

Factors Influencing Pupils' Progression Rates from Grade Five to Grade Six: A Case Study of Selected Primary Schools in Petauke District

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Abstract – Pupil progression from one grade to the next is a critical indicator of educational efficiency, particularly in rural contexts where multiple challenges impede learning continuity. This study investigated the factors influencing pupils' progression rates from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools within Petauke District, Eastern Province, Zambia. The research employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data from questionnaires and school records with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions involving teachers, pupils, parents, and education officers. Key findings revealed that pupil progression was influenced by an interplay of academic, institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural factors. While 46.7% of pupils were within the typical age range for Grades 5–6, delayed progression was linked to grade repetition, late school entry, and irregular attendance. Additional factors included inadequate learning materials, large class sizes, limited parental involvement, long distances to school, household chores, and food insecurity. Gender-specific challenges, particularly for girls, were also noted, including absenteeism due to menstrual hygiene and early marriage risks. Based on these findings, the study recommends: provision of adequate learning materials, school feeding programs to address nutritional gaps, transport support for pupils living far from school, teacher professional development to improve instructional quality, reduction of class sizes, and enhanced parental and community engagement. Implementing these measures is expected to improve progression rates, reduce repetition and dropout, and promote equitable, inclusive education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Keywords – Pupil progression, Grade 5 to 6, rural education, Petauke District, Zambia, school dropout, educational equity.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Overview

This chapter introduces the study that investigates the factors influencing pupils' progression rates from Grade 5 to 6 in selected primary schools in Petauke District. It lays the foundation for understanding the academic, socioeconomic, and institutional barriers that may hinder or promote grade-level advancement. The chapter outlines the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose, objectives, and research questions guiding the investigation. Additionally, it discusses the significance, scope, limitations, theoretical framework, and key operational terms. The aim is to examine these progression dynamics within the rural context of Zambia's education system, where many pupils face challenges that negatively impact transition between primary school levels. This chapter is essential in setting the tone for the subsequent literature review, methodology, data analysis, and recommendations for improved progression strategies in basic education.

2. Background to the Study

Pupils' academic progression is a key indicator of educational system effectiveness. In primary education, progression from one grade to another reflects both academic achievement and institutional support (UNESCO, 2019). However, across many developing countries including Zambia, various systemic factors such as teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and limited learning resources contribute to stagnation and dropout before completing primary school (MoGE, 2021). The transition from Grade five to Grade six is a critical stage in basic

education where learning complexity increases, and pupils are expected to have developed foundational skills. In rural districts like Petauke, educational inequality further complicates this transition due to disparities in access to materials and trained teachers. Therefore, investigating what facilitates or hinders pupils' progression at this level is crucial to formulating effective policies for inclusive and continuous learning.

Globally, pupil progression is affected by a complex interplay of factors including poverty, school quality, and parental support (Glewwe & Kremer, 2006). Countries that have improved education progression rates often do so by investing in school infrastructure, teacher development, and community engagement. In Sub-Saharan Africa, progression rates have remained low particularly in rural areas due to high repetition and dropout rates linked to economic and social challenges (World Bank, 2020). Zambia, despite implementing Free Primary Education in 2002 and curriculum reforms under the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), continues to face challenges in ensuring smooth progression between grades, especially from Grade 5 to 6. This study aims to analyze these challenges within the localized context of Petauke District to generate contextual insights that may inform national interventions. The importance of progression from Grade Five to six is also linked to Zambia's national development goals as articulated in the 8th National Development Plan (2022–2026), which emphasizes human capital investment through education (Zambia Ministry of Finance, 2022). Failure to progress beyond Grade 5 can increase vulnerability to early marriages, child labor, and long-term poverty, especially in rural communities (UNICEF, 2018).

Despite initiatives such as the School Feeding Programme and teacher recruitment drives, rural schools in Petauke still experience disparities in pupil progression. Exploring the specific factors that lead to successful or failed transitions between these grades is therefore not only a pedagogical concern but also a national development priority. The findings of this study will thus contribute to the educational equity and quality discourse in Zambia.

The theoretical basis for understanding pupil progression incorporates concepts of educational equity, inclusive learning, and child development. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the importance of social interactions and support structures in fostering learning progression (Vygotsky, 1978). When pupils in rural schools lack engagement due to insufficient support at home or in school, their academic development is hindered. In Zambia, language barriers and lack of learner-centered pedagogies further affect progression from Grade 5 to 6, where content becomes more abstract and demanding. It is at this stage that pupils are expected to demonstrate literacy, numeracy, and content comprehension. If foundational competencies have not been effectively built in earlier grades, progression becomes difficult. Thus, this study is grounded in the idea that external support, curriculum design, and instructional quality directly influence progression outcomes.

Evidence from educational research shows that the home environment significantly affects a child's ability to progress academically. Pupils from low-income families in rural areas often face inadequate nutrition, limited access to learning materials, and increased responsibility for household chores—all of which disrupt regular school attendance (Chisanga et al., 2020). These factors are particularly relevant in Petauke District, where subsistence farming is the primary livelihood, and children's education may be deprioritized. Girls are especially vulnerable due to early marriages and gendered domestic roles. Understanding these socioeconomic variables is key to interpreting why some pupils fail to advance to Grade 6 despite being enrolled in school. By identifying these home-based barriers, this research aims to propose realistic strategies that address the root causes of stagnation and dropout in Zambia's rural educational landscape.

Another important aspect that affects pupil progression is school leadership and teacher motivation. According to Bush and Glover (2014), school management plays a pivotal role in creating an environment conducive to learning and retention. In poorly managed schools, teacher absenteeism, lack of planning, and poor communication with parents lead to pupil disengagement. In Petauke District, some schools operate with understaffed faculties, resulting in high pupil-to-teacher ratios and limited one-on-one instruction. Additionally, rural teachers may experience low morale due to isolation, lack of incentives, and inadequate housing. These challenges compromise instructional delivery, especially in upper primary grades, which demand greater pedagogical complexity. Therefore, effective leadership and teacher support systems are

necessary in promoting continuous pupil engagement and academic success from Grade 5 to 6.

Instructional quality and curriculum delivery methods are directly linked to how pupils experience school and progress academically. Studies by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) indicate that pupils taught using participatory and differentiated instruction methods perform better and are more likely to advance in school. However, in many Zambian primary schools, rote learning and teacher-centered practices still dominate, leaving behind pupils who need individualized attention. Grade 5 is often seen as a bridge year, introducing advanced literacy and mathematics concepts. If teachers do not employ adaptive techniques, many pupils may become disinterested or feel inadequate, resulting in poor performance and grade repetition. In the case of Petauke District, an evaluation of classroom practices may reveal gaps between curriculum expectations and teaching reality, which this study seeks to address.

Pupil progression can also be hindered by infrastructural inadequacies within the learning environment. The availability of classrooms, desks, textbooks, and clean sanitation facilities plays a significant role in pupil retention and academic success (UNESCO, 2015). In Petauke District, many schools operate in dilapidated conditions or with makeshift classrooms. During the rainy season, flooding and roof leaks disrupt teaching and demotivate both pupils and teachers. The lack of access to clean toilets particularly affects girls' attendance. Without adequate infrastructure, pupils struggle to concentrate, complete assignments, or develop positive attitudes towards school. These issues are often overlooked in policy discussions but have a direct impact on grade-level progression. This study will explore the relationship between school infrastructure and the transition from Grade 5 to 6 in the selected schools. Psychosocial factors, including pupil confidence, teacher-pupil relationships, and peer support, are essential in supporting learners' progression. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), a child's motivation and belief in their ability to succeed are shaped by social reinforcement. If a pupil consistently receives negative feedback, they may internalize a belief of failure, which discourages effort and participation. In rural settings, where school counseling services are limited, these psychological burdens may remain unaddressed. Furthermore, bullying, marginalization, and teacher bias may affect pupils' emotional well-being, ultimately influencing their ability to cope with increasing academic demands in Grade 6. By examining these often-neglected dimensions, this study will provide a more holistic understanding of pupil progression and propose interventions that include emotional and psychological support strategies.

Parental involvement has been widely recognized as a strong predictor of pupil academic success. In a study by Epstein (2001), schools that engaged parents in learning saw improved pupil performance, attendance, and progression rates. However, in Petauke District, many parents may be illiterate or unaware of the importance of involvement in their children's education. Some parents

view education as solely the responsibility of teachers and withdraw their support after initial enrollment. Additionally, economic constraints may force parents to prioritize income-generating activities over school-related concerns. This study will assess the extent of parental engagement in the selected schools and its correlation with pupil progression. Findings will help develop community outreach strategies to foster a more collaborative approach to education that supports Grade 5 to 6 transitions.

National policy and systemic interventions also influence progression rates. Zambia's Ministry of Education has introduced several reforms including the Education Act of 2011 and Curriculum Framework of 2013 aimed at improving educational access and quality. Despite these reforms, disparities in implementation remain between urban and rural areas (MoGE, 2021). Resources are often concentrated in towns, leaving districts like Petauke with fewer trained teachers, irregular monitoring, and inadequate teaching materials. Consequently, policy intentions are not always translated into practice at the school level. This study will explore how policy implementation gaps affect progression in rural schools and recommend localized strategies for bridging those gaps. By focusing on policy-practice alignment, the research seeks to strengthen the feedback loop between grassroots educational realities and national educational planning.

The impact of health and nutrition on educational attainment has been extensively documented. Malnourished pupils tend to have lower concentration, poor memory retention, and higher absenteeism (UNICEF, 2020). In Petauke, many families cannot afford consistent, nutritious meals, making children vulnerable to fatigue and illness. The Zambian government's school feeding program has tried to mitigate this problem, but implementation inconsistencies persist. Pupils who miss school due to illness or hunger are more likely to lag behind and fail to transition to the next grade. This study includes an analysis of health-related absenteeism and its impact on progression, aiming to provide evidence for strengthening school-based health interventions. Improved nutrition and health services may not only enhance pupil well-being but also lead to higher academic progression rates.

Cultural beliefs and societal expectations continue to shape attitudes toward education in Zambia. In some rural communities, boys are encouraged to engage in cattle herding while girls may be expected to marry early, especially after puberty (Mwansa, 2022). These cultural practices reduce the likelihood of consistent school attendance and ultimately, academic progression. Education may not be seen as a valuable investment when compared to immediate economic gains or social status. Cultural resistance to female education is particularly detrimental to progression beyond Grade 5. This research seeks to uncover the cultural factors influencing pupil progression in Petauke and recommend culturally sensitive approaches that align education with community values. Such alignment is critical for community buy-in and sustainable educational outcomes.

The role of school-based assessments in determining progression is a significant factor. Pupils must meet academic performance benchmarks to proceed from Grade 5 to 6, often measured by end-of-term tests or continuous assessments. However, discrepancies in assessment standards and marking practices may unfairly disadvantage some pupils. According to Clarke (2012), when assessments are not standardized or transparent, progression decisions may lack fairness and consistency. In Petauke, some teachers may inflate grades to show compliance with progression targets, while others may fail pupils due to rigid interpretations of benchmarks. This study will examine how assessment practices influence pupil progression and recommend strategies to ensure equity, transparency, and reliability in academic evaluation at the school level.

Technological access, though limited in rural Zambia, is an emerging factor influencing education outcomes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning highlighted the digital divide between rural and urban schools. In Petauke, very few schools have access to computers or internet, which limits pupils' exposure to digital learning tools and modern instructional materials (Ngoma, 2021). While the role of ICT in progression is not yet fully developed in rural primary education, this study will explore existing opportunities and future potential for integrating affordable technologies to support learning. Innovative low-tech solutions such as radio programs, mobile SMS quizzes, or recorded audio lessons may serve as transitional tools for enhancing pupil learning and ultimately improving progression outcomes.

In summary, the progression of pupils from Grade 5 to 6 is influenced by a diverse range of academic, institutional, social, cultural, and policy-related factors. The rural context of Petauke District presents unique challenges such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher support, and cultural barriers, all of which may hinder effective learning and grade transition. Understanding these factors through empirical research is crucial for informing targeted interventions that promote equity and inclusiveness in Zambia's basic education system. The findings of this study will not only contribute to knowledge but also serve as a policy tool for enhancing pupil progression and educational continuity. This background sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the causes of poor progression rates and offers a foundation for subsequent chapters.

3. Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous educational reforms and policies aimed at increasing school enrolment and retention in Zambia, a significant number of pupils still fail to progress smoothly from Grade 5 to Grade 6, especially in rural areas such as Petauke District. The Ministry of General Education (MoGE, 2021) continues to report grade repetition and dropout rates in upper primary levels, signaling unresolved systemic challenges. While enrollment at the early grades is relatively high, progression into the upper primary grades shows noticeable decline. The Grade 5 to 6 transition represents a critical academic junction, yet many learners

do not complete this phase due to various interrelated barriers. This stagnation not only affects the individual learner's future prospects but also undermines national goals of human capital development and universal primary education.

Existing literature and national educational reports focus extensively on enrolment and completion rates, with minimal emphasis on mid-primary grade progression, particularly the Grade 5 to 6 level (UNESCO, 2019; CSO, 2020). This gap in both academic inquiry and policy attention leaves educators and planners ill-equipped to implement evidence-based interventions for progression improvement. Studies by Chisanga et al. (2020) and Mwansa (2022) have highlighted dropout rates in general terms but have not provided grade-specific analyses or rural-focused insights. In Petauke, anecdotal evidence suggests that progression issues are influenced by a combination of socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural factors. However, there remains a lack of systematically documented research focused on these variables at the micro-level, which is essential for policy formulation and targeted interventions in rural Zambia.

Additionally, while Zambia has adopted a Competency-Based Curriculum and policies promoting inclusive education, there is limited clarity on how these initiatives affect pupil progression in rural schools with minimal resources (MoGE, 2017). Many primary schools in Petauke District face acute shortages of qualified teachers, learning materials, and infrastructural support. These shortcomings potentially disrupt curriculum delivery and reduce pupil engagement. Furthermore, teachers often have limited professional development in tracking and supporting pupil progression using continuous assessment tools. The absence of a reliable monitoring framework to track pupil progression trends across mid-primary grades leads to the continued recycling of pupils in the same grade, especially Grade 5. This study responds to the urgent need to generate localized, data-driven insights into this progression dilemma.

Socioeconomic constraints and cultural factors further exacerbate the issue of low progression. Poverty, child labor, and gender-based roles influence school attendance and academic performance in rural communities (UNICEF, 2020). While the government has introduced various pro-poor strategies like the School Feeding Programme and Free Education Policy, their effectiveness in influencing actual progression patterns remains under-researched. Particularly, rural areas like Petauke often suffer from poor policy implementation fidelity, rendering such initiatives ineffective. Cultural norms that discourage prolonged schooling for girls and encourage early marriage contribute to dropout and stagnation. Without specific data on how these external variables influence Grade 5 to 6 progression, policy frameworks risk overlooking the nuanced challenges affecting educational continuity at community level.

