

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The practice of allowing students to progress from one class to the next irrespectively of their academic performance otherwise called automatic promotion has polarized education development stakeholders along the lines of those in support and those against[1].According to [2], the origin of the policy can be traced to the 1930s and it is adopted and implemented in the perceived interest of a student's well-being. Arguments for and against automatic promotion are centered on its credibility as a viable alternative to grade retention, [3], and he further explained, if not properly managed will lead to academic wastages. Enhancing the quality of education arguments point to the fact that repetition does not improve the achievement of the low-achievers, nor does it reduce the range of abilities but increases wastages according to [4], since each class will carry the retained students into the next year as a source of a difference inability [5].

Moreover, retaining students leads to crowding inclassrooms, leading to high student-classroom ratios and high student-teacher ratios thus lowering the overall quality of education [6].This case is directly related to the situation of secondary schools in Cameroon, especially at the urban areas of the North West and South West, were majority of the students in the rural schools of the Anglophone regions have migrated to the core cities of the two speaking English Secondary Schools, where student-teacher ratio is a problem and as a result, promotes psychosocial interactions, that some has led to the extreme cases of killings between students and teachers and diminishing academic achievement which influences the decisions of automatic promotions. By contrast, automatic promotion fosters equity in learning outcomes especially between male and female students [7], and between schools with availability of learning materials and schools with inadequate learning materials Furthermore, repeating classes in our secondary schools in Cameroon prolongs the actual school completion time instead of seven years as the case may be, some students will turned to spend more than seven years especially repeating in examination classes, such as form five and upper sixth as well as time to engage productively in the labor market, which represents a monetary cost to students over their life-cycles [8].Counter arguments against automatic promotion state that it negatively affects the overall quality of education since it eliminates competition, de-motivatesstudents and teachers' alike hence lowering teaching and learning outcomes). By contrast, class retention is viewed as leading to an improvement in cognitive learning outcomes [9], It is worth noting that studies that have reported academic gains attributable to repetition have gone on to add that the gains are short-term and as a result eventually retainedstudents end up lagging behind, which affects their self-esteem and increases the probability of dropping out [10],

1.1.2 Contextual Background

[11], reports that in Cameroon the school system continues to suffer from inefficiency witnessed in the repetition of classes, poor pass rates in official examinations with large differences in performance between urban and rural schools. Indeed, many studies [12], reveal high repeating rates (more than 40%) at the level of primary schools in Cameroon. To confront this problem, the government of Cameroon through the former Ministry of National Education initiated with the assistance of the African Development Bank, the Education project II. This project had as a main objective, to experiment on the reduction of repetition to about 10% through the introduction of compensatory or remedial education, competency-based teaching and automatic promotion in some selected schools in the country.

Compensatory teaching within the context of Education Project II refers to any supplementary teaching outside the official school time (MINEDUC, Education Project II, 2011). The strategies in compensatory/remedial education proposed by Biehler and Snowman in [13], are as follows: Group work, individual teaching, material for extra and further teaching, provision for alternative material, re-teaching and re-education. Promotion is based on a policy upon which children change from an inferior class to a superior class irrespective of the child's average score. In Cameroon English speaking secondary school systems, is divided into two major cycles, that is cycle 1, which runs from form 1 to form 5, and writing a national entrance examination (O/Level) to be promoted to cycle two, which is lower sixth and upper sixth and writing another entrance national examination (A/Level) Advance level to complete the secondary school cycle. This division into cycles is based on the fact that the curriculum of each cycle is similar and the level of psycho-socio interactions is common among each cycle.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since its adoption and implementation, automatic promotion has given rise to an engaging debate amongst education stakeholders in Africa. The policy is supported by the Ministry of Education and international education development partners (donors) operating in the country. The opponents of the policy comprise parents, school administrators, district education officials, private education providers, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). The arguments for and against the policy in Cameroon are similar to those held in developed and other developing countries that have experience with it (i.e. contrasting it with class repetition on the students psycho-social interactions). The difference being that

the debate in Cameroon is happening without either side presenting any evidence in the context of Cameroon to support their respective claims/arguments especially at the GCE O and A level performance of students automatically promoted. The general performance of official or national examination has been consistently dropping since the implementation of the policy till date. The secondary school systems has continues to graduate inexperienced and immature students in to the universities, with low retention rates and poor behaviors. [15], the psychological impact of failure and repetition on the individual student can be destructive as the repeater (student) develops an inferiority complex and an unprogressive attitude towards peers and schools. On the part of parents, failure and repeating by off-springs can lead to the development of a feeling of guilt in the non-accomplishment of their duty as primary educators.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Given the above evidence, this study thus seeks to fill the information gap regarding the impact of comparatively, the performance of students automatically promoted and students meritoriously promoted in secondary schools in the South West and North West regions of Cameroon

Consequently, the key research questions guiding this study are;

- What is the effect of automatic promotion between male and female students' achievements in official examination in Cameroon's secondary education?
- To assess the effect of students achievements from rural and urban secondary schools in official examination in Cameroon?

