias (School C), different schools had developed internal means to counteract the government's directive of not forcing students to repeat grades. It was even trickier in government schools, where strictness about academic progress was enforced, compared to private schools. Elias intimated how School C liaised with the parents of the failing students to chart the way forward so that their children could avoid the repercussions of single-handed decisions on the student's educational path. Like how Akkari (2004) noted the financial burden of education on most families in Africa, Elias hinted at the challenge of students losing government sponsorship when they repeated grades, a challenge that parents from low-income families did not want to bear when their children repeated grade levels.

Even though the old and new curricula are all examination-oriented, participants revealed how the government, through MoES, did not support schools' decisions to force students to repeat class levels. However, the schools found themselves in a dilemma when they had to keep up with public demands for high-grade performance, while school administrators felt their hands tied behind their backs. The focus group participants shared how parents tended to shun schools with high rates of class-level repetition, which affected the students' enrolment, and eventually, schools faced financial challenges.

Challenges of Automatic Promotion Policy on Students

According to Twinomuhwezi and Herman (2020), the lack of partnership in developing and implementing a number of educational policies in Uganda negatively impacted the general purpose of such policies. For example, the USE policy's only success, seen by most stakeholders, was more on student enrollment than academic improvement. The automatic promotion policy has left academic commitment and its success to students' luck, without a system of checks and balances. For example, James stated how most recipients of automatic

promotion from the elementary level hardly achieved admission grades for prestigious schools. As a result, James noted that they end up in USE schools, exacerbating the challenges of high teacher-student ratio and continued poor academic achievement.

According to Arthur, the “massive promotion” of students overlooked the academic needs of slow learners, and only served quick learners. Arthur and James stated that automatic promotion at the primary school level left more slow learners unable to access prestigious schools after their PLEs, thus widening the rapport gap between student peers due to academic differences. At worst, Arthur shared how parents of such weak students cannot access schools of their choice for their children even when they can financially afford them. Arthur further observed how implementing automatic promotion policy at the primary school level did not provide the “opportunity to give that extra time to the learners,” who struggled to absorb anything during classroom instruction due to the overwhelming teacher-student ratio.

Bazilio (2019) confirmed how the presence of APP declined the essence and impact of education, as students only saw it favoring automatic progress without minding its accountability. Kelly (2013) viewed Automatic Promotion Policy as promoting a vicious cycle of low academic performance and poor overall education in the Ugandan community. Kelly further concurred with most of the study participants and outcomes when he confirmed that students continued to lose competitive spirit, because they considered internal examinations less significant and counted for less in their academic progress. Most study participants agreed, especially as students opted for USE schools where internal examinations did not have much impact on their student life.

Integral Linkage of Individualism-Collectivism Theory in the Study

The theory of individualism-collectivism, which guided this study, revealed the need to appreciate individual autonomy without overlooking the entire group's needs (Triandsi & Gelfand, 2011). Even though participants at each school was aware of the school mission in guiding the way they disseminated educational services to parents and their children, they acknowledged their subordination to the overall culture of MoES. Such an experience justified Gundlach et al.'s (2006) observation that competition between individuals and groups was inevitable.

The theory helped me understand how school administrators struggled to keep their schools' sense of autonomy amid external pressures from the public to keep their performance high and to safeguard their job positions. Such public pressure increased the internal academic controls that created an uphill task for students to navigate as they progressed with their academic pursuits. Considering the examination-oriented curriculum in Ugandan education, this study established how schools have continued to devise ways to keep up with the competitive nature of examinations to target high student enrollment and financial support (Otaala et al., 2013). Schools can only keep student numbers high through the status they create over the years, as reflected through their national examination performance and discipline.

According to all the participants, the existing culture of prestigious schools and parents' desire to identify with them created a gap between schools, and a gap between the rich and the poor in society. Akkari (2004) mentioned how financially struggling families miss out on formal education for their children, and it was clear among the participating schools that such families continued to be sidelined by competitive educational institutions as they promoted well-to-do

families who accessed the best educational services, which further enhanced their networking opportunities.

Using Finland as an example, Valijarvi and Sahlberg (2008) noted how that country's education system was responsible for failing students as a result of focusing on "high standards and lack of individualized support mechanisms" (p. 389). According to all participants, such a scenario was not alien to the Ugandan education system, as grade repetition revealed deep-seated learning problems. The need for educational interdependence between schools and MoES (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011) continued to suffocate each school's mission and belief systems, further encouraging the commercialization of education through cognitive abilities rather than holistic empowerment.