Thus, there is a clear need to investigate the specific factors that affect pupil progression from Grade 5 to 6 in selected

rural primary schools in Petauke District. Understanding these factors is crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education (UN, 2015). The absence of empirical data on progression dynamics at this level undermines efforts to improve educational planning and resource allocation. This research aims to fill this critical knowledge gap by exploring the academic, social, economic, institutional, and cultural variables affecting pupil progression. The findings are expected to guide stakeholders—including teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and communities—in designing targeted strategies that foster uninterrupted learning and reduce stagnation at this important stage of primary education.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influenced pupils' progression rates from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools within Petauke District. By identifying academic, socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural variables that affected progression, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and facilitators that impacted pupil advancement at this critical stage. The research sought to generate empirical evidence that could inform education stakeholders, including policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and community leaders, to design targeted interventions that improved retention and transition rates. Furthermore, the study was aligned with national educational objectives aimed at increasing completion rates and promoting equitable access to quality education in rural Zambia (MoGE, 2021). Ultimately, the findings were intended to support sustainable improvements in educational outcomes and contribute to the achievement of Zambia's develop

5. Objectives of the Study

The study was focused on the following objectives:

- To identify the key academic, social, and institutional factors influencing pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools in Petauke District.
- To assess the role of parental and community involvement in supporting pupils' academic progression at the upper primary level.
- To recommend practical strategies and policy interventions to improve progression rates and reduce grade repetition and dropout in rural primary schools.

6. Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

- What academic and institutional factors influence pupils' progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in the selected primary schools?
- How does parental and community involvement affect pupils' progression rates?
- What strategies can be implemented to enhance progression and reduce repetition and dropout rates in Petauke District?

7. Research Hypotheses

This study tested the following hypotheses:

- There is a significant relationship between instructional quality and pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6.
- Parental and community involvement positively influences pupils' academic progression rates.
- Socioeconomic and cultural factors significantly affect pupil progression and dropout rates in rural primary schools.

8. Significance of the Study

This study held significant value for multiple stakeholders involved in the education sector within Petauke District and beyond. For policymakers and education planners, the findings provided evidence-based insights into the complex factors that affected pupil progression between Grade 5 and Grade 6, thereby enabling more targeted resource allocation and intervention designs. By illuminating the academic, socioeconomic, and institutional challenges, the research informed policy refinement aimed at reducing repetition and dropout rates, thus supporting Zambia's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education (UNESCO, 2015). Additionally, the study's localized focus contributed to bridging the knowledge gap in rural education contexts, which often differed markedly from urban environments in terms of infrastructure, social dynamics, and educational outcomes.

For educators and school administrators, the research offered practical recommendations to enhance instructional quality, improve classroom management, and foster stronger community engagement. By understanding the specific barriers pupils faced at this critical educational juncture, teachers and school leaders were able to implement tailored support strategies that promoted continuous learning and reduced stagnation. Furthermore, the study empowered parents and communities by highlighting the importance of their involvement in pupil progression, thereby encouraging collaboration between home and school environments. Ultimately, the study promoted equitable educational opportunities and improved learning outcomes for rural Zambian pupils, contributing to national development through human capital enhancement.

9. Delimitation of the Study

This study was delimited to selected primary schools within Petauke District, focusing specifically on pupils progressing from Grade 5 to Grade 6. The choice of Petauke District as the research site was deliberate, given its rural setting and unique socio-economic and educational challenges, which were representative of many rural areas in Zambia (CSO, 2020). However, the findings might not have been fully generalizable to urban schools or districts with different socio-economic profiles. The research excluded lower primary grades and other transition points, concentrating solely on the critical Grade 5 to Grade 6 progression to allow an in-depth analysis of this pivotal stage in basic education.

Furthermore, the study focused primarily on factors related to academic performance, school infrastructure, teacher and parental involvement, and socio-cultural influences. Other external factors, such as national policy changes beyond the Ministry of General Education's immediate interventions or macroeconomic influences, were not deeply examined. This delimitation ensured a manageable scope for comprehensive data collection and analysis within the available resources and timeframe, while still providing valuable insights applicable to improving pupil progression at the grassroots level.

10. Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was its geographical focus on selected primary schools within Petauke District, which might have limited the broader applicability of the findings to other districts with differing socio-economic or cultural contexts. Rural settings like Petauke had unique challenges that might not have reflected conditions in urban or peri-urban schools (CSO, 2020). Therefore, while the study provided valuable localized insights, caution was necessary when generalizing results beyond similar rural environments.

Another limitation involved data collection challenges related to pupil and parental participation. Some respondents might have provided socially desirable answers, particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as parental involvement or socio-economic hardships (Flick, 2018). This response bias could have affected the accuracy of data regarding the factors influencing progression rates. The study mitigated this limitation by ensuring confidentiality and using triangulation to validate information.

Finally, resource and time constraints may have limited the depth of longitudinal data collection necessary to fully capture progression trends over multiple years. The study relied mainly on cross-sectional data, which might not have accounted for all variables influencing pupil progression dynamically over time (Creswell, 2014). Nonetheless, the findings offered significant baseline knowledge to inform further longitudinal studies.

11. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded primarily in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the critical role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). According to this theory, learning is mediated through interaction with more knowledgeable others such as teachers, parents, and peers. In the context of pupil progression from Grade 5 to 6, effective social support and culturally relevant teaching strategies are essential to scaffold learning and ensure academic advancement.

Complementing this is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which frames the pupil within nested environmental systems ranging from immediate settings like family and school (microsystem) to broader societal influences (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This

framework aids in understanding how multiple layers of influence—including community attitudes, economic conditions, and national educational policies—interact to impact pupil progression in rural Zambia.

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory also informs this study, highlighting the stages of intellectual growth that pupils undergo (Piaget, 1952). Grade 5 to 6 marks the transition from concrete operational to formal operational thinking, requiring instructional approaches that promote abstract reasoning and problem-solving. Failure to meet developmental readiness can contribute to progression delays.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that observational learning and self-efficacy are key determinants of academic motivation (Bandura, 1977). Pupils who witness positive role models and develop confidence in their abilities are more likely to engage actively in learning and succeed academically. Teacher encouragement and peer support thus play a significant role in facilitating progression.

Human Capital Theory underpins the rationale for investing in education as a means of increasing individual productivity and national economic growth (Becker, 1993). Ensuring pupils progress through primary education uninterrupted maximizes returns on educational investments and contributes to sustainable development goals.

The Motivation-Hygiene Theory by Herzberg (1966) is relevant in understanding teacher motivation and its impact on instructional quality. Satisfied and motivated teachers are more likely to implement effective teaching practices that support pupil progression, while dissatisfaction can lead to absenteeism and poor performance.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) helps explain parental involvement and community attitudes toward education. Parents' behavioral intentions and perceived control influence their engagement with their children's schooling, which in turn affects pupil progression.

Critical Pedagogy Theory (Freire, 1970) encourages educational approaches that empower learners to challenge social inequalities. This study considers how education in rural Zambia can address structural barriers hindering pupil progression, advocating for learner-centered and contextually relevant pedagogy.

Lastly, the Systems Theory approach (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) offers a holistic view of the education ecosystem, where changes in one subsystem (e.g., school infrastructure or policy) affect the entire system's functioning. This perspective guides the study's multi-faceted analysis of factors influencing progression rates.

12. Operational Definition of Key Terms

Academic Progression

Academic progression refers to the advancement of pupils from one grade level to the next within the formal education system, indicating successful completion of required learning outcomes and competencies for that grade (MoGE, 2021). In this study, it specifically denotes the movement of pupils from Grade 5 to Grade 6, reflecting both academic achievement and fulfillment of assessment criteria.

Assessment

Assessment involves systematic evaluation of pupils' learning through various tools such as tests, assignments, and continuous assessments. It is used to measure competencies, inform instruction, and determine readiness for progression to higher grades (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)

CBC is an educational approach focused on learners acquiring specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes, emphasizing practical application over rote memorization. Zambia's CBC aims to improve pupil engagement and progression by tailoring instruction to competencies (MoGE, 2017).

Dropout

Dropout describes pupils who discontinue schooling before completing the designated grade or level. It negatively affects progression statistics and is influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors (UNICEF, 2020).

Parental Involvement

This term refers to parents' participation in their children's education, including support with homework, attendance at school meetings, and communication with teachers, which positively influences pupil academic outcomes and progression (Epstein, 2001).

Progression Rate

Progression rate is the percentage of pupils who successfully advance from one grade to the next within a specified time frame, serving as an indicator of educational system effectiveness (UNESCO, 2019).

Repetition

Repetition occurs when pupils are required to repeat a grade due to insufficient academic performance, which can delay progression and increase dropout risk (MoGE, 2021).

School Infrastructure

This term includes the physical facilities and resources such as classrooms, furniture, sanitation, and learning materials, which create the environment necessary for effective teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2015).

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

SES is a composite measure of a family's economic and social position based on income, education, and occupation. It influences pupils' access to educational resources and overall academic progression (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation encompasses the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence educators' enthusiasm, commitment, and performance, directly affecting instructional quality and pupil academic progression (Herzberg, 1966).

Summary

This chapter has established the foundation for investigating factors influencing pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools within Petauke District. The background highlighted the multifaceted challenges—academic, socio-economic, institutional, and cultural—that affect educational continuity in rural Zambia. The problem statement underscored gaps in existing research and policy implementation that contribute to low progression rates. The study's purpose, objectives, research questions, and hypotheses were clearly articulated to guide the inquiry. The significance of the research lies in its potential to inform targeted interventions for improved educational outcomes. Delimitations and limitations defined the scope and constraints, while the theoretical framework anchored the study in relevant educational theories. Finally, key terms were operationally defined to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the research. This chapter thus provides a robust conceptual and contextual ba

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Overview

Pupil progression remains a critical indicator of educational system effectiveness worldwide. This chapter reviews existing literature on the various factors influencing progression rates globally and within Zambia, emphasizing the transition between primary school grades. It synthesizes research across domains such as socioeconomic influences, teacher-related factors, school environment, curriculum design, and community engagement. The review highlights how complex interactions among these factors affect learner outcomes and educational continuity. Studies from diverse contexts provide comparative insights, while local empirical evidence from Zambia offers specificity to this research's rural focus. The chapter also identifies gaps in current knowledge and methodological approaches that the present study aims to address. By integrating theoretical and empirical perspectives, this literature review establishes a foundation for understanding the multidimensional challenges impacting pupil progression, particu

2. Factors Affecting Pupil Progression (Global Context)

Pupil progression is influenced by a complex interplay of factors ranging from individual learner characteristics to broader systemic issues. Globally, socioeconomic status is consistently identified as a key determinant, with children from low-income families facing higher risks of grade repetition and dropout (OECD, 2018). Economic hardships often translate into limited access to learning materials, inadequate nutrition, and increased child labor, which collectively hinder academic advancement (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, educational policies that fail to address

these socioeconomic disparities tend to exacerbate inequities in progression rates. For instance, studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have shown that poverty-related factors disproportionately affect rural pupils, limiting their ability to progress beyond primary grades (Lewin, 2017). Understanding these global patterns is essential for contextualizing local challenges and designing effective interventions tailored to specific settings.

Globally, teacher quality and instructional practices play a pivotal role in pupil progression. Research highlights that well-trained and motivated teachers significantly improve learners' academic outcomes, reducing repetition and dropout rates (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Conversely, teacher absenteeism, inadequate pedagogical skills, and large class sizes undermine effective learning, especially in resource-constrained settings (UNESCO, 2019). For example, in several low-income countries, poor teacher preparation and lack of ongoing professional development have been linked to low pupil progression rates (Akycampong et al., 2019). The global push towards competency-based education underscores the need for continuous teacher training to ensure curriculum delivery aligns with learner needs and supports smooth grade transitions (UNICEF, 2021). Thus, teacher-related factors are a critical global consideration in understanding progression challenges.

School infrastructure and learning environments are fundamental determinants of pupil progression globally. Adequate classroom space, access to learning materials, and safe sanitation facilities have been shown to positively influence attendance and academic performance, thereby supporting seamless progression (UNICEF, 2018). Conversely, overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated facilities, and lack of clean water contribute to absenteeism and disengagement, particularly among vulnerable groups such as girls (WHO, 2019). Studies in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated that investments in school infrastructure correlate strongly with improved retention and progression rates (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, the presence of supportive learning environments fosters motivation and participation, which are critical for pupils to meet grade-level competencies. Addressing infrastructural deficits is thus essential in tackling progression challenges globally.

Curriculum relevance and instructional design also critically influence pupil progression on a global scale. Curricula that are overly theoretical or disconnected from learners' lived experiences can result in disengagement and poor academic performance (Schmidt et al., 2019). In contrast, competency-based curricula that emphasize practical skills and learner-centered approaches have been shown to enhance understanding and retention, fostering smoother transitions between grades (UNESCO, 2017). For example, countries that have adopted curriculum reforms focusing on critical thinking and problem-solving report higher progression rates and improved educational outcomes (OECD, 2020). However, successful curriculum implementation requires alignment with teacher capacity

and resource availability, factors that if overlooked, can hinder progression regardless of curricular improvements (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Thus, instructional quality and curriculum design remain integral to addressing global progression issue

Parental and community involvement significantly impacts pupil progression globally. Research consistently shows that active engagement by parents in their children's education—such as monitoring homework, attending school meetings, and supporting learning at home—correlates with improved academic outcomes and higher progression rates (Epstein, 2011). Community support, including local leadership endorsement of education and provision of learning resources, also enhances school attendance and motivation among pupils (Bakker et al., 2017). However, in many low-income settings, limited parental education and economic hardships constrain meaningful involvement, negatively affecting progression (World Bank, 2019). Programs that strengthen home-school partnerships have demonstrated success in increasing retention and progression, highlighting the need to integrate community engagement strategies in education reforms worldwide (USAID, 2020).

Health and nutrition are critical yet often overlooked factors influencing pupil progression globally. Malnutrition and poor health reduce cognitive functioning, concentration, and energy levels, contributing to absenteeism and lower academic achievement (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). School feeding programs and health interventions have been linked to improved attendance and higher progression rates, especially in low-income countries where food insecurity is prevalent (Bundy et al., 2018). For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, integrated school health initiatives have been shown to significantly enhance pupils' ability to cope with academic demands and successfully transition between grades (WHO, 2016). Ensuring that learners receive adequate nutrition and health support is therefore essential for sustaining academic progression worldwide.