2.0REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Repetition and wastage could be curbed and automatic promotion practiced while ensuring that learning is taking place. Mastery learning uses differentiated and individualized instruction, progress monitoring, formative assessment, feedback, corrective procedures, and instructional alignment to minimize achievement gaps [15], The strategy is based on Benjamin Bloom's Mastery model, in which following initial instruction, teachers administer a brief formative assessment based on the unit's learning goals. The assessment gives students information, or feedback, which helps identify what they have learned well to that point (diagnostic) and what they need to learn better (prescriptive).

Findings from a study carried out in Afghanistan by [16], reveal that teachers are concerned about the low level of achievement in lower primary grades due to automatic promotion which according to them is due to the high prevalence of repetition in grade 4, .Bonvin et al, 2008, Witmer, Hoffman

and [17], found out that teachers believe in retention but the authors argue that past inquires have found that teachers' beliefs about retention are influenced by peers rather than by research. [17], and Range et al., believe that this has caused teachers to recommend retention for students who have similar characteristics such as being male, minority and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. According to a study by [18], 77% of respondents who were teachers believed that grade repetition is an effective way of preventing students' future academic failure and 94% of the respondents disagree with the statement that students should never repeat.

African teachers who were spoken to regarding retention had favorable views and saw it as an essential tool to assist weaker children by giving them a chance to improve their knowledge and be more prepared for the higher levels of schooling.[19],reports that nearly80% of Senegaleseteacher thought repetition was an 'efficient' measure and 18% thought it was 'extremely efficient'. Only 2% believed that repetition was 'totally inefficient alternative to automatic promotion. It would seem that most research findings on teachers' perception on automatic promotion reveal negative perceptions.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This research incorporated a mixed method research approach which applied both the Qualitative and Quantitative approaches. The sample was drawn randomly from the population examinations records between the students automatically promoted and students' meritoriously promoted (N-2), secondary data were collected on line and in selected schools and the themes are presented thematically.

4.0. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Research Question One: To find out the performance scores between students automatically and meritoriously promoted in terms of gender in the North and South West of Cameroon.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents Response in Different Secondary Schools

Subjects	2015 Automatic Promoted Candidates (APC %)	2015 Meritoriously Promoted Candidates (MPC)	2014 Automatic Promoted Candidates (APC %)	2014 Meritoriously Promoted Candidates (MPC)	2013 Automatic Promoted Candidates (APC %)	2013 Meritoriously Promoted Candidates (MPC)	2012 Automatic Promoted Candidates (APC %)	2012 (MPC)
Mathematics	32.31	52.61	29.78	55.87	31.67	53.19	33.11	62.61
English	21.72	57.3	23.08	53.54	22.5	52.98	21.67	56.3
French	19.87	53.9	18.6	52.76	19.61	51.75	24.15	51.8
Geography	39.17	67.2	36.16	59.2	41.31	61.43	37.19	

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Biology	35.17	62.9	32.12	58.3	36.12	64.67	32.64	58.8
Average	29.64	58.78	27.95	55.93	30.24	56.80	29.75	59.3
Remark	Bad	Good	Bad	Average	Poor	Fair	Poor	Good