Implications of the Study

As the theory of individualism-collectivism guided the study to help understand the complexities of each school's autonomy and their need to identify with the overall education guiding cultures of MoES (Triandis & Gelfand, 2011), I found a need for all stakeholders to be aware of their roles and how they impacted the educational service delivery at a secondary school level. With this in mind, the following implications emerged from the study, focused on different education stakeholders in Uganda.

The Ministry of Education and Sports

With most education stakeholders in this study expressing worries about APP and USE's focus on increasing student enrollment without paying attention to its challenges, MoES needs to re-think the policy repercussions on education quality versus quantity. Even though most Ugandans would benefit from automatic promotion policy, MoES needs to be intentional in helping enrolled students embrace it and satisfy their individual learning needs. MoES also needs

to be aware of how its education policies continue to control already overwhelmed schools whose focus on passing national examinations undermines the intended essence of offered education.

MoES needs to proactively provide instructional resources to schools to offset struggling libraries and laboratories, to lessen teachers' straining burden while instructing students in compulsory and non-compulsory subjects. There is a need to enhance overall school instructional supervision by MoES officials to help reveal each school's needs and where the government can intervene for any needed help. School supervision would streamline the internal promotional systems that have left more students repeating or changing schools.

Based on Tyrosvoutis's (2016) observation of how schools in Myanmar created separate classroom streams for quick and slow learners, it was also revealed during this current study that some of the prestigious schools separated such students into the main school campus and its annex to shield themselves from losing national competitive positions. MoES needs to be aware of the impact of such annex schools on students' image beyond school life. The ministry further needs to be aware of how USE schools have continued to absorb expelled students from high-status private and government schools, which has overwhelmed the teacher-student ratio in such schools. The ministry needs to strengthen its schools' inspection and supervisory roles to crack down on such divisive segregation of students tagged as not fitting in well-to-do schools.

Education Policy Makers

The study outcomes revealed that the surrounding pressure on schools to produce results dictated their academic and cultural environment, disregarding the school community's needs. This confirmed Triandis and Gelfand's (2011) observation of how the conflict between educational cultures among the stakeholders subordinated each school's values and belief

systems. Understanding competing cultures' dynamism could help policymakers understand the essence of stakeholders' involvement to curtail unforeseeable policy repercussions. Therefore, there is a need for education policymakers to emphasize the ownership of educational policies among stakeholders to ease the implementation and sustainability challenges among schools.

School Authorities: Headteachers/Principals

Based on Arthur's sharing, environmental familiarization can be one of the remedies for some of the academically destructed students. Arthur noted how students who repeat or progress to other schools with lower status than their former schools tend to perform better. Even though this study did not focus on how schools orient their students during and after their admissions, school authorities need to ascertain the impact such a change in the school environment can create in students and how it is reflected in the rate of grade repetition among students.

There is a need for senior teachers to continue engaging in teacher development workshops, seminars, and further in-service training to strengthen student-centered instruction and create more ways how to deal with individualized instruction beyond the examination-oriented focus. Furthermore, there is a need to recognize and respect teachers' academic endeavors in accompanying students. Headteachers should constantly encourage and support their teachers in challenging teaching tasks, even as they respond to internal and external academic pressures.

Based on this study's discovery of how repeating grades impacted more female students than their male counterparts, it is deemed necessary for school authorities to reflect on how schools' academic culture would create an inclusive learning environment for all. Such a move would offer equal support to female and male students and further sustain more female student numbers in the formal education sector. Schools need to increase teacher-student contact hours

through student-centered instruction outside and inside the classroom to increase teachers' awareness of each student's needs, especially repeating students. Additionally, the schools and MoES need to be aware that the lack of a standardized academic yardstick for internal promotional examination percentages disparaged well-performing students who would be considered bright in other schools.

As Uys and Alat (2015) and Grossen et al. (2017) observed how outgrowing the class level was a challenge to repeaters, there were no accommodative solutions from the four participating schools on how to accompany students who outgrew their class levels through grade repetition. Schools need to reconsider their strategies of academic decision-making about who, among students, should repeat, and they should put in place measures that would meet all the needs of such students without ignoring gender differences.

Teachers

Teachers need to be mindful of each student's needs through student-centered instruction. It will help teachers relate to the students' instructional absorption rate and the pace at which they disseminate instructional activities. It will help teachers accommodate each learner's needs both in the classroom and outside the school environment.