Gender disparities continue to influence pupil progression rates globally, with girls in many regions facing greater barriers to educational continuity. Societal norms, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities disproportionately affect girls, increasing their risk of dropout or delayed progression (UNICEF, 2019). Efforts to promote gender equity, such as scholarships for girls and gender-sensitive school environments, have improved progression rates in some contexts (World Bank, 2020). However, entrenched cultural attitudes and safety concerns often undermine these gains. For instance, in rural communities of South Asia and Africa, girls' progression to upper primary grades remains significantly lower than boys' (Herz & Sperling, 2004). Addressing gender-specific challenges through policy and community engagement is critical to achieving equitable progression outcomes globally.

Language of instruction also significantly affects pupil progression, especially in multilingual societies. Research shows that pupils taught in their mother tongue during early

grades demonstrate better comprehension, higher retention, and smoother grade transitions compared to those instructed in a second language (Heugh, 2011). Conversely, language barriers can lead to disengagement, low performance, and grade repetition (UNESCO, 2016). Several African countries have adopted bilingual education policies to mitigate these challenges, resulting in improved progression rates (Brock-Utne, 2007). However, successful implementation requires trained teachers and appropriate learning materials in local languages, which remain scarce in many contexts. Language policy, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping progression patterns globally, particularly in diverse linguistic settings.

Technological integration in education has emerged as a global factor influencing pupil progression. The use of digital tools and e-learning platforms can enhance engagement, provide personalized learning experiences, and support learners who face barriers to traditional instruction (UNICEF, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning technologies helped mitigate educational disruptions, preserving progression rates in many contexts (World Bank, 2021). However, unequal access to technology—often termed the 'digital divide'—limits these benefits for pupils in rural and low-income settings (OECD, 2020). Infrastructure deficits, lack of teacher training in digital pedagogy, and limited internet connectivity pose significant challenges. Addressing these issues is crucial for leveraging technology's potential to improve progression and learning outcomes globally.

Assessment practices globally have a strong impact on pupil progression, particularly where promotion from one grade to another is based on high-stakes examinations. In many countries, rigid assessment systems result in high repetition rates when learners do not meet standardized benchmarks (UNESCO, 2015). This often demotivates pupils and contributes to school dropout, especially in resource-limited settings where remedial support is lacking (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). Conversely, formative and continuous assessment models that track learner progress throughout the year are associated with improved learning outcomes and more consistent grade progression (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Countries adopting inclusive assessment frameworks—focusing on learner growth rather than performance alone—tend to experience better pupil retention and progression trends. Thus, assessment reform is a key element in promoting global educational equity.

Educational policy and governance frameworks play a foundational role in shaping pupil progression patterns worldwide. Countries with well-coordinated policies that prioritize equitable access, quality teaching, inclusive curricula, and adequate financing typically record higher progression and retention rates (UNESCO, 2021). Decentralized education systems that empower local school authorities often deliver more responsive and context-sensitive interventions, enhancing learning outcomes (Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2011). However, inconsistent policy implementation, corruption, and limited oversight can hinder effectiveness, particularly in low-income

nations. Furthermore, abrupt or poorly planned reforms may disrupt instructional continuity, negatively affecting pupil progression. Sustainable education policy must therefore be data-driven, inclusive, and consistently evaluated to ensure it fosters progression across all levels of basic education. Governance remains a critical enabler or constraint to education

Conflict and humanitarian crises present significant global barriers to pupil progression. In regions affected by war, displacement, or natural disasters, schooling is often disrupted, leading to widespread dropout and grade repetition (UNHCR, 2021). Children in conflict zones face psychological trauma, lack of school infrastructure, and safety concerns, all of which hinder academic focus and progression (Save the Children, 2019). Refugee learners often struggle with language barriers, interrupted schooling, and unfamiliar curricula, making transitions between grades even more difficult (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). International efforts to deliver education in emergencies—through mobile schools, accelerated learning programs, and psychosocial support—have yielded some success, but challenges remain. Ensuring educational continuity for children in crisis contexts is essential for safeguarding their long-term development and reducing global inequality in progression outcomes.

Teacher attitudes and expectations significantly influence pupil progression worldwide. Research shows that when teachers hold high expectations and demonstrate positive attitudes, pupils tend to perform better academically and progress smoothly through grades (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Conversely, low teacher expectations can result in reduced pupil motivation and achievement, contributing to grade repetition and dropout (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Cultural biases and stereotyping may also affect teacher perceptions, particularly in diverse classrooms, leading to differential treatment that impacts progression outcomes (Ferguson, 2003). Professional development programs aimed at enhancing teacher awareness and inclusive practices have been shown to improve classroom dynamics and pupil advancement (OECD, 2019). Therefore, fostering supportive teacher attitudes is crucial in global efforts to improve pupil progression.

Parental education levels have a profound impact on pupil progression globally. Numerous studies indicate that children whose parents have higher educational attainment are more likely to progress steadily through school grades (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Educated parents often possess greater awareness of the importance of schooling, provide academic support at home, and navigate educational systems more effectively (Coleman, 1988). Conversely, low parental education is associated with limited engagement, higher dropout rates, and delayed progression (Sirin, 2005). In many low-income countries, efforts to improve adult literacy and parental education have been linked to enhanced pupil outcomes, demonstrating the intergenerational benefits of education (UNESCO, 2017). Consequently, parental education

remains a critical factor influencing progression rates worldwide.

3. Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Progression

Socioeconomic status (SES) is widely recognized as a fundamental determinant of pupil progression. Children from low-income families often face barriers such as lack of school fees, inadequate learning materials, and poor nutrition, which impede their ability to progress through grades (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Financial constraints may also force children into child labor, reducing time for study and attendance (UNICEF, 2016). In Zambia and similar contexts, rural poverty exacerbates these challenges, limiting educational opportunities for many pupils (CSO, 2020). SES influences not only access to education but also cognitive development and academic achievement, directly impacting progression rates (Sirin, 2005). Therefore, addressing socioeconomic disparities is critical for improving educational continuity and reducing dropout. Household income level directly correlates with school attendance and progression. Families with higher income can afford necessary school supplies, uniforms, and transportation, all of which facilitate consistent attendance (World Bank, 2018). Conversely, low-income families often prioritize short-term survival needs over education, resulting in irregular attendance and grade repetition (Lewin, 2007). The financial burden of schooling disproportionately affects girls, who may be withdrawn earlier for domestic duties or marriage (UNICEF, 2019). Conditional cash transfer programs in some countries have successfully incentivized attendance and progression by alleviating economic pressures (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Such interventions demonstrate the importance of economic support in fostering educational advancement. Parental occupation influences educational outcomes and progression rates. Parents engaged in informal or subsistence work often have limited time and resources to support their children's schooling (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Agricultural labor, common in rural Zambia, may demand children's participation, reducing study time and attendance (World Bank, 2020). Conversely, parents with stable formal employment typically provide more consistent academic support and resources (Sirin, 2005). Employment status also affects parental attitudes towards education, with more educated and economically stable parents valuing and promoting academic success (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Understanding the interplay between parental occupation and pupil progression is thus vital for tailored policy interventions. Parental education levels strongly influence pupil progression by shaping attitudes towards schooling and the ability to support learning at home. Parents with higher education tend to value formal education, set academic expectations, and provide cognitive stimulation, which improves children's academic performance and continuity (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). In contrast, low parental literacy may limit assistance with homework and reduce awareness of school policies, negatively affecting progression rates (Sirin, 2005). Efforts to enhance adult literacy in low-income communities have shown positive ripple effects on children's schooling outcomes (UNESCO,

2017). Thus, parental education is a critical socioeconomic factor intertwined with educational progression.

Access to educational resources, including textbooks, stationery, and technological devices, is closely linked to socioeconomic status and influences progression. Pupils from wealthier families are more likely to have adequate learning materials, which facilitate homework completion and exam preparation (OECD, 2018). In many developing countries, limited school resources compound this disadvantage, especially in rural areas where supply chains are weak (Lewin, 2017). Resource deficits contribute to poor academic performance, repetition, and dropout (World Bank, 2020). Addressing resource inequities through government provision and community support programs is essential to improving progression outcomes among disadvantaged pupils.

Nutrition and health, integral aspects of socioeconomic conditions, affect pupils' cognitive development and school attendance. Malnourished children often exhibit delayed cognitive growth, reduced concentration, and increased absenteeism, all of which hinder academic progression (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). School feeding programs have demonstrated efficacy in improving attendance and learning outcomes, especially in impoverished communities (Bundy et al., 2018). In Zambia, where food insecurity remains a challenge, such interventions are crucial for sustaining pupils' progression through primary grades (CSO, 2020). Hence, socioeconomic support addressing nutrition and health directly impacts educational continuity.

Household size and family dynamics also influence pupil progression rates. Larger families, common in many rural African contexts, often face resource dilution, where limited financial and emotional resources must be spread among many children (Blake, 1981). This can result in reduced educational investment per child, higher dropout rates, and delayed progression (UNICEF, 2019). Additionally, family disruptions such as divorce or death of a parent may destabilize children's schooling (Morrow & Malherbe, 2012). Policies aimed at supporting vulnerable families can mitigate these socioeconomic challenges, promoting steady pupil progression.

Geographical location, a socioeconomic determinant, plays a significant role in progression disparities. Rural areas often lack adequate school infrastructure, qualified teachers, and learning materials compared to urban centers, creating an uneven educational landscape (Lewin, 2017). Long distances to school also increase absenteeism and dropout risk, particularly for girls (UNICEF, 2019). In Zambia, rural pupils face compounded socioeconomic disadvantages that impede smooth grade transitions (CSO, 2020). Addressing rural-urban inequities through targeted investments is essential for improving progression rates nationwide.

Economic shocks and instability within households significantly disrupt pupils' educational progression.

Sudden loss of income due to unemployment, illness, or natural disasters forces families to prioritize immediate survival needs over schooling expenses (World Bank, 2017). This unpredictability leads to intermittent school attendance, grade repetition, or complete dropout (Beegle et al., 2010). In rural Zambia, where subsistence farming predominates, crop failures and seasonal income fluctuations exacerbate educational discontinuity (CSO, 2020). Social protection programs such as cash transfers and scholarships have proven effective in buffering these shocks, supporting sustained pupil progression (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

Cultural practices linked to socioeconomic conditions can influence progression patterns. Early marriage and initiation ceremonies in certain communities often interrupt schooling, especially for girls transitioning from primary to secondary levels (UNICEF, 2019). Such practices are frequently associated with lower household socioeconomic status and limited educational opportunities (Biddlecom et al., 2008). Addressing these cultural barriers through community sensitization and legal frameworks is crucial to improving progression rates and gender equity in education (Panday et al., 2009).

Access to financial aid and scholarships mitigates socioeconomic barriers to pupil progression. Targeted support programs enable disadvantaged pupils to cover school fees, purchase uniforms, and access learning materials, reducing dropout and repetition rates (Lewin, 2007). In Zambia, government and NGO initiatives providing bursaries have enhanced retention, particularly among vulnerable populations (MoGE, 2018). However, the adequacy, transparency, and sustainability of such programs remain challenges, requiring continued evaluation and expansion to reach all needy learners effectively.

Parental employment stability impacts pupils' academic progression. Stable employment, especially in formal sectors, affords families predictable income and benefits that support consistent school attendance and learning (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Conversely, informal or seasonal employment prevalent in many rural settings generates income volatility, affecting school fee payments and children's availability for schooling (World Bank, 2020). Employment programs focusing on livelihood diversification can indirectly enhance educational outcomes by stabilizing household economies.

Socioeconomic inequalities in access to early childhood education influence later progression. Children from higher SES backgrounds are more likely to attend quality pre-primary programs that prepare them for formal schooling, resulting in better academic readiness and progression (Heckman, 2006). In contrast, limited access to early childhood education in low-income families contributes to skill deficits that manifest as grade repetition and dropout in primary grades (UNICEF, 2017). Expanding affordable early childhood education services is vital to reducing progression disparities.

Community socioeconomic status shapes the availability of educational resources and support systems. Wealthier communities tend to have better-funded schools, parental advocacy groups, and access to extracurricular learning opportunities, enhancing pupil progression (OECD, 2018). In impoverished rural communities, inadequate public investment and limited community capacity undermine educational quality and continuity (Lewin, 2017). Strengthening community mobilization and resource allocation can improve the educational environment and progression rates.

4. Teacher-Related Influences

Teacher quality is a cornerstone of pupil progression worldwide. Studies show that teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and classroom management directly impact learners' academic success and smooth grade transitions (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Inadequate teacher preparation often leads to ineffective instruction, resulting in poor comprehension and increased repetition rates (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Continuous professional development (CPD) has been shown to enhance teacher effectiveness, supporting improved pupil outcomes and progression (UNESCO, 2016). In Zambia, challenges in teacher training and retention, particularly in rural areas, hinder progression efforts, highlighting the need for targeted capacity-building initiatives (MoGE, 2018).

Teacher motivation strongly influences instructional quality and pupil progression. Motivated teachers tend to invest more effort, create engaging lessons, and provide personalized support, which fosters learner achievement and grade advancement (Herzberg, 1966). Conversely, low motivation, often caused by poor remuneration, lack of recognition, and challenging working conditions, leads to absenteeism and diminished teaching quality (UNESCO, 2019). Teacher incentive programs, including performance-based bonuses and career advancement opportunities, have demonstrated positive effects on motivation and pupil progression (World Bank, 2017). Addressing motivational factors is critical to sustaining teacher performance and educational continuity.

Class size impacts teacher effectiveness and pupil progression, with smaller classes generally enabling more individualized instruction and better learner support (Blatchford et al., 2011). Large classes, common in many low-income countries including Zambia, present challenges such as overcrowding, noise, and limited teacher attention per pupil, contributing to learning difficulties and repetition (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Government policies aimed at reducing class sizes and increasing teacher recruitment have shown promise in improving progression rates, but resource constraints often limit implementation (MoGE, 2018). Optimizing class size remains a key strategy for enhancing academic outcomes and progression.

Teacher attitudes and expectations profoundly affect pupil progression. Research indicates that teachers who hold high expectations tend to foster better academic outcomes, encouraging pupils to achieve and advance grades

(Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Conversely, negative stereotypes or low expectations, particularly towards marginalized groups, can reduce pupil motivation and lead to increased repetition or dropout (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Cultivating positive teacher beliefs through professional development and inclusive education training enhances classroom dynamics and supports equitable progression (OECD, 2019).