Source: Secondary Data

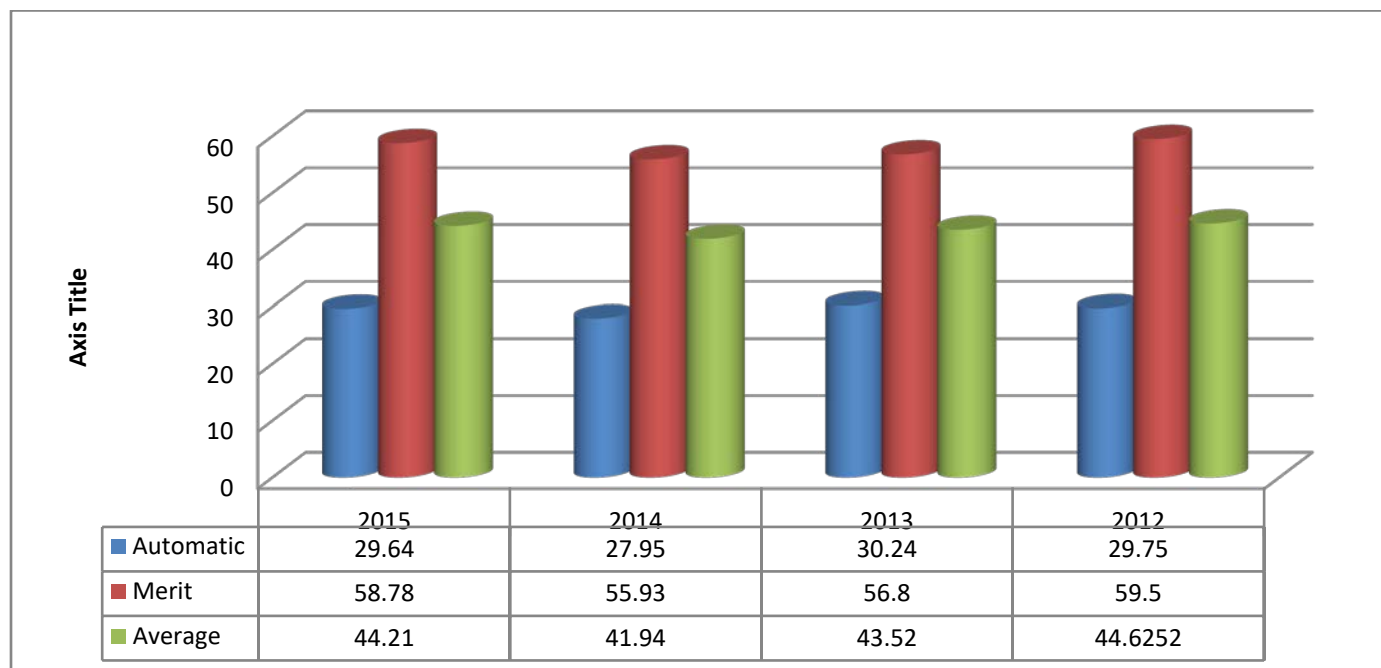


Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents Response in Different Secondary Schools

According to research question one, To find out the performance scores between students automatically and meritoriously promoted in terms of gender in the North and South West of Cameroon. Specifically, the table above reveals that students who were progressively automatically promoted faced difficulties in official or national exams, such as the Ordinary Level. Statistics from the findings on the bar chart, reveals that, Ordinary Level of 2012, Average performance for English, French, Mathematics, Biology and Geography of 250 students of some selected secondary schools in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon had an average score of 44.6252% with 59.5% from students who are meritoriously promoted and 29.75% from students who were progressively automatically promoted, as from 2013, general performance of

the official or national examination has been dropping and standard of education falling because of the policy of automatic promotion.

From empirical findings, in secondary schools in the North West and South West, Automatic promotion is commonly practices and highly implemented in Government Schools in the two speaking English Regions, compared to private and Mission schools who concentrate on performance and meritorious progressive performance rather than Automatic promotion. Percentage of National Examination is higher in private and Mission schools than in Government schools. Most of the teachers did not think automatic promotion had a positive effect on the quality of education. These findings corroborated examination markers expressed disappointment in some student’s level of understanding and writing styles. Mr. Victor said three out of five scripts he marks, the candidates misinterpret the question paper.

Research Question 2: Aimed at finding out if automatic promotion influence students’ performance in official examinations in rural and urban schools in the North and South West Regions of Cameroon.

Table 2. 2017 Statistics of Ordinary Level Performance

Year	No. Registered	No. Sat	No. Passed	No. Failed	% Passed	% Failed
2017	80212	46,532	11,770	34,555	25.29%	74.59%
2018	110702	102857	63951	38906	62.17%	37.82%