Parents

Headteachers need to be mindful of the parents'/guardians' financial position in all the school decisions. The schools should involve parents/guardians at every step of their children's academic progress. Such an involvement should go beyond being informative to binding collective decision-making. Parents need to be educated on how to value their children's academic successes and their career choices.

Students

Schools need to engage students through academic advising sessions throughout the year to help them work with their teachers on an academic path suitable for each student, beyond grade repetition.

Recommendation for Further Research

With the revelations from this study about the localized internal examination controls in each participating school, the only literature that particularly pointed to how such individualized school systems emerged to counteract the national examination pressures based on the Ugandan education system was Otaala et al. (2013) and backed up by Tyrosvoutis (2016) on Myanmar's education. Chen's (2017) observation on how schools focused on passing examinations to safeguard their status and names without individualizing students' needs concurred with most study participants, who pointed out how such controls impacted more female students than male counterparts. I, therefore, recommend a qualitative study directed toward understanding how internal promotional systems at the secondary school level accommodate gender differences in the Ugandan education system. Such a study will benefit from individualized experiences in each school on how they consider the needs of female students and the impact internal promotional systems have on the female students' quest for formal education to counteract society's preference for boys.

Arthur and James (School D) shared how new students tend to get swallowed by the school environment and its surroundings as they acclimatized with the new school, and further noted how even bright students tended to lose academic focus and perform poorly. Even though this study did not focus on the students' orientation time and how school administrators helped them settle in school before they officially began their studies, there is a need for a further

qualitative study on the influence of the school environment on students' behavior and academic achievement. Understanding the students' experiences of their interaction with the school environment and how they settled in for their academics will guide school administrators on how to accompany their new students as they adjust to new environments in their search for formal education.

During the study, Dina revealed how School C included its remedial classes in the school's teaching schedule even though the teachers conducted them at an inconvenient time of dawn and dusk. James and Arthur of School D revealed how the school's academic recovery meetings were held during holidays and outside the class instructional schedule, as teachers used tutoring or academic coaching to strengthen students' academic grades. No reviewed literature indicated how extra lessons outside the class schedule positively impacted students' well-being beyond cognitive empowerment. Since the current study did not focus on the influence of academic coaching on students' holistic academic journey, there is a need for a quantitative study on the impact of extra tutoring or academic coaching on students' academic well-being. Using a quantitative approach will help reach out to many participants in different schools in a short time to obtain a broader perspective of the impact of such academic practices on students.

Conclusion

The individualism-collectivism theory helped me understand the overall impact of grade repetition on schools, students, and parents using the lenses of educational costs, students' self-efficacy, and national examination pass rates. Based on this study, MoES lacked measures to address the financial burden on parents, guardians, and schools at a secondary school level beyond USE schools. The government's lack of control of tuition and fees among government and private schools favored financially stable families in accessing prestigious schools.

However, it failed to create equal opportunities for low-income parents to access schools of their choice without the fear of incurring embedded financial consequences. The government needs to focus more on the grave burden on low-income parents who cannot afford extra fees for private tutoring or academic coaching, which has led more low-income parents to force their children to leave school.

Curriculum developers need to reconsider the position of examinations in the curriculum and schools' focus on syllabi competition in order to lessen schools' heavy dependence on teacher-centered instruction. Revising examination positions at a secondary school level would help teachers create more individualized instruction without being pressured by their administrators to focus on completing the teaching syllabi. The pressure on teachers from within and from the public, through extra academic coaching and tutoring students beyond their school time, signified education focused on how much schools can teach rather than how much students have understood the instructional materials. My focus on the impact of the school culture on students' academic success revealed a preference for bright students, as the average students fell through the cracks of the schools' internal promotional systems. Like School D, which created academic recovery meetings targeting internal promotional pass mark percentage failures, schools must go beyond the examination yardstick to focus on students' overall capabilities beyond the cognitive level.

This study indicated a lack of individualized learning due to time constraints as schools raced to cover all teaching areas the Uganda National Examination Board would likely set in national examinations. This scenario responded to my inquisitiveness around exploring whether student repeaters suffered from a lack of individualized instruction, and teachers' lack of concern for student needs. The study revealed more of how school proprietors and administrators

safeguarded their schools' image more than they focused on individualized learning among students. All participants emphasized how students significantly suffered as schools implemented internal promotional systems, especially without factoring in gender differences. Schools will need to walk the talk while using guidance and counseling to accompany students whose self-confidence, emotionally and psychologically, has been shattered by examination pressures. Additionally, internal academic competition has seen more students expelled from schools for not meeting internal promotional percentages. The lack of a standardized internal examination cutoff percentage across the regional schools continued to disparage even the bright students who would have excelled in other schools' internal promotional systems.