The availability and use of instructional materials by teachers significantly influence learning and progression. Teachers equipped with textbooks, visual aids, and technology can deliver lessons more effectively, increasing pupil understanding and retention (UNESCO, 2017). However, in many resource-poor settings, teachers lack adequate materials, limiting pedagogical effectiveness and hindering progression (Lewin, 2017). Investment in learning resources, alongside teacher training on their use, is essential for improving grade transitions.

Teacher absenteeism is a major impediment to pupil progression. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa reveal high rates of teacher absenteeism, leading to missed lessons and compromised curriculum coverage (Chaaban & Cunningham, 2011). This disrupts learning continuity, increases repetition, and reduces pupil motivation (UNESCO, 2019). Effective monitoring systems, coupled with incentives and accountability mechanisms, have been shown to reduce absenteeism and enhance progression rates (World Bank, 2017).

Professional development opportunities shape teacher competencies and thus influence pupil progression. Continuous training allows teachers to update pedagogical methods and address diverse learner needs, supporting academic achievement and smooth grade transitions (UNESCO, 2016). However, many rural and under-resourced schools face challenges accessing CPD, resulting in stagnant teaching quality and progression challenges (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Scaling up inclusive and accessible professional development is vital for sustained educational improvement.

Teacher collaboration and support networks enhance instructional quality and pupil progression. Collaborative teaching practices, peer mentoring, and professional learning communities foster sharing of best practices and problem-solving, which benefit pupil learning outcomes (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). In contexts where teachers work in isolation, progression rates tend to be lower due to limited pedagogical innovation and morale (UNESCO, 2017). Encouraging collaborative school cultures is thus a key strategy for improving progression.

Teacher communication skills are essential for fostering pupil understanding and engagement, which directly impact progression. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication enhances concept clarity and classroom interaction, promoting deeper learning and retention (Marzano, 2003). Conversely, poor communication can cause confusion, frustration, and disengagement, leading to

poor performance and grade repetition (UNESCO, 2016). Teacher training programs emphasizing communication strategies have demonstrated positive effects on pupil academic outcomes and progression (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Classroom management strategies employed by teachers affect learning environments and pupil progression. Well-managed classrooms minimize disruptions, maintain learner focus, and create safe spaces conducive to learning (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Ineffective classroom management often results in chaotic settings where learning is impeded, increasing dropout and repetition risks (OECD, 2019). Training teachers in behavior management techniques is critical to fostering environments that support continuous progression.

The teacher's ability to differentiate instruction based on pupil needs is a growing focus in progression research. Differentiated teaching recognizes learner diversity in ability, background, and learning styles, adapting methods accordingly (Tomlinson, 2014). This approach supports struggling pupils, reducing repetition and dropout by addressing individual challenges (OECD, 2020). However, in many low-resource contexts, lack of teacher training and large class sizes limit differentiated instruction implementation (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Enhancing this competency is essential for equitable progression.

Teachers' assessment practices significantly influence pupil progression. Formative assessments guide instructional adjustments and provide timely feedback, enabling learners to improve and meet progression benchmarks (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Over-reliance on summative high-stakes exams, however, can increase anxiety and lead to grade repetition if pupils fail to meet cutoffs (UNESCO, 2015). Training teachers in balanced assessment approaches promotes fairer evaluation and supports continuous progression.

The cultural competence of teachers affects pupil inclusion and progression, especially in diverse classrooms. Teachers who understand and respect cultural differences create inclusive environments that enhance learner belonging and participation (Gay, 2018). Lack of cultural responsiveness can marginalize some pupils, lowering motivation and progression rates (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Integrating cultural competence in teacher education supports equitable progression outcomes.

Teacher retention and turnover rates influence pupil progression by affecting instructional continuity. High teacher turnover disrupts learning and relationships, leading to inconsistent instruction and lower pupil achievement (Ingersoll, 2001). Retention is often a challenge in rural and disadvantaged areas due to poor working conditions and limited incentives (MoGE, 2018). Policies aimed at improving teacher welfare and career development can enhance retention, thereby supporting sustained pupil progression.

5. School Environment and Infrastructure

The physical environment of schools significantly affects pupil progression by shaping learning conditions and overall school experience. Adequate classrooms, sanitation facilities, and safe drinking water are essential for maintaining attendance and focus (UNICEF, 2016). Poor infrastructure, such as overcrowded classrooms or lack of toilets, particularly for girls, leads to absenteeism and increased dropout rates (Sommer et al., 2016). Studies in sub-Saharan Africa link inadequate school facilities with low progression rates, highlighting the need for investment in physical infrastructure to support educational continuity (World Bank, 2018).

School safety is a critical component of the environment influencing pupil progression. Unsafe school environments, characterized by bullying, violence, or harassment, undermine learners' psychological well-being and academic engagement (UNESCO, 2019). In particular, gender-based violence in schools disproportionately affects girls' attendance and progression (UN Women, 2020). Creating protective and inclusive school climates through policies, teacher training, and student empowerment programs fosters a sense of security, promoting sustained educational progression (UNICEF, 2018).

Availability of learning resources within schools influences academic achievement and progression rates. Libraries, laboratories, and teaching aids enrich the curriculum and stimulate learner interest (OECD, 2017). Schools lacking these resources often produce lower achievement levels and higher repetition rates (Lewin, 2017). Investment in school facilities that provide varied learning experiences encourages pupil motivation and supports smooth transitions between grades (UNESCO, 2016). Thus, infrastructure goes beyond buildings to include educational resources critical for progression.

Teacher housing and amenities at schools influence teacher retention, which in turn affects pupil progression. In many rural areas, lack of adequate teacher accommodation discourages qualified teachers from working in remote schools, leading to frequent teacher turnover and instructional disruptions (MoGE, 2018). Stable teacher presence is linked to consistent teaching quality and better learner outcomes, facilitating smooth grade progression (UNESCO, 2016). Government and donor programs aimed at improving teacher living conditions have shown positive impacts on retention and progression rates (World Bank, 2017).

Access to electricity and internet connectivity in schools has become increasingly important for enhancing teaching and learning environments. Electrification enables the use of digital tools and multimedia resources, which can improve engagement and understanding (OECD, 2020). Schools lacking these facilities, particularly in rural Zambia, are disadvantaged, limiting innovative instructional methods and widening the urban-rural progression gap (MoGE, 2018). Investment in school

infrastructure modernization is vital to promote equitable pupil progression in the digital age.

School proximity and transportation infrastructure significantly affect attendance and progression. Long distances to school, particularly in rural regions, increase absenteeism due to travel fatigue, costs, and safety risks (UNICEF, 2019). This challenge is especially acute for girls, who face heightened vulnerability during commutes (World Bank, 2020). Strategies such as establishing more schools closer to communities and providing safe transport options have been effective in improving attendance and progression rates (MoGE, 2018). Infrastructure planning must consider accessibility to enhance educational continuity.

Sanitation facilities, especially gender-sensitive toilets, play a pivotal role in pupil progression by affecting school attendance and health. The absence of adequate sanitation often results in absenteeism, particularly among adolescent girls during menstruation, leading to grade repetition or dropout (Sommer et al., 2016). Improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs in schools have demonstrated positive effects on attendance and progression, reinforcing the importance of these basic amenities in educational planning (UNICEF, 2018). Ensuring that schools meet minimum WASH standards is thus critical for sustaining pupil advancement.

Classroom ventilation and lighting impact pupils' concentration, health, and learning outcomes, which in turn affect progression rates. Poorly ventilated and inadequately lit classrooms can cause fatigue, respiratory problems, and reduced attention spans (World Bank, 2017). Research from diverse contexts shows that improved classroom conditions correlate with better academic performance and fewer repetitions (OECD, 2017). Designing and maintaining learning spaces that promote physical comfort is essential for facilitating smooth grade transitions.

School maintenance and cleanliness influence pupils' sense of belonging and motivation to attend regularly. Neglected school environments can lower morale among learners and teachers alike, leading to reduced engagement and progression (UNESCO, 2016). Community involvement in school upkeep, including initiatives like 'clean-up days', fosters ownership and pride, contributing positively to attendance and grade progression (Lewin, 2017). Sustainable infrastructure management is therefore a vital aspect of supporting continuous education.

Availability of recreational facilities and extracurricular programs supports holistic development and enhances pupil progression. Participation in sports, arts, and clubs fosters social skills, self-esteem, and school attachment, which correlate positively with academic persistence and progression (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Schools lacking such opportunities may see higher dropout rates and disengagement (UNICEF, 2018). Integrating extracurricular activities within the school environment promotes learner well-being and educational continuity.

6. Curriculum and Instructional Design

Curriculum design plays a critical role in pupil progression by shaping the learning experiences and outcomes across grade levels. A well-structured curriculum that is coherent, sequenced, and developmentally appropriate facilitates smooth transitions from one grade to the next (Tyler, 1949). Conversely, overly rigid or content-heavy curricula can overwhelm pupils, leading to poor comprehension and grade repetition (UNESCO, 2015). Curriculum frameworks that integrate learner-centered approaches and flexibility accommodate diverse learning paces and styles, promoting better academic progression (Tomlinson, 2014).

Alignment between curriculum content and assessment is essential to support pupil progression. When assessments reflect taught content and skills, pupils are more likely to demonstrate mastery and advance grades confidently (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Misalignment, where assessments focus on memorization or content not covered adequately, leads to increased failure and repetition (Popham, 2008). Curriculum reform efforts globally emphasize the need for constructive alignment to enhance learning continuity and progression outcomes (OECD, 2019).

Incorporating competency-based approaches within instructional design has gained prominence as a means of improving pupil progression. Competency-based curricula focus on the acquisition and demonstration of specific skills and knowledge, rather than seat time, allowing learners to progress upon mastery (Spady, 1994). This approach accommodates learner diversity, reduces grade repetition, and supports lifelong learning competencies (UNESCO, 2016). Countries adopting competency-based education, including Zambia, face challenges in implementation but report potential benefits for progression rates (MoGE, 2018).

The relevance of curriculum content to pupils' cultural and contextual realities affects engagement and progression. Curricula that reflect local knowledge, languages, and experiences enhance learner interest and comprehension, supporting smooth grade transitions (Banks, 2015). In many African contexts, curricula have been criticized for being overly Western-centric, alienating learners and contributing to poor progression (Mafa, 2019). Efforts to decolonize and contextualize curriculum content aim to make education more meaningful and accessible, improving learner retention and progression (Tikly, 2013).

Instructional pacing within the curriculum impacts pupil progression by balancing content coverage and depth of understanding. Fast-paced curricula may prioritize content completion over mastery, causing learners to fall behind and repeat grades (UNESCO, 2015). Conversely, well-paced instruction allows for consolidation and differentiated support, facilitating successful progression (Tomlinson, 2014). Teacher capacity to adapt pacing to learner needs is therefore crucial for effective curriculum delivery and progression.

Integration of formative assessment within instructional design supports continuous feedback and pupil progression. Formative assessments help identify learning gaps early, enabling timely interventions to prevent failure and repetition (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Curricula that embed regular formative assessment encourage active learning and self-regulation among pupils, contributing to sustained academic advancement (OECD, 2019). In many developing countries, strengthening formative assessment practices remains a key challenge for improving progression rates (MoGE, 2018).

Curriculum flexibility is vital for accommodating learners with diverse needs, promoting inclusive progression. Rigid curricula that do not consider learning differences, disabilities, or language barriers exclude many pupils, increasing dropout and repetition (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive curricular frameworks advocate for adaptations such as simplified content, alternative assessment modes, and language support to enable all learners to progress effectively (Florian, 2014). Zambia's efforts to incorporate inclusive education principles reflect this global shift toward equitable progression (MoGE, 2018).

Teacher involvement in curriculum development influences the effectiveness of instructional delivery and pupil progression. When teachers participate in shaping the curriculum, they are more likely to understand its objectives and adapt materials to local contexts, enhancing learner engagement (Fullan, 2007). Excluding teachers from curriculum planning often results in misalignment between prescribed content and classroom realities, impeding pupil progression (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Empowering teachers through participatory curriculum design fosters ownership and improves progression outcomes.

The integration of technology in curriculum and instructional design offers new opportunities for enhancing pupil progression. Digital learning resources, interactive content, and online assessments provide personalized learning experiences and immediate feedback, supporting learner mastery and advancement (OECD, 2020). However, disparities in access to technology, especially in rural and low-income areas, limit these benefits and may widen progression gaps (MoGE, 2018). Addressing the digital divide is therefore essential for equitable educational progression.

Curriculum coherence across grade levels is crucial for seamless pupil progression. Disjointed curricula with gaps or overlaps between grades create learning discontinuities that hinder academic advancement (Tyler, 1949). Vertical alignment ensures that skills and knowledge build progressively, preparing pupils adequately for subsequent levels (UNESCO, 2015). Countries with well-articulated curricula demonstrate higher progression and retention rates, underscoring the importance of coherence in curriculum design (OECD, 2019).

Curriculum responsiveness to labor market and societal needs impacts pupil motivation and progression. Curricula

that incorporate life skills, vocational training, and relevant knowledge enhance learners' perceived value of education, encouraging persistence and progression (World Bank, 2018). Conversely, curricula disconnected from real-world applications may reduce engagement and increase dropout (UNESCO, 2016). Aligning curriculum content with local economic and social realities supports meaningful progression and future employability.

Language of instruction within curriculum design affects comprehension and progression, especially in multilingual contexts. Research shows that mother tongue instruction in early grades improves understanding and learning outcomes, facilitating smoother progression (Heugh, 2011). However, transitions to second languages without adequate support often lead to learning difficulties and grade repetition (UNESCO, 2016). Curriculum policies promoting bilingual education have demonstrated positive impacts on progression rates in diverse settings.

Curriculum evaluation mechanisms are integral for ensuring relevance and effectiveness in supporting pupil progression. Regular curriculum review processes involving stakeholders enable identification of gaps and areas for improvement, enhancing progression outcomes (Fullan, 2007). Inadequate evaluation can lead to outdated or irrelevant curricula that fail to meet learners' needs, increasing repetition and dropout (Akyeampong et al., 2019). Strengthening curriculum monitoring systems is essential for continuous educational improvement.

Cross-curricular integration within instructional design supports holistic learning and progression by linking concepts across subjects. Integrated curricula foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and transfer of knowledge, which enhance academic success and readiness for higher grades (Beane, 1997). However, implementation challenges such as teacher training and resource constraints often limit integration, particularly in low-resource contexts (Lewin, 2017). Promoting interdisciplinary approaches can improve pupil engagement and progression.

7. Community and Parental Involvement

Community and parental involvement are pivotal in influencing pupil progression by creating supportive environments for learning. Engaged parents who communicate with teachers, monitor homework, and encourage school attendance foster positive educational outcomes and smooth grade transitions (Epstein, 2011). Communities that prioritize education through advocacy and resource mobilization also contribute to higher progression rates (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). In many African contexts, including Zambia, strengthening home-school partnerships has been shown to reduce dropout and repetition (Chansa-Kabali et al., 2019).