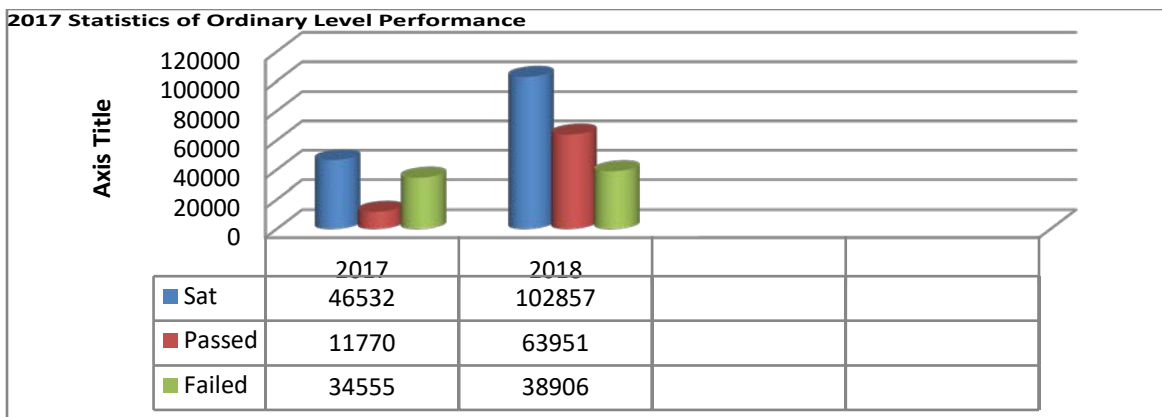


Figure 2: Statistics of Ordinary Level Performance

Findings revealed that, students who are progressively promoted without required average to the next class perform poorly and could not meet to the standard of the Examination. According to a secondary data, A news magazine in Douala, Cameroon-Monday August 14,2017-9:00 PM Local Time, Ordinary Level results of the 2017 session of the General Certificate of Education Examination, GCEE have finally been made public with statistics indicating a drastic drop in performance as compared to last year 2016. Affirming the statistics of research question one, as performance of students keeps dropping as years goes on. This year’s results are disastrous, out of 80,212 who registered, only 46, 532 sat for the exams and 11,770 passed with a percentage pass of 25.29 contrary to last year where 110702 who registered 102, 857 sat for the session and 63,951 passed with a percentage of 62.17.

English language among others written at the Ordinary Level is the language that defines the English-speaking Cameroonian. It has to be taught well, spoken well and written well. It is the medium through which English-speaking pupils and students are taught in schools hence it is the most important subject at the Ordinary Level. This year, 89,821 candidates sat the English exam at the ‘O-Levels’ and 77,911 failed (86.74% failed English). In mathematical ratios, this

means that out of every 100 candidates who sat the English exam, roughly 87 failed. This is very shocking. Another embarrassing statistic is that only 4 candidates in the whole country had an A grade in English language; one from Sacred Heart College Bamenda, one from Our Lady of Lourdes Bamenda, one from PSS Mankon, Bamenda and one from GBHS Etoug-Ebe. The 77,911 candidates who failed English would have to re-sit GCE O-levels in the coming year(s) if they want to study beyond high school. The recurrences of poor and embarrassing results at official examinations have been trace and link to automatic promotion of students.

5.0 DISCUSSION

There are discrepancies between the conception and implementation of automatic promotion and the proper practices of automatic promotion in the English Speaking Secondary Schools in Cameroon. Automatic promotion was conceived as a package that involved remedial teaching, individualized instruction and the competency based approach. Findings reveal that these elements are not being implemented which could lead to a drop in quality especially at the English speaking secondary schools where the parents and guidance faced challenges to provide for basic school needs and remedial teaching. The above perceptions are in line with some of the perceptions of teachers and stakeholders. Arguments against automatic promotion state that it negatively affects the overall quality of education since it eliminates competition, de-motivates students and teachers alike hence lowering teaching and learning outcomes[19], Teachers believe that class repetition is an effective way of preventing students' future academic failure. [19], However, there is also substantial research findings that contradict the above assertions.

Research reveals that in Cameroon a 2010 study conducted by the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEBUB) among primary school students before moving to secondary school confirms this finding: 49% of Cameroonian children in the third year of primary school struggled to read, while 27% could not read at all in secondary schools, given the prevalence of continuous dropping in the official examinations, demonstrating the urgent need for Cameroon to improve the quality of its education (World Bank, 2014). The fundamental goal of education is for people to acquire literacy, numeracy and essential life skills and a lack of literacy and numeracy is strongly correlated with poverty – both in an economic sense and in the broader sense of a deprivation of capabilities. Literacy strengthens the capabilities of individuals, families and communities to access health, educational, political, economic and cultural opportunities and services (EFA Monitoring Report, 2006)

6.0. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Automatic promotion as a policy may have positive or negative outcomes depending on its implementation. Even though many studies have addressed automatic promotion very few have dwelled on the comparative analysis between students automatically promoted and those meritoriously promoted on gender and rural and urban setting. A closer look at how it is implemented in various contexts may provide clues to the outcomes. Many developing countries may not set the stage for the implementation of automatic promotion but anticipate successful outcomes. In Cameroon there is a discrepancy between the conception of automatic promotion and the quality of education. This may account for the performances of students during official or national examination. Changes were not made at the school level to enhance the effectiveness of automatic promotion especially at the two English speaking Regions of Cameroon. Even though automatic promotion is aimed primarily at minimizing wastage it also

calls for a lot of investment by way of human and material resources especially in countries which are grappling with large class sizes and low socio-economic background of learners.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Educational performance between automatic and merit promoted students is generally imperative because the performance of automatic promoted students generally affects the performance of official examinations in the North and South West Regions of Cameroon. However, the key factor in automatic promotion is its implementation. Automatic promotion should not be done in isolation. In Cameroon automatic promotion was conceived to be accompanied by the mastery learning approach which required remedial and individualized instruction to improve the cognitive ability of slow learners, Cameroon has been known with good policies the problem always lies at the effective implementation. As a proposal to hierarchy on how to improve quality, respondent interviewed suggested, automatic promotion is a brilliant concept, working well in other countries, the policy makers needs to take other things in to considerations, such as students' background, Socio Educational level and parented approvals in order to implement.



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