Although the cited literature indicated how teachers' positive attitudes and commitments were paramount in students' improved academic performance and commitment, parents' threats of withdrawing tuition for poorly academically performing students, and the negative language witnessed in School C on the lack of care for any students who refused to repeat, symbolized an endemic challenge for such students' emotional being. School administrators and teachers need to refrain from negative language as they interact with their students to avoid lasting students' psycho-socio challenges beyond school time. Lastly, most participants, especially those in government schools, pointed to how they created ways to navigate the government directives to meet the needs of their surrounding communities. Such a scenario indicated the lack of understanding of the essence of such policies and called for a need to involve all stakeholders at all levels to implement and sustain such policies in schools successfully.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

UIW IRB Approval

July 17, 2023

PI: Mr. Patrick Tumwine

Protocol title: Exploration of how Education Stakeholders Perceive the Implications of Grade Repetition in Secondary Education on Costs, Students' Self-Efficacy and

National Examination Pass Rates in Western Uganda

IRB Reference: 2023-1404-EXP

Expiration Date: 07/12/2024

Project Link: https://uiw.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/ProjectView/Index/1404 Hello

This letter corrects and replaces your current study approval letter.

The above study has been determined to be Expedited review.

The following expedited categories apply:

- Category 5: Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis)., Category 6: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., Category 7:

Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Project team:

Team Name	Team Email	Team CITI Expiration Date	Team Role - value
Dr. M. Alison Buck	mbuck@uiwtx.edu	05/10/2025	Faculty Supervisor/Co-PI
Dr. Norman St. Clair	stclair@uiwtx.edu	04/12/2024	Co-PI or Site PI
Dr. Grace Gutierrez	grgutier@uiwtx.edu	05/05/2026	Co-PI or Site PI

Approved documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Recruitment Materials	CITI Report	08/14/2021	1
Recruitment Materials	Research Participant Invitation-2023	01/23/2023	1
Recruitment Materials	Research Participant Invitation	01/23/2023	1
Recruitment Materials	Request Letter-Kinoni High School-Uganda	03/01/2023	1
Recruitment Materials	Request Letter-Biguli Secondary School-Uganda	03/02/2023	1
Recruitment Materials	Request Letter-Mbarara High School-Uganda	03/06/2023	1
Other Supporting Documents	Patrick-Acceptance Research Letter-Kinoni SS	03/07/2023	1
Other Supporting Documents	PATRICK PHD ACCEPTANCE LETTER Biguli SS	03/08/2023	1
Instruments for Data Collection	Teachers' Interview Guide	03/10/2023	1
Instruments for Data Collection	PTA Charperson's Interview Guide	03/10/2023	1
Instruments for Data Collection	SCHOOL~1	03/10/2023	1
Recruitment Materials	SCHOOL~1	03/10/2023	1
Instruments for Data Collection	Patrick's Document Checklist Guide	03/10/2023	1
Instruments for Data Collection	Observation Checklist	03/13/2023	1
Instruments for Data Collection	FGD Guide	03/14/2023	1

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Other Supporting Documents	Acceptance Letter from Mbarara High School-Uganda	03/22/2023	1
Recruitment Materials	Request Letter-Central Secondary School Ruhaama-Uganda	03/28/2023	1
Other Supporting Documents	Central Secondary School Acceptance Letter	03/31/2023	1
Consent Documents	Informed Consent form for Observation	04/06/2023	1
Other Supporting Documents	Patrick Tumwine Approval Letter	04/12/2023	1
Other Supporting Documents	UNCST 2023 Research Approval Permit-PhD	05/18/2023	1
Consent Documents	Patrick's Administrator-Informed Consent Form-Interview	06/07/2023	3
Consent Documents	Patrick's Informed Consent Form-Document Checklist Access-Administrator	06/07/2023	3
Consent Documents	Patrick's Informed Consent Form-Interview for PTA	06/07/2023	2
Consent Documents	Patrick's Informed Consent Form-Document Checklist for Teachers	06/07/2023	3
Consent Documents	Patrick's Informed Consent Form-Interviews for Teachers	06/07/2023	3
Consent Documents	Consent Form-Focus Group Discussion	06/07/2023	2
Other Supporting Documents	Tumwine Patrick-Dissertation Proposal	07/03/2023	2

Please keep in mind the following responsibilities of the Principle Investigator:

- Conduct the study only according to the protocol approved by the IRB.
- Submit any changes to the protocol and/or consent documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to the implementation of the changes. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
- Ensure that only persons formally approved by the IRB interact or enroll with subjects.
- Report immediately to the IRB any severe adverse reaction or serious problem, whether anticipated or unanticipated, using the **Unanticipated Problem/Protocol Deviation Report**.