Parental socioeconomic status affects the degree and quality of involvement in pupils' education. Higher-income families typically have more time, resources, and education to support their children's schooling, positively influencing progression (Davis-Kean, 2005). Conversely, poverty may

limit parental engagement due to competing economic demands and lower literacy levels (Sirin, 2005). Policies that empower disadvantaged parents through education and community programs enhance involvement and improve learner progression (UNICEF, 2017).

Community norms and values shape attitudes toward education, impacting pupil progression. Communities that value formal education and gender equity tend to encourage school attendance and support girls' progression, reducing dropout rates (UNESCO, 2016). In contrast, communities where early marriage or child labor is normalized often experience higher dropout and delayed progression (Panday et al., 2009). Community sensitization programs aimed at shifting harmful norms have yielded positive impacts on progression outcomes (UNICEF, 2018).

School governing bodies (SGBs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) play a critical role in promoting pupil progression by fostering collaboration between schools and communities. Active SGBs and PTAs help mobilize resources, monitor school performance, and address issues such as absenteeism and dropout (Matthews, 2013). Their engagement strengthens accountability and responsiveness of schools, which has been linked to improved retention and progression rates (Chansa-Kabali et al., 2019). Capacity building for these bodies is essential for sustained educational support.

Parental expectations and aspirations significantly influence pupils' motivation and progression. When parents hold high educational aspirations, children are more likely to value schooling, exert effort, and persevere through challenges, resulting in smoother grade transitions (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Conversely, low parental expectations, often due to limited educational attainment or economic constraints, can dampen pupil motivation and increase repetition or dropout (Jeynes, 2007). Encouraging positive parental attitudes through community outreach enhances progression outcomes.

Community-based support services, such as after-school tutoring and mentoring programs, enhance pupil progression by providing academic and psychosocial assistance. These services address learning gaps and support at-risk learners, reducing repetition and dropout rates (Balfanz et al., 2012). In resource-limited settings, partnerships with NGOs and local organizations have expanded access to such support, contributing to improved educational continuity (MoGE, 2018). Scaling up community support interventions is critical for sustained progression.

Parental literacy levels directly impact their ability to support children's learning and progression. Literate parents are better equipped to assist with homework, understand school communications, and advocate for their children's education (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Low parental literacy, common in many rural Zambian communities, limits engagement and contributes to poor academic outcomes and grade repetition (Chansa-Kabali et

al., 2019). Adult education programs targeting parents can improve their participation and subsequently support pupil progression.

Economic involvement of parents, such as contributions to school fees and materials, influences pupil retention and progression. While primary education in Zambia is free, hidden costs such as uniforms, books, and transport still pose barriers for many families (MoGE, 2018). Parental inability to meet these expenses leads to irregular attendance, repeating grades, or dropout (World Bank, 2017). Community fundraising and government support programs have mitigated these challenges, improving progression rates (UNICEF, 2019).

Community cultural practices, including celebrations, rituals, and festivals, can either support or hinder educational progression. In some contexts, participation in cultural activities fosters social cohesion and reinforces values aligned with education (Banks, 2015). However, when cultural obligations interfere with school attendance or prioritize early marriage and labor over schooling, progression is adversely affected (Panday et al., 2009). Balancing cultural heritage with educational goals is crucial for promoting sustained pupil advancement.

Gender roles within families and communities affect parental involvement and pupils' progression, particularly for girls. In many traditional societies, girls bear significant household responsibilities, limiting time for study and increasing absenteeism (UNESCO, 2016). Parental support that challenges restrictive gender norms and encourages girls' education is linked to higher progression rates (Chansa-Kabali et al., 2019). Gender-sensitive community programs are essential to foster equitable progression.

Parental involvement in decision-making processes at schools empowers communities and positively influences pupil progression. When parents participate in school boards or committees, they help shape policies and practices that directly affect learners, such as attendance monitoring and discipline (Matthews, 2013). This engagement fosters a sense of shared responsibility and accountability, contributing to improved educational outcomes and smoother grade transitions (Epstein, 2011). Strengthening parent-school partnerships remains a priority in enhancing progression rates.

Communication channels between schools and parents are vital for sustaining involvement and progression. Regular feedback on pupil performance, attendance, and behavior allows parents to provide timely support and interventions (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). In many rural areas, however, communication is limited due to language barriers, distance, and lack of technology (Chansa-Kabali et al., 2019). Innovative strategies such as community meetings and mobile messaging have improved school-parent communication, fostering better learner support and progression.

Community perceptions of the value of education influence parental involvement and pupil progression. When communities prioritize education as a pathway to socioeconomic advancement, parental support for schooling increases, reducing dropout rates (UNESCO, 2016). Conversely, communities facing poverty or political instability may deprioritize education, affecting progression negatively (World Bank, 2018). Community mobilization campaigns and advocacy are effective in shifting perceptions and enhancing educational progression.

Social capital within communities, encompassing networks, trust, and norms, facilitates parental involvement and pupil progression. High social capital supports collaborative efforts to address educational challenges such as absenteeism and dropout (Coleman, 1988). Communities with strong social bonds often establish support systems like study groups and resource sharing, benefiting pupil progression (Putnam, 2000). Building social capital through community engagement initiatives is therefore integral to sustained educational success.

8. Empirical Studies on Pupil Progression in Zambia

Several empirical studies have examined factors influencing pupil progression in Zambia, revealing a multifaceted nexus of socioeconomic, school, and community-related variables. Chansa Kabali et al. (2019) identified poverty as a major obstacle to progression, where lack of learning materials and inconsistent attendance reinforced retention and dropout risks in rural districts. The study emphasized that parental involvement—through activities such as homework supervision and participation in school governance—alongside community-driven initiatives, significantly mitigated these outcomes and facilitated smoother transitions between grades. These findings reflect broader African research, such as Lewin (2017), which underscores poverty's persistent influence on educational attainment, suggesting that interventions addressing financial barriers can substantially enhance pupil progression.

Research by Mulenga (2017) concentrated on teacher-related determinants of progression in Zambian primary schools, revealing that frequent absenteeism and limited pedagogical skills undermine pupil learning and contribute to grade repetition. The study revealed weak alignment between curriculum demands and teachers' instructional competencies, further aggravated by sporadic teacher attendance. Additionally, the absence of ongoing professional development constrained teachers' capacity to adapt to curriculum reforms and deliver competency-based education effectively. Mulenga argued that sustained investment in teacher mentoring, continuous subject-specific in-service training, and systems to curtail absenteeism are essential for improving pupil mastery and reducing repetition rates—thus promoting upward progression.

Phiri and Banda (2018) conducted a comprehensive study assessing the role of school infrastructure in pupil progression within urban Lusaka. Their findings

demonstrated that schools equipped with adequate classrooms, proper sanitation, stable water supply, and learning resources recorded higher retention and progression rates than under-resourced counterparts. The study stressed that safe and supportive learning environments not only encouraged regular attendance but also enhanced pupils' concentration and motivation. It further indicated that infrastructure deficiencies disproportionately affected girls—especially in the absence of adequate sanitation—which in turn led to dropout and delayed progression. The research supports targeted infrastructure investment as a cornerstone of educational improvements.

More recent research by Tembo and Sichinga (2021) investigated the influence of nutrition and health on academic progression among primary pupils in Eastern Province. The authors found that children experiencing chronic undernutrition were almost twice as likely to repeat grades or drop out compared to well-nourished peers, due to decreased cognitive functioning and school attendance. School-based health interventions—including deworming, school feeding programs, and routine health screenings—were positively correlated with improved attendance and fewer repetitions. These results highlight that addressing health disparities is fundamental to facilitating academic progression. The study calls for integrated educational and health policies to improve pupil outcomes holistically.

9. Research Gaps

Although numerous studies have identified socioeconomic constraints—such as poverty and parental engagement—as critical factors in pupil progression, few have examined how these forces interact with community-level dynamics within Zambia. Most research, including Chansa Kabali et al. (2019), used quantitative methods to establish correlations but often overlooked qualitative inquiry into local cultural norms, community decision-making processes, or informal support systems. This gap limits understanding of how community capital or shared values can be mobilized to address progression challenges. Addressing this requires mixed-methods research that combines large-scale data with rich contextual narratives, revealing both statistical relationships and the lived realities that shape educational trajectories.

Teacher-related research, such as Mulenga (2017), has documented absenteeism and pedagogical deficiencies, yet few studies have explored the underlying institutional conditions that reinforce these patterns. What motivates or dissuades teachers from maintaining consistent attendance, for instance, remains understudied. Furthermore, interventions aimed at improving teacher presence are rarely tested for efficacy or sustainability. As such, teacher quality efforts often focus on surface-level variables without interrogating systemic issues such as rural postings, professional compensation, or workplace culture. Future research should evaluate how organizational structures, incentives, and accountability frameworks influence teacher behaviour and, by extension, pupil progression.

While Phiri and Banda (2018) emphasized the influence of infrastructure on pupil outcomes, much of the scholarship neglects spatial inequality across districts. The studies typically focus on a small sample of urban or rural schools without assessing variations within districts or provinces. As a result, national educational policies may overlook school-level heterogeneity—such as differences in school management capacity or localized infrastructure initiatives. A more nuanced approach, using geospatial analysis or district-level case studies, would better capture these variations and inform place-specific policy recommendations that reflect the realities of resource allocation and school readiness.

Tembo and Sichinga (2021) revealed associations between health, nutrition, and academic progression, yet questions remain about the sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and implementation challenges of school health programs. No study has systematically compared nutrition-only models to combined interventions (deworming, feeding, health education), or evaluated the long-term impact on academic progression beyond immediate attendance gains. This absence of longitudinal data limits the design of robust models that balance health and educational goals. Future research should involve longitudinal intervention trials to assess not only short-term outcomes but longer-term progression, repetition, and transition-to-secondary metrics.

Another key gap lies in understanding the psychological dimensions of progression—such as student motivation, self-efficacy, and aspirations. Existing research predominantly addresses structural and material obstacles, while ignoring internal determinants that can mediate academic outcomes. Learners facing similar resource constraints may still demonstrate differing progression trajectories based on personal, family, or community beliefs. Exploring the psychosocial factors that support or hinder learning could inform more holistic interventions. Leveraging tools from educational psychology would add depth to the analysis and guide programs that nurture intrinsic motivation alongside external support structures.

The existing literature has limited inquiry into how gender intersects with other progression factors. For example, while poor sanitation was identified as a barrier for girls (Phiri & Banda, 2018), broader explorations of gendered learning spaces, household expectations, or teacher biases are still sparse. Qualitative gender-disaggregated studies are necessary to understand how societal gender norms shape progression—such as whether girls receive less parental educational encouragement or fear sexual harassment. Engaging feminist and gender-focused pedagogical frameworks could reveal nuanced pathways to progression that can inform gender-responsive policy design.

Curriculum-related influences on progression remain underexplored. While teacher preparedness has been scrutinized, less attention has been paid to how curricular relevance, pacing, and the integration of local languages or cultural content affect pupil persistence. Competence-based

or culturally responsive curricula may foster deeper engagement and reduced dropout, yet none of the major studies have evaluated this systematically in Zambia. Investigating curricular coherence, teacher curriculum interpretation, and student perceptions could contribute to curricular reform aimed at improving progression outcomes.

10. Summary

This section reviewed empirical studies on pupil progression in Zambia and identified significant gaps. While research has underscored the influence of poverty, teacher quality, infrastructure, and health, these factors often remain studied in isolation. Areas such as community dynamics, teacher motivation, curriculum relevance, gender, psychosocial supports, and longitudinal progression lack depth and integration. Moreover, the local heterogeneity of school contexts and the sustainability of interventions remain underexplored. Addressing these research gaps through mixed-methods, longitudinal, and thematic inquiries will provide a more comprehensive understanding of what influences progression, enabling the design of nuanced, contextualized, and sustainable strategies to support pupil advancement in Zambia's diverse educational landscape.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Overview

This chapter outlined the methodological framework that guided the investigation into the factors that influenced pupils' progression rates from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools within Petauke District. It described the research design, site, population, sampling techniques, instruments, data collection procedures, analysis strategies, and ethical considerations. The methodology was carefully selected to align with the objectives of the study and to ensure validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings within similar rural educational contexts. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach to allow triangulation and to gain a deeper understanding of quantitative progression patterns and the qualitative experiences underlying them. Through this approach, the researcher explored how academic, institutional, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics interacted to shape progression outcomes, thereby contributing to evidence-based policy and practice in rural Zambian primary education (Creswell

2. Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced pupils' progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6. The mixed-methods design allowed the researcher to quantify progression trends and statistically assess key variables while also capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers, pupils, and parents (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design was particularly appropriate for educational research in rural contexts,

where statistical data were limited, and qualitative insights provided depth. By using both closed and open-ended tools, the study triangulated findings to strengthen validity and reliability (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The design also aligned with the study's objectives, which sought to identify not only what factors influenced progression but how and why they did so in the context of Petauke District.

A convergent parallel design guided the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, allowing simultaneous data collection and separate analysis before merging the results for interpretation. This design enabled the researcher to compare statistical trends with contextual narratives, enhancing the credibility and completeness of the findings (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Quantitative data were drawn from progression records, repetition rates, and structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions. The convergent approach ensured that neither data type was prioritized over the other, promoting equal status and complementarity (Creswell, 2014). This strategy was particularly valuable in the Zambian rural school context, where statistical indicators alone might have overlooked deeply rooted social and institutional dynamics influencing educational outcomes.

The design incorporated both descriptive and inferential components to analyze the quantitative data effectively. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means summarized pupil progression trends, repetition rates, and parental involvement levels. Inferential statistics—including correlation and regression analyses—tested the significance of relationships among key variables such as instructional quality, socio-economic status, and progression (Muijs, 2011). This dual approach enhanced the robustness of the findings by allowing generalization within the sampled population and hypothesis testing, as outlined in Chapter One. Moreover, statistical findings were complemented by qualitative data to explain patterns and anomalies, supporting a more holistic interpretation of progression dynamics in the Petauke context.

The qualitative component of the research design adopted a case study approach, enabling an in-depth investigation of progression-related factors within a specific, real-world educational setting. Case studies were effective in exploring complex phenomena in context and were suitable for educational research that sought to understand stakeholder perspectives and institutional practices (Yin, 2018). In this study, selected schools in Petauke District served as the case boundaries, and data were gathered from headteachers, teachers, pupils, and parents. The case study allowed for thick descriptions of institutional, socio-cultural, and instructional dynamics that influenced grade progression. The embedded design ensured that both individual and institutional perspectives were captured, aligning with the study's objectives and enhancing its relevance for rural education policy and practice in Zambia.

3. Research Site

This study was conducted in selected primary schools within Petauke District, located in the Eastern Province of Zambia. Petauke was predominantly rural, characterized by subsistence farming, limited infrastructure, and high levels of poverty, all of which significantly impacted education access and quality (CSO, 2020). The district presented a representative case for examining rural education dynamics in Zambia, where issues of school dropout, grade repetition, and irregular progression were prominent. Its socio-economic and cultural context provided fertile ground for understanding the complex interplay of academic, institutional, and community-level factors influencing progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6. Additionally, Petauke's historical challenges with resource allocation, teacher deployment, and community engagement made it ideal for a case study that sought to offer practical recommendations for rural education systems (MoGE, 2018).

The selected schools within Petauke District included both government and community schools to capture a broader range of experiences and institutional characteristics. This diversity was necessary to reflect variations in teacher qualifications, classroom conditions, school management practices, and community involvement—all factors presumed to influence pupil progression. Schools were purposefully selected based on their accessibility, availability of progression records, and willingness to participate in the study. This purposive approach ensured depth of data and relevance to the study objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). Moreover, focusing on Grade 5 to Grade 6 transitions within these schools aligned with the basic education structure in Zambia, where mid-primary grades served as critical indicators for future school retention and success (UNESCO, 2016). The chosen research site was, therefore, strategically aligned with the goals and scope of the study.

4. Study Population

The study population comprised various stakeholders in the selected primary schools of Petauke District who were directly involved in or affected by pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6. These included Grade 5 and 6 pupils, their teachers, school headteachers, and parents or guardians. Each group provided unique perspectives and insights that were crucial for understanding the multifaceted factors influencing progression. Pupils represented the primary unit of analysis, while teachers and administrators contributed institutional and instructional viewpoints (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Parents offered insights into socio-economic and cultural influences, especially in rural contexts where community involvement was essential to educational continuity (Epstein, 2011). This multi-perspective approach enriched the findings by capturing a holistic picture of the school-community ecosystem affecting grade progression.

The population size varied across stakeholder groups but focused on a manageable and information-rich subset suitable for case study research. In each selected school, a

sample of Grade 5 and 6 pupils, at least one subject teacher per grade, the school headteacher, and several parents or guardians were identified for participation. This distribution allowed triangulation of data sources, enhancing the credibility and depth of the study (Yin, 2018). While the study did not aim for statistical generalization, the chosen population reflected typical demographic and institutional features of rural Zambian schools, improving its analytical generalizability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Ethical clearance was sought from relevant authorities, and informed consent was obtained from all participants or their guardians in adherence to research ethics.

5. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study was carefully determined to ensure both depth and diversity of data, in line with qualitative case study requirements and quantitative representativeness. The researcher purposively selected six primary schools within Petauke District, ensuring a mix of government and community schools. From each school, approximately 10 Grade 5 and 10 Grade 6 pupils were sampled, totaling about 120 pupils. Additionally, at least one teacher per grade, one headteacher, and two parents or guardians per school were included, leading to a total sample of around 180 participants. This size was sufficient to allow the detection of trends while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The sample reflected both gender balance and diversity in socio-economic backgrounds to improve credibility.

The sampling technique combined purposive and stratified sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select schools that had readily available data on progression, experienced administrators, and diverse pupil backgrounds. Within each selected school, stratified sampling ensured proportional representation of male and female pupils, as well as inclusion of pupils with varying academic performances. This stratification was crucial for identifying how progression dynamics varied across different subgroups (Teddle & Yu, 2007). Teachers were selected based on their experience teaching Grades 5 and 6, while parents were chosen based on their involvement in school-related activities or PTA membership. This approach ensured that the sample was both information-rich and inclusive of key stakeholder perspectives that affected or experienced progression outcomes.

The selection of key informants, such as headteachers and senior teachers, was guided by their leadership roles and knowledge of institutional practices influencing pupil progression. Their inclusion provided essential data on school-level decision-making, instructional supervision, and resource allocation (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, randomization was used within the strata of pupils to ensure objectivity in selection, especially where large class sizes were involved. Ethical sampling procedures were strictly followed, with informed consent obtained and anonymity assured. The use of both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling strategies allowed the researcher to balance

statistical reliability with contextual richness, thereby enhancing the explanatory power of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

6. Research Instruments

The study utilized a combination of research instruments to ensure comprehensive data collection that addressed both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research objectives. The primary instruments included structured questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion schedules, and document analysis checklists. The questionnaires were administered to pupils and teachers to collect quantitative data on factors influencing progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6. They included both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions to capture measurable data and personal insights (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The instrument covered areas such as academic performance, teaching practices, home environment, and attendance patterns. Each item was aligned with the study's objectives to ensure construct validity and reliability.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview guides were developed and administered to headteachers and selected teachers. These guides sought to explore in detail their perceptions and experiences regarding progression trends, institutional challenges, and interventions adopted to support pupils at risk of repetition or dropout. Interviews provided rich descriptive data that illuminated the contextual dynamics underlying quantitative findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interview guide included open-ended questions that allowed flexibility and probing to elicit detailed responses. Focus group discussion (FGD) schedules were used to gather collective views from parents and guardians. FGDs encouraged interaction and exchange of opinions among participants, making it possible to capture communal perspectives and cultural attitudes influencing pupil progression (Morgan, 2019). Each FGD involved six to eight participants, ensuring a manageable group size that encouraged participation. A document analysis checklist was also employed to review school records such as attendance registers, pupil performance reports, and progression registers. These documents provided objective data on enrolment, absenteeism, repetition, and promotion rates, complementing the self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews (Bowen, 2009).

7. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out systematically to ensure accuracy, consistency, and adherence to ethical research standards. Prior to the main fieldwork, the researcher obtained authorization from the Ministry of Education, the District Education Board Secretary's Office (DEBS), and the respective school administrations. The researcher also sought informed consent from participants or their guardians, especially for minors. Data collection took place over a four-week period to allow adequate time for interacting with respondents and triangulating information from multiple sources.

Quantitative data were collected first using questionnaires administered to pupils and teachers. The researcher distributed the questionnaires personally, provided instructions, and clarified any uncertainties to ensure reliable responses. The questionnaires were completed during school hours under supervision to avoid external influence. Upon collection, the researcher reviewed each questionnaire to check for completeness and consistency before leaving the school premises.

Qualitative data collection followed immediately after quantitative data gathering. Semi-structured interviews with headteachers and teachers were conducted in their offices or other quiet spaces within the school environment. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure accuracy of transcription. Focus group discussions with parents and guardians were held in convenient community settings, often after school hours to encourage attendance. These discussions were moderated by the researcher, with a research assistant taking notes to capture non-verbal cues and group dynamics.

Document analysis was conducted concurrently by examining school records relevant to pupil enrolment, attendance, and performance. Permission was sought from school heads before accessing such documents. The researcher cross-checked recorded information with DEBS statistical summaries to verify consistency. Throughout the process, the researcher maintained a reflective field journal to note contextual observations, challenges, and emerging themes that informed subsequent analysis.

8. Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques, reflecting the mixed-methods design of the study. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were computed to summarize patterns in pupils' progression rates, academic performance, and associated variables. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses, were employed to test relationships between key factors such as socio-economic status, instructional quality, and progression outcomes (Muijs, 2011). The statistical results were presented in tables and charts to enhance clarity and interpretability.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. The researcher first read through the transcripts several times to gain a holistic understanding, then coded them manually to identify recurring themes and sub-themes. These themes were categorized according to the study objectives, focusing on institutional, academic, socio-economic, and cultural factors influencing progression. Thematic patterns were compared across participant groups to identify similarities and contrasts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Excerpts from participants'

statements were integrated into the findings to illustrate key insights and to give voice to respondents' lived experiences. Document analysis results were triangulated with both quantitative and qualitative findings. For example, school records on repetition and absenteeism were compared with teachers' and parents' narratives to validate patterns and identify discrepancies. This triangulation strengthened the credibility and validity of the findings (Patton, 2015). Quantitative results helped to quantify the extent of each factor's influence, while qualitative data provided contextual explanations. Integration of findings occurred during interpretation, where numerical results and narratives were combined to form a comprehensive understanding of progression determinants in Petauke District.

9. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings, several measures were employed to establish validity and reliability. In quantitative data, content validity was ensured through expert review of the questionnaire by two education specialists and a research supervisor. Their feedback helped refine ambiguous items and align them with the study objectives. Construct validity was maintained by basing the instrument design on reviewed literature and previously validated tools (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). To ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted in one non-sampled primary school in Petauke District. The pilot allowed the researcher to test internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high reliability.

For qualitative data, credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the field, allowing the researcher to build rapport and gain participants' trust. Member checking was conducted by sharing summarized interview responses with participants to confirm accuracy and interpretation. Transferability was promoted by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics, allowing other researchers to judge applicability to similar settings. Dependability was ensured through a detailed audit trail of research decisions, procedures, and data management. Finally, confirmability was established through triangulation of multiple data sources, minimizing researcher bias and subjectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

10. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered strictly to ethical research standards as outlined by the University's Research Ethics Committee and the Zambian Ministry of Education guidelines. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained, and permission was sought from the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) and headteachers of participating schools. Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants and from parents or guardians of minor pupils. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality was upheld by using pseudonyms and codes instead of real names when reporting findings. All collected data were securely stored in password-protected digital files and locked physical folders, accessible only to the researcher. During focus group discussions, participants were reminded to respect one another's privacy by not sharing other members' contributions outside the group. Audio recordings and transcripts were deleted upon completion of data analysis to prevent unauthorized access. The researcher also ensured cultural sensitivity by using respectful communication, explaining the study's purpose in local languages when necessary, and avoiding any questions that could cause discomfort or distress.

11. Summary

This chapter presented the methodology that guided the study on factors influencing pupils' progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools of Petauke District. It described the mixed-methods research design, the study area, population, sampling techniques, instruments, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The chapter also discussed validity, reliability, and ethical considerations that ensured accuracy and integrity of the findings. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of progression patterns and the underlying factors influencing them. The next chapter presented the findings and analysis derived from the collected data, structured according to the study objectives.

IV. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

1. Overview

This chapter presented and analyzed the findings of the study on the factors that influenced pupils' progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools of Petauke District. The analysis was guided by the research objectives and employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques, as outlined in Chapter Three. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS Version 25 to generate frequencies, percentages, and correlations, while qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis were analyzed thematically. The integration of the two data strands provided a comprehensive picture of the determinants of pupil progression in rural educational settings.

2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

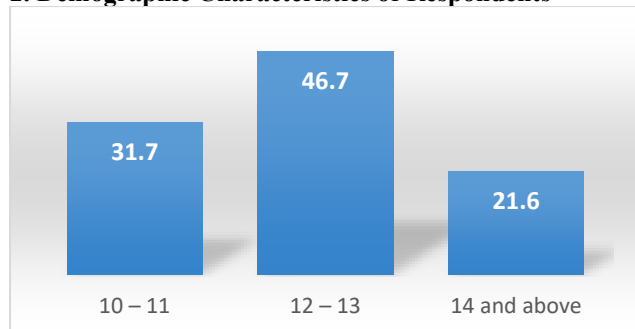


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Pupil Respondents (n=120)

The analysis of pupil age distribution revealed that the majority of learners (46.7%) were between 12 and 13 years, aligning with the typical age for Grade 5 and Grade 6 pupils in Zambia. Nevertheless, a significant proportion (21.6%) were aged 14 years and above, suggesting instances of delayed progression, which may result from grade repetition or late school enrolment. Interviews with headteachers corroborated these findings, highlighting that late entry into school and irregular attendance were persistent challenges in rural areas of Petauke District. These delays were primarily attributed to socioeconomic factors, including household labour demands, poverty, and the need for children to contribute to family livelihoods, which adversely affected timely educational advancement.

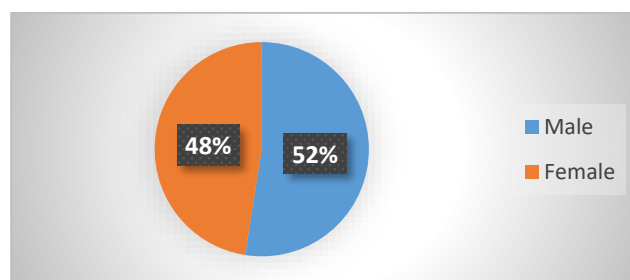


Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Pupils (n=120)

The study sample exhibited a near gender balance, with male pupils marginally outnumbering their female counterparts. Despite this apparent balance, qualitative data from teacher interviews highlighted that female pupils faced distinct challenges affecting their progression. Notably, absenteeism linked to menstrual hygiene management, domestic responsibilities, and the risk of early marriage in certain communities limited girls' consistent participation in school activities. These gender-specific barriers contributed to delayed progression and, in some cases, higher dropout rates among female learners. This pattern aligns with existing research on rural education in Zambia, which emphasizes the persistent vulnerability of girls to socio-cultural constraints that impede equitable educational attainment (MoGE, 2021).

2. Academic and Institutional Factors Affecting Progression

Table 1: Pupil School Attendance Frequency

Attendance Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always	51	42.5
Often	37	30.8
Sometimes	25	20.8
Rarely	7	5.9
Total	120	100

The majority (73.3%) of pupils reported attending school regularly ("always" or "often"), though 26.7% admitted irregular attendance. Qualitative findings revealed that irregular attendance was commonly attributed to household chores, illness, and long walking distances. A headteacher from one school stated:

“Many children miss classes during farming seasons or when they are required to help their parents at home.”

Document analysis of attendance registers corroborated these findings, showing attendance rates as low as 65% in some months.

Table 2: Rating of Teaching Quality by Pupils

Rating	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	18	15.0
Good	46	38.3
Fair	39	32.5
Poor	17	14.2
Total	120	100

The majority of pupils (53.3%) rated the quality of teaching in their schools as “good” or “excellent,” whereas 46.7% perceived it as “fair” or “poor,” reflecting a division in learner experiences. Qualitative insights from teacher interviews highlighted structural and resource-related challenges that constrained instructional effectiveness. Large class sizes were particularly problematic, with reports indicating that a single teacher often managed up to 70 pupils per classroom, significantly limiting opportunities for individualized attention, formative feedback, and interactive learning. Additionally, the scarcity of essential teaching materials and learning aids further impeded pedagogical effectiveness, corroborating the quantitative findings and underscoring the critical interplay between teacher capacity, resources, and perceived teaching quality.