Report immediately to the IRB the death of a subject, regardless of the cause.

Report promptly to the IRB any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to participate or continue to take part in the study.

Ensure completion and maintenance of an active (non-expired) CITI human subjects training certificate for all individuals on the protocol.

Close the protocol after completion of the project. Use the **IRB Closure Request** form. Data must be retained for a minimum of **3 years** after study completion.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

If you wish to continue the study, submit a **Continuing Review Request** before 07/12/2024. If the study is active beyond 07/12/2024 it will **expire**.

If you need any assistance, please contact us.

Sincerely

Office of Research and Graduate Studies

Research Compliance

University of the Incarnate Word

(210) 805-3555

irb@uiwtx.edu

IRB #: 00005059 / FWA #: 00009201

Appendix B

Research Approval: Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

(Established by Act of Parliament of the Republic of Uganda)

Our Ref: SS1727ES **18 May 2023**

Patrick Tumwine
Congregation of Holy Cross, District of East Africa

Kampala

Re: Research Approval: **<u>An Exploration of How Education Stakeholders Perceive the Implication of Grade Repetition at a Secondary School Level in Western Uganda. A Qualitative Multiple-Case Study.</u>**

I am pleased to inform you that on **18/05/2023**, the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) approved the above referenced research project. The Approval of the research project is for the period of **18/05/2023** to **18/05/2025**.

Your research registration number with the UNCST is **SS1727ES**. Please, cite this number in all your future correspondences with UNCST in respect of the above research project. As the Principal Investigator of the research project, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. Keeping all co-investigators informed of the status of the research.
2. Submitting all changes, amendments, and addenda to the research protocol or the consent form (where applicable) to the designated Research Ethics Committee (REC) or Lead Agency for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes. UNCST must be notified of the approved changes within five working days.
3. For clinical trials, all serious adverse events must be reported promptly to the designated local REC for review with copies to the National Drug Authority and a notification to the UNCST.
4. Unanticipated problems involving risks to research participants or other must be reported promptly to the UNCST. New information that becomes available which could change the risk/benefit ratio must be submitted promptly for UNCST notification after review by the REC.

5. Only approved study procedures are to be implemented. The UNCST may conduct impromptu audits of all study records.
6. An annual progress report and approval letter of continuation from the REC must be submitted electronically to UNCST. Failure to do so may result in termination of the research project.

Please note that this approval includes all study related tools submitted as part of the

No.	Document Title	Language	Version Number	Version Date
1	Informed Consent for PTA's interview	English	1	10 March 2023
2	Informed Consent for Teacher's Interview	English	2	10 March 2023
3	Informed Consent for Administrator's Interview	English	2	10 March 2023
4	Informed Consent for Teacher's Records	English	2	06 April 2023
5	Informed Consent for Administrator's Records	English	2	06 April 2023
6	Covid-Risk Management	English	1	10 March 2023
7	Document Checklist Guide	English	1	10 March 2023
8	FGD Guide	English	1	10 March 2023
9	Informed Consent for FGD	English	1	06 April 2023
10	Informed Consent for Observation	English	1	06 April 2023
11	Observation Checklist Guide	English	1	10 March 2023
12	Project Proposal	English	1	
13	Approval Letter	English		
14	Administrative Clearance	English		

application as shown below:

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Ddamulira
For: Executive Secretary

UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

LOCATION/CORRESPONDENCE

Plot 6 Kimera Road, Ntinda
P.O. Box 6884
KAMPALA, UGANDA

COMMUNICATION

TEL: (256) 414 705500
FAX: (256) 414-234579
EMAIL: info@uncst.go.ug
WEBSITE: http://www.uncst.go.ug

Appendix C

Protocol Approval: Makerere University

P .O. Box 7062,
Kampala, Uganda
Cables: MAKUNIKA

Tel: 256-41-545040/0712 207926
Fax: 256-41-530185
E-mail: makssrec@gmail.com

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Your Ref:

Our Ref: MAKSSREC 03.23.650/AR

12th April 2023

Bro. Patrick Tumwine
Principal Investigator (MAKSSREC 3.23-650)
University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway,
San Antonio, Texas 78209

Telephone No: +1(210)-805-3565
Email: tumwine@student.uiwtx.edu)
Dear Sir,

Initial Review – Regular
Re: Approval of Protocol titled: "An Exploration of how Educational Stakeholders Perceived the Implication of Grade Repetition at a Secondary School Level in Western Uganda: A Qualitative Multiple-Case Study
This is to inform you that, the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC) granted approval to the above referenced study. The MAKSS REC reviewed the proposal using the full board review **30th March 2023**. This was done after the investigator addressing the comments raised by the REC as required satisfactorily

Your study protocol number with MAKSS REC is **MAKSSREC 03.23.650** Please be sure to reference this number in any correspondence with MAKSS REC. Note that, the initial approval date for your proposal by **MAKSS REC was 30th March 2023**. This is an annual approval and therefore; approval expires on **29th March 2024. Please note that, final approval should be done by Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. You should use stamped consent forms and study tools/instruments while executing your field activities at all times.** However, continue d approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements.

Continued Review
In order to continue on this study (including data analysis) beyond the expiration date, Makerere University School of Social Sciences (MAKSS REC) must re-approve the protocol after conducting a substantive meaningful, continuing review. This means that you must submit a continuing report
Form as a request for continuing review. To avoid a lapse, you should submit the request six (6) to eight (8) weeks before the lapse date. Please use the forms supplied by our office.

1

Please also note the following:

- No other consent form(s), questionnaires and or advertisement documents should be used. The Consent form(s) must be signed by each subject prior to initiation of my protocol procedures. In addition, each research participant should be given a copy of the signed consent form.

Amendments

During the approval period, if you propose any changes to the protocol such as its funding source, recruiting materials or consent documents, you must seek Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (MAKSS REC) for approval before implementing it.

Please summarise the proposed change and the rationale for it in a letter to the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee. In addition, submit three (3) copies of an updated version of your original protocol application- one showing all proposed changes in bold or "track changes" and the other without bold or track changes.

Reporting

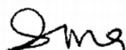
Among other events which must be reported in writing to the Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee include:

i. Suspension or termination of the protocol by you or the grantor.
ii. Unexpected problems involving risk to participants or others.
iii. Adverse events, including unanticipated or anticipated but severe physical harm to participants.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to the protection of human subjects in research.
The legal requirement in Uganda is that, all research activities must be registered with the National Council for Science and Technology. The forms for this registration can be obtained from their website www.unsct.go.ug

Please contact the Administrator of Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee at makssrec@gmail.com OR bijulied@yahoo.co.uk or telephone number +256 712 207926 if you counter any problem.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Stella Neema
Chairperson
Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research and Ethics Committee

c.c.: The Executive Secretary, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology

Appendix D

Invitation Letter of Study Participation

Name of Investigator: Patrick Tumwine

Study Title

Exploration of How Education Stakeholders Perceive the Implications of Grade Repetition in Secondary Education on Educational Costs, Students' Self-Efficacy and National Exam Pass Rates in Western Uganda: A Qualitative Multiple-Case Study

Dissertation Committee

Co-Chair: Dr. Alison M Buck
Co-Chair: Dr. St. Norman St. Clair
Committee Member: Dr. Grace Gutierrez

Mr/Miss/Mrs.....
Name of the School:
P.O.Box......

City, District Name.......

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs:

I am Bro. Patrick Tumwine, CSC, a Ph.D. candidate in education at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. I will be conducting *A Qualitative Multiple-Case Study on How Education Stakeholders Perceive the Implications of Grade Repetition in Secondary Education on Educational Costs, Students' Self-Efficacy, and National Exam Pass Rates in Western Uganda* as a requirement for my graduation.

I request your participation in my study because of your rich experience in Ugandan education. Your position as a research participant in this study will significantly strengthen the in-depth understanding of the above research phenomenon. I look forward to hearing from you regarding your decision and any other information you may need concerning this topic of study.

With your acceptance, I will contact you in June 2023 to plan our interaction. If you have questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with me by phone at +256772858730 (Ug), +1(574)2292149 (U.S), or by email at tumwinepatrick@gmail.com or tumwine@student.uiwtx.edu I appreciate your time in considering my request.

Sincerely,

……………………………………

Bro. Patrick Tumwine, CSC
PhD Candidate in Education
Organizational Leadership
tumwine@student.uiwtx.edu