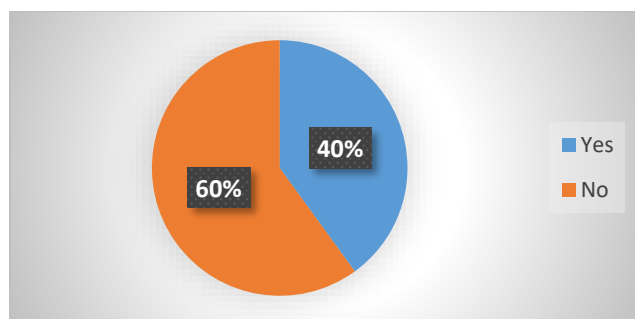


Figure 3: Availability of Learning Materials

A substantial proportion of pupils (60%) reported lacking adequate learning materials, including textbooks, exercise books, and stationery, which hindered their ability to engage fully with classroom activities. Both teachers and headteachers consistently identified the shortage of instructional resources and teaching aids as a major constraint on pupil progression. During focus group discussions, parents reinforced this perspective, with one noting:

“Sometimes three or four children share one book, and it discourages learning because they cannot all read at once.” This shared-resource challenge not only limited individual practice and comprehension but also exacerbated classroom inefficiencies, underscoring the critical role of learning materials in supporting effective pedagogy and timely progression.

3. Parental and Community Involvement

Table 3: Parental Help with Homework

Frequency of Help	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always	26	21.7
Sometimes	42	35.0
Rarely	33	27.5
Never	19	15.8
Total	120	100

Only 21.7% of pupils reported receiving consistent parental support with homework, indicating relatively low levels of engagement in their academic activities at home. Qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that a majority of parents lacked formal education, limiting their capacity to provide substantive academic assistance. Despite this, many parents demonstrated a commitment to their children’s schooling through alternative forms of support, such as ensuring regular attendance, providing uniforms, and supplying basic learning materials when resources permitted. These findings suggest that while direct academic involvement was limited, parental engagement in the form of care and facilitation remained a critical factor in enabling pupils to remain in school and continue their educational progression.

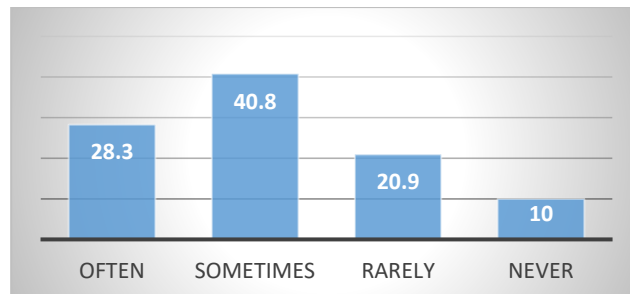


Figure 4: Parental Attendance at School Meetings

A majority of parents (69.1%) reportedly attended school meetings either “often” or “sometimes,” indicating a moderate level of engagement with school governance and pupil welfare. However, qualitative data from teacher interviews suggested that parental participation was frequently reactive rather than proactive, with many parents attending primarily when disciplinary issues arose. Further probing revealed that economic pressures and livelihood responsibilities often constrained parental availability during school hours, particularly in rural Petauke. Parents engaged in income-generating activities, farming, or domestic work, which limited their ability to consistently participate in school functions. These findings underscore the interplay between socioeconomic constraints and parental engagement, highlighting how economic realities influence involvement in children’s educational processes.

4. Socioeconomic and Environmental Factors

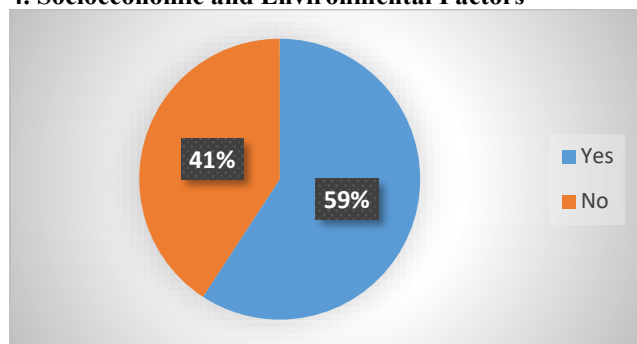


Figure 5: Access to Basic Needs (Food and Clothing)

Although the majority of pupils reported access to basic needs, a significant proportion (40.8%) experienced deprivation, which adversely affected both school attendance and classroom concentration. Teachers observed that pupils who arrived at school hungry frequently struggled to participate actively, performed poorly in tasks, or even slept during lessons, thereby limiting their learning opportunities. These observations highlight the critical link between nutritional security and educational outcomes, as adequate nourishment is essential for cognitive function, attention, and academic engagement. This finding corroborates UNESCO's (2015) assertion that nutritional insecurity is a key barrier to effective learning, particularly in rural contexts, and underscores the need for targeted interventions to support vulnerable pupils.

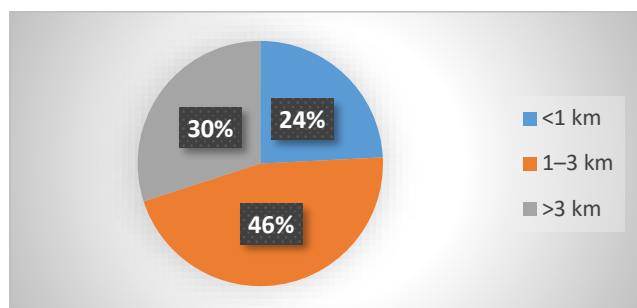


Figure 6: Distance from Home to School

A significant proportion of pupils (75.8%) reported walking more than one kilometre to reach school each day, with nearly a third (30%) travelling distances exceeding three kilometres. These extensive commutes were found to have multiple negative implications for attendance, punctuality, and academic engagement. Focus group discussions and interviews with parents revealed that long distances frequently resulted in lateness, fatigue, and in some cases, complete absence from school, particularly during adverse weather conditions. One parent lamented:

"Our children walk long distances, and when it rains, they miss school because the streams become impassable." Teachers corroborated these observations, noting that pupils who arrived tired or late were often less attentive, struggled to participate in lessons, and exhibited reduced concentration and stamina. This geographical challenge compounds other barriers to learning, including nutritional deficits, inadequate teaching resources, and socio-

economic pressures. The findings suggest that physical accessibility is a critical determinant of educational outcomes in rural Petauke, affecting both progression and overall performance. Interventions such as the provision of transport services, construction of closer schooling facilities, or boarding arrangements could mitigate these challenges. The data aligns with broader research highlighting the relationship between school proximity and learner participation, emphasizing the importance of infrastructural and logistical planning in improving educational equity and progression rates.

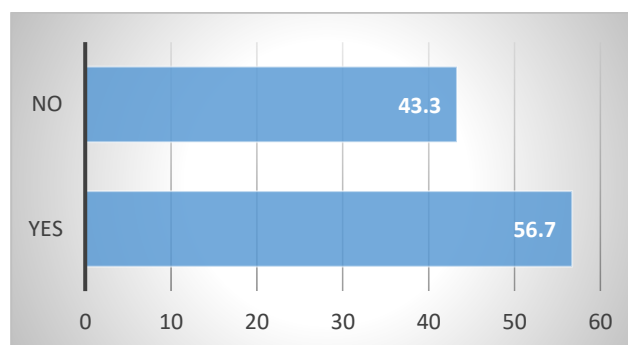


Figure 7: Transportation and Distance Challenges

The study revealed that more than half of the pupils (56.7%) experienced challenges related to transportation or the long distances between their homes and school. These physical barriers were identified as significant contributors to irregular attendance and delayed progression, particularly during the rainy season when pathways became impassable. Focus group discussions and interviews with parents highlighted that children often had to traverse rivers, muddy tracks, and uneven terrain, which not only increased travel time but also exposed them to safety risks. Teachers further reported that pupils arriving late or exhausted from long journeys were less attentive, participated minimally in classroom activities, and sometimes performed poorly in assessments.

5. Pupil Experiences and Suggestions

Table 4: Common Challenges Affecting Progression

Theme Identified	Frequency of Mentions	Percentage (%)
Lack of learning materials	29	24.2
Long distances to school	26	21.7
Poor teaching resources	20	16.7
Household chores	18	15.0
Hunger/poverty	15	12.5
Poor parental involvement	12	10.0
Total Mentions	120	100

The analysis of common challenges affecting pupil progression revealed a complex interplay of academic, socioeconomic, and logistical barriers. Table 4 shows that

the lack of learning materials was the most frequently cited challenge, mentioned by 29 respondents (24.2%), followed closely by long distances to school, reported by 26 respondents (21.7%). Poor teaching resources, household chores, hunger or poverty, and limited parental involvement were also highlighted, collectively accounting for the remaining mentions. Qualitative data provided deeper insight into these statistics, with pupils emphasizing that insufficient textbooks, stationery, and learning aids hindered active participation in lessons and self-study. Long travel distances were frequently associated with fatigue and lateness, particularly in adverse weather conditions, compounding the impact of other challenges. Teachers corroborated these findings, noting that socioeconomic constraints, including poverty and domestic responsibilities, reduce

development and motivation incentives, which affected lesson creativity and engagement.

Community and cultural factors also emerged as barriers. Early engagement in income-generating activities, gendered domestic expectations, and, in some cases, early marriage risks for girls were cited as contributing to absenteeism and delayed progression. Pupils themselves suggested that enhanced school support mechanisms, such as after-school tutoring, school feeding programs, transport assistance, and the provision of learning materials, could mitigate these barriers.

These qualitative insights provide a richer understanding of the interplay between socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors. They underscore that pupil progression is influenced not only by material and structural limitations but also by broader social and household dynamics that shape educational participation in rural Petauke.

Table 5: Pupil Suggestions for Improving Progression

Suggested Solution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Provide learning materials	34	28.3
Improve school feeding	25	20.8
Introduce transport support	21	17.5
Reduce class size	17	14.2
Increase parental sensitization	14	11.7
Enhance teacher motivation	9	7.5
Total	120	100

Pupils suggested practical measures such as provision of materials, feeding programs, and improved transport to encourage attendance. These suggestions were consistent with insights from parents, who emphasized community participation and school support mechanisms.

6. Qualitative Insights on Factors Affecting Progression

Beyond the quantitative patterns and previously discussed challenges, the qualitative data revealed nuanced contextual factors influencing pupil progression. Focus group discussions and interviews highlighted the role of household responsibilities, particularly for older pupils, in limiting study time and school attendance. Many learners reported spending several hours on domestic chores before or after school, which led to fatigue and reduced concentration during lessons. Parents confirmed that these responsibilities were often non-negotiable, given the economic and subsistence demands of rural households.

Teacher interviews further illuminated challenges associated with instructional delivery. While large class sizes were a known constraint, several educators noted that pupils' diverse abilities compounded teaching difficulties, particularly when remedial support was unavailable. Some teachers expressed frustration at the lack of professional

6. Summary

The findings revealed that pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in Petauke District was influenced by a complex interplay of factors. Regular school attendance, adequate learning materials, and supportive home environments were key facilitators, while poverty, long distances, and inadequate teaching resources served as barriers. The study demonstrated that progression was not merely a function of academic ability but a reflection of broader socioeconomic realities. The integration of quantitative data with qualitative narratives provided a holistic understanding of the issue, reinforcing the need for multi-sectoral interventions in rural education.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Overview

This chapter presented the discussion, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research based on the study findings. The discussion compared the results of the current study with previous scholarly works to establish how academic, socioeconomic, and institutional factors influenced pupils' progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in selected primary schools of Petauke District. The conclusions were drawn directly from the research objectives, highlighting how each factor affected pupil advancement. The recommendations were formulated to guide policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders in developing effective interventions that enhance educational progression. Finally, the chapter suggested areas for future studies to deepen the understanding of school progression challenges in rural Zambia and similar socio-educational contexts.

2. Discussion of Findings

The study established that pupil age significantly influenced progression rates, as older pupils tended to repeat grades more often. This finding aligns with Lewin (2009), who argued that overage learners are more likely to experience

low academic motivation and eventually drop out. Similarly, Chinyama (2018) found that late school entry remains a persistent problem in rural Zambia due to socioeconomic hardship and parental illiteracy. In the current study, pupils aged fourteen and above formed a substantial proportion of Grade 5 and 6 learners, reflecting delayed enrolment and repetition. Such delays disrupted normal progression patterns and placed additional strain on school resources. These findings suggest the need for early childhood interventions that promote timely enrolment and consistent attendance in the lower grades.

Gender distribution revealed near parity between boys and girls, yet qualitative evidence showed that female pupils faced more challenges in progression. This observation is consistent with studies by Fawe (2016) and UNICEF (2020), which documented the negative effects of early marriage, menstruation-related absenteeism, and household chores on girls' education. Teachers in the current study reported that girls often missed classes during their menstrual periods due to poor hygiene facilities at school. Additionally, cultural expectations for girls to assist in domestic duties reduced their study time. These barriers align with Kasonde-Ng'andu (2013), who emphasized the importance of gender-sensitive school policies. Hence, addressing gender disparities requires both infrastructural improvements and continuous community sensitization.

Attendance patterns demonstrated that most pupils attended school regularly; however, a significant minority missed classes frequently due to household chores and illness. These results mirror findings by Chevalier et al. (2017), who argued that household economic demands often force rural children into part-time attendance. In this study, absenteeism was strongly linked to farming seasons when children were required to assist their parents. Consistent attendance is vital for knowledge continuity and academic progression, as supported by Alexander (2015), who showed that frequent absenteeism leads to learning gaps that accumulate over time. Therefore, promoting attendance requires community-based interventions that address household labour demands, particularly during peak agricultural periods, through flexible learning schedules or after-school catch-up programs.

Findings on teaching quality revealed that although most pupils rated instruction as good or excellent, teachers cited large class sizes and limited teaching resources as constraints. This corresponds with the findings of Mulenga and Luchembe (2019), who reported that overcrowded classrooms in rural Zambia hindered individualized instruction and assessment. The student-teacher ratio in Petauke schools often exceeded recommended limits, reducing classroom interaction. Similar challenges were noted by Adedjei and Olaniyan (2011) in sub-Saharan Africa, where teacher shortages compromise learning quality. The implication is that teacher recruitment, training, and retention must be prioritized. Additionally, strengthening school supervision and continuous professional development programs could improve

instructional quality and thus enhance pupil progression rates.

The shortage of learning materials emerged as one of the most critical barriers to progression. Sixty percent of pupils reported inadequate access to textbooks and stationery. This aligns with studies by UNESCO (2016) and Zulu (2021), who found that resource-poor schools in rural Zambia often struggle to provide even basic instructional materials. The absence of sufficient books limits independent study and group learning, which are essential for mastering key concepts. Teachers interviewed in the present study stated that pupils shared textbooks in groups of three or more, reducing concentration. This situation validates the assertion by Barasa (2017) that educational quality cannot be achieved without adequate teaching aids. Increased funding and equitable resource distribution are therefore crucial.

Parental involvement was found to be limited, with only a small proportion of parents consistently helping their children with homework. This finding corroborates Epstein's (2001) theory of school-family-community partnerships, which argues that parental engagement enhances student motivation and achievement. In the present study, lack of parental support was attributed to low literacy levels among adults. Similar results were observed by Musonda (2018), who reported that parents in rural Zambia valued education but lacked the skills to assist academically. Encouragingly, most parents attended meetings occasionally, reflecting a willingness to engage. Schools can capitalize on this interest by organizing literacy workshops and parent education programs aimed at improving their capacity to support learning at home.

Socioeconomic challenges such as poverty and food insecurity were identified as major contributors to low progression. About 40.8% of pupils lacked regular access to food and clothing, echoing findings by World Bank (2018), which linked poverty to low educational attainment. Hunger and malnutrition were found to affect concentration and classroom participation, as noted by teachers. This observation supports Wodon (2012), who demonstrated that school feeding programs improve attendance and academic outcomes. In Petauke, pupils from poor households often missed school to engage in small-scale trading or farming. Therefore, integrating school feeding and social protection measures can play a pivotal role in reducing absenteeism and improving progression, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities.

Distance to school was another determinant of progression. Approximately 30% of pupils walked more than three kilometres daily, making punctuality and attendance difficult. This finding is consistent with research by Hungi and Thuku (2010), who established that long distances discourage attendance, especially for younger children. In Zambia's rural areas, inadequate transport infrastructure worsens this problem. Parents and pupils alike described the physical exhaustion associated with walking long distances. Similar experiences were reported by Mwewa (2020) in

Katete District, where seasonal flooding restricted access to schools. Addressing distance-related barriers requires constructing more satellite schools and implementing bicycle or transport support initiatives, which have been successful in other developing contexts such as Malawi and Kenya.

Institutional capacity was also found to influence progression outcomes. Interviews revealed that most schools in Petauke lacked sufficient classrooms, leading to overcrowding and double-shift teaching. This finding aligns with Chikombwe (2020), who reported that infrastructure deficits remain a central challenge in rural education systems. Overcrowding diminishes teacher effectiveness and reduces pupil comfort, particularly during the hot season. Furthermore, the lack of electricity in some schools limited the use of teaching aids. The study confirmed that infrastructural improvements, combined with adequate teacher housing and incentives, are necessary to enhance both teaching and learning conditions. Without such support, progression rates will continue to stagnate, particularly in under-resourced districts like Petauke.

Cultural beliefs and traditional practices were found to play a significant role in shaping pupils' educational outcomes. Some parents prioritized farming or early marriage over continued schooling, especially for girls. This finding resonates with Banda (2017), who noted that cultural norms in Eastern Province often undervalue girls' education. In interviews, teachers reported cases where pupils dropped out to herd cattle or engage in domestic chores. Such practices limit educational continuity and reduce transition rates. According to Nyerere (2014), overcoming these cultural constraints requires sustained sensitization and community mobilization. The study thus supports the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships between schools, chiefs, and churches to challenge harmful traditions and promote education as a shared community value.

The thematic analysis also revealed motivational and pedagogical challenges among teachers. Fatigue, absenteeism, and limited professional development affected instructional delivery. This mirrors findings by Mulenga (2021), who reported that rural teachers often feel demoralized due to poor working conditions. The study found that some teachers handled large workloads and lacked adequate supervision. Such circumstances compromise lesson planning and assessment quality. Conversely, motivated teachers achieved better pupil engagement and results, confirming Lockheed and Verspoor's (1991) argument that teacher quality is the most influential school-level factor in learning. Addressing motivation through improved welfare, accommodation, and recognition is therefore essential for enhancing educational progression in Petauke and similar rural settings.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data showed that the challenges affecting progression were interrelated rather than isolated. Socioeconomic barriers influenced attendance, which in turn affected academic performance. This supports Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems

Theory, emphasizing that learners' outcomes are shaped by multiple interacting systems. The study further confirmed that educational inequalities in Petauke were deeply rooted in social and economic structures. Consistent with Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Integration, pupils' sense of belonging and support from teachers and parents directly affected their commitment to school. Hence, addressing progression requires holistic interventions that consider family, school, and community contexts collectively.

Findings from document analysis, particularly school records, validated the self-reported challenges from pupils and parents. Records indicated high repetition and absenteeism rates, supporting the quantitative data. This triangulation reinforced the credibility of the results, aligning with Creswell's (2014) advocacy for mixed-methods approaches in educational research. The consistency of these findings demonstrated that the progression problem was systemic rather than isolated to a few schools. Therefore, the study underscores the importance of evidence-based planning and monitoring mechanisms within the Ministry of Education to track and address barriers affecting progression at an early stage.

Overall, the study's findings confirm that improving progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 requires integrated solutions addressing both school and community factors. While academic support is essential, the results reveal that social, cultural, and economic dimensions are equally critical. Similar conclusions were drawn by Hungi (2011), who emphasized the multi-dimensional nature of educational inequality in Africa. Therefore, promoting progression in Petauke should combine policy reforms, infrastructural development, teacher support, and community sensitization. The combination of quantitative precision and qualitative depth in this study provides a solid empirical foundation for such multi-sectoral interventions aimed at improving education outcomes and promoting equity in Zambia's rural primary schools.

2. Conclusion

The study concluded that pupils' progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in Petauke District was influenced by multiple interrelated factors rather than a single determinant. Age and overage learners played a significant role, with delayed enrolment and grade repetition affecting the normal progression timeline. Pupils who started school late or repeated classes faced academic and social challenges that slowed advancement. The evidence indicated that progression was not solely dependent on learning ability but intertwined with broader socioeconomic and institutional realities. Early identification of at-risk pupils, timely interventions, and continuous monitoring were essential in addressing age-related delays and ensuring that pupils progressed in accordance with the intended educational trajectory.

Gender dynamics emerged as a key consideration in progression outcomes, with girls facing unique challenges related to cultural practices, domestic responsibilities, and menstrual hygiene management. Although the overall

gender balance among pupils was near parity, the qualitative findings revealed that girls were more likely to miss school or perform below potential due to these factors. Consequently, gender-sensitive interventions, including improved sanitation facilities, community education, and encouragement for girls to remain in school, were essential for equitable progression. The study underscored that without addressing the social and cultural barriers affecting female learners, broader improvements in progression rates would be limited, as girls' educational outcomes significantly contribute to the overall success of the education system.

Regular school attendance was identified as a critical determinant of progression. Pupils who attended classes consistently were more likely to advance successfully, while irregular attendance caused learning gaps and delayed grade completion. Household responsibilities, illness, and environmental factors such as long walking distances contributed to absenteeism, affecting both academic performance and motivation. The study demonstrated that attendance patterns were shaped by socioeconomic conditions and community support structures. Schools that implemented measures to monitor attendance and engage parents in promoting regular attendance saw better outcomes. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing absenteeism through flexible schedules, supportive community engagement, and improved access to school facilities were essential to ensure that pupils progressed at the expected pace.

The quality of teaching and classroom environment significantly influenced pupils' ability to progress. Overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials, and teacher fatigue reduced the effectiveness of instruction, leading to poor comprehension and slow learning. Pupils expressed the need for more interactive and individualized teaching approaches to sustain interest and enhance understanding. The study concluded that teacher capacity and motivation were central to academic success. Improvements in teacher training, workload management, and provision of instructional resources were critical to enhancing learning outcomes. Additionally, schools with better teacher-student interaction and organized classroom management were observed to have higher progression rates, highlighting the direct correlation between pedagogical quality and successful grade advancement.

Availability of learning materials was another determinant of progression. Pupils who had access to textbooks, writing materials, and reference resources were better prepared for lessons and examinations, whereas those without such materials struggled to keep up. The study concluded that resource deficits limited both independent and group learning, negatively impacting progression. Sharing of limited resources among multiple pupils created additional challenges, including reduced reading opportunities and slower mastery of concepts. Therefore, equitable distribution of learning materials across schools and grades was critical to ensuring all pupils could engage fully with the curriculum. Investment in educational resources not

only enhanced academic performance but also improved pupils' confidence and motivation to advance to the next grade.

Parental involvement and support at home were crucial for promoting pupil progression. Pupils with parents who consistently helped with homework or engaged in their academic development demonstrated higher levels of confidence, understanding, and performance. However, many parents lacked the formal education required to provide meaningful academic assistance. Despite this, parental interest in attending school events and monitoring attendance suggested potential for engagement. The study concluded that fostering meaningful home-school partnerships through parent education programs, literacy initiatives, and sensitization campaigns could enhance parental contributions. Strengthening these relationships would ensure that children received both academic and emotional support at home, creating a conducive environment for learning and increasing the likelihood of successful progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6.

Socioeconomic constraints, including poverty and food insecurity, significantly hindered pupil progression. Children who lacked access to adequate food, clothing, or school supplies were often unable to concentrate or fully participate in lessons. The study concluded that economic deprivation not only affected attendance but also reduced motivation and self-esteem, contributing to grade repetition or dropout risk. Pupils' involvement in income-generating activities further limited study time. Addressing these socioeconomic barriers required targeted interventions such as school feeding programs, provision of uniforms and materials, and support for disadvantaged families. By mitigating these economic challenges, pupils would have a greater chance of consistent attendance, active engagement in learning, and progression to higher grades, thus reducing inequities in educational outcomes.

Environmental factors, particularly the distance from home to school, posed significant challenges for progression. Pupils who walked long distances, especially over three kilometres, faced fatigue and reduced readiness for learning. Seasonal weather conditions, including rain and floods, further impeded access to school. The study concluded that addressing these environmental barriers was crucial to ensuring equitable progression opportunities. Potential solutions included constructing additional schools closer to residential areas, providing bicycles, or introducing transport support schemes. Schools that considered accessibility challenges observed better attendance and engagement among pupils. Therefore, planning for infrastructure and transportation support in rural communities was essential to minimize environmental constraints that negatively affect pupils' academic continuity and successful progression.

Institutional capacity, including school infrastructure and classroom availability, played a critical role in pupil progression. Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate facilities limited instructional effectiveness and reduced

pupils' focus and comfort. The study concluded that infrastructure deficits directly impacted the quality of learning and overall progression rates. Schools lacking sufficient classrooms often implemented double shifts, leading to shorter lesson durations and reduced individual attention. Strengthening institutional capacity through the construction of additional classrooms, provision of furniture, and improvement of learning spaces was necessary to enhance educational outcomes. Adequate infrastructure not only improved teaching and learning conditions but also promoted a more organized, motivating, and supportive environment conducive to pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6.

Cultural influences emerged as a subtle but impactful determinant of progression. Some families prioritized domestic work, farming, or early marriage over continuous schooling, particularly for girls. The study concluded that these cultural practices limited opportunities for consistent learning, delayed progression, and in some cases led to early dropout. Community sensitization programs and engagement with traditional leaders were identified as vital strategies to transform perceptions and reinforce the importance of education. Schools that collaborated with community stakeholders and promoted awareness campaigns observed improved attendance and retention. Therefore, progression interventions must address both academic and socio-cultural factors to create an enabling environment for pupils, ensuring that all children, regardless of gender or cultural expectations, have equitable chances to advance.

Teacher motivation and pedagogical practices were found to influence pupil progression substantially. Demotivated teachers and those experiencing fatigue or absenteeism struggled to provide quality instruction. Conversely, teachers who used interactive methods, encouraged participation, and monitored learning closely observed higher pupil achievement and smoother progression. The study concluded that teacher welfare, professional development, and incentives were essential to sustaining motivation and enhancing instructional effectiveness. By improving teaching conditions, schools could directly impact learning outcomes and progression rates. Well-supported and engaged teachers were better equipped to manage diverse classrooms, address learning gaps, and provide individualized attention, thereby fostering academic success and ensuring that pupils transitioned to Grade 6 with the requisite knowledge and skills.

Overall, the study concluded that pupil progression in Petauke District was a multi-faceted issue requiring integrated solutions. Academic, socioeconomic, institutional, environmental, and cultural factors intersected to shape educational outcomes. No single intervention could address progression challenges in isolation. The study demonstrated that quantitative patterns such as attendance and age interacted with qualitative realities like cultural practices and poverty to influence advancement. Consequently, a holistic approach involving teachers, parents, communities, and policymakers was essential.

Interventions needed to target both school-level improvements and broader social determinants to ensure sustainable progression. By understanding these dynamics, education stakeholders could design effective strategies that improve Grade 5 to Grade 6 progression rates, thereby contributing to equitable and quality education for all pupils.

3. Recommendations

- Ensure adequate provision of learning materials, including textbooks, stationery, and teaching aids, to facilitate effective learning and support pupil progression.
- Implement school feeding programs to address nutritional deficiencies that affect concentration, attendance, and academic performance.
- Introduce transport support or construct additional schools closer to communities to reduce absenteeism caused by long walking distances.
- Recruit and train more teachers to reduce class sizes, improve teacher-pupil interaction, and enhance the quality of instruction.
- Conduct regular parent sensitization programs to increase home support for learning and encourage active participation in school activities.
- Engage community leaders and stakeholders in awareness campaigns to address cultural practices that hinder continuous schooling, particularly for girls.
- Develop monitoring systems to track pupil attendance, academic performance, and progression, allowing timely interventions for at-risk learners.
- Provide professional development, incentives, and motivation programs for teachers to improve pedagogical practices and commitment.
- Improve school infrastructure, including classrooms, desks, and sanitation facilities, to create a conducive learning environment.
- Foster multi-sectoral collaboration between education authorities, NGOs, and local communities to implement comprehensive strategies for sustainable pupil progression.

4. Future Studies

Future research should explore longitudinal studies on pupil progression from early primary grades through to the completion of Grade 7 to capture trends over time and assess the long-term impact of socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural factors. Additionally, studies could examine the effectiveness of targeted interventions such as school feeding programs, transport support, and parental sensitization campaigns to determine their direct influence on retention and transition rates. Research could also focus on comparative analyses between rural and urban schools to understand contextual differences in progression dynamics. Furthermore, qualitative investigations into the experiences of teachers, parents, and pupils regarding policy implementation and community engagement would

provide deeper insights for evidence-based educational reforms.

5. Summary

This chapter concluded the study by synthesizing the main findings, providing conclusions, and offering recommendations for improving pupil progression from Grade 5 to Grade 6 in Petauke District. The discussion highlighted the interplay of academic, socioeconomic, institutional, and cultural factors in shaping progression outcomes.

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