



THE ILLUSION OF PASS PERCENTAGE: IS IT A COMPLETE TRAVESTY OF RESULTS?

Dr. Jaspreet Kaur

Alumnus, Department of Education, Punjab University, Chandigarh

Cite This Article: Dr. Jaspreet Kaur, "The Illusion of Pass Percentage: Is it a Complete Travesty of Results?", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education*, Volume 10, Issue 2, July - December, Page Number 64-68, 2024.

Copy Right: © R&D Modern Research Publication, 2024 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract:

As stated by Newton's third law of motion; "that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." However, the reaction can be positive or negative; there is no further explication as it all depends upon the time, situation and amount of effort put into that reaction. Based upon the analogy, testing norms and standards of measurement in schools towards the content being taught is at risk depending upon the conditions and tempo of the contemporary era. The examination system is at stake almost due to the manipulative ideas that have been induced in it; both at lower as well as higher level by the concerned authorities. This paper explores the phenomenon of institutions reporting cent percent pass percentages that whether these results are genuine or being manoeuvred over. By analyzing research studies, assessment practices and educational policies, the research aims to shed light on the implications of inflated results on educational integrity in addition to student outcomes.

Key Words: Analogy, Explication, Inflated, Manoeuvred, Tempo.

Introduction:

The emergence of the topic began from what the researcher had experienced in practicality. But while pondering and probing upon the context of the situation the following was scenario surfaced which is explicated further. It almost seems like a hoax statement that pass percentages have often been used as a key metric for evaluation for the effectiveness of educational institutions. Thus, the rising trend of schools reporting cent percent pass rates directs one to dwell into questioning its validity. There are plethora of newspaper reports that provide detailed account along with statistics impinging upon the cent percent pass percentage of students at various levels be it primary, secondary or senior secondary in schools. However, this seems to be a utopian state that provides the impression to involve possibly the tactics of eminence of the institution; mauling the perils that might concoct cataclysmic consequences in future. This alarming prevalence of unrealistic pass rates suggests the potential manipulations that can even misrepresent educational success.

In practicality, if highlighted upon the higher pass percentage it can be attributed to the following reasons to be accounted as the favourable factors i.e. effectiveness of teaching techniques that involve engaging and adaptive teaching methods catering to varying learning styles enhancing student understanding as well as retention of the material; a convincing curriculum design specifically well-structured and aligned with learning objectives assisting students in grasping the essential concepts efficiently; constant assessment which inculcates frequent evaluation enabling timely feedback and identification of areas requiring improvement; nurturing learning environment enhancing positivity and inclusivity thus, permitting students to question, actively participate and seek help whenever required; availability of resources such as textbooks, online including other supplementary material supporting diverse needs for learning; engaging parents so that they can reinforce learning at home and involving them to motivate students ultimately contributing in their academic success; personalizing the attention in the form that small class sizes can help address specific student challenges thereby increasing individualized support in turn leading to better learning outcomes; creation of a growth mindset and commemoration of achievements can encourage the child, boost motivation of the student and instil confidence; continuous training to professional development of educators ensuring they stay updated with the latest teaching methods along with subject knowledge; open and effective communication between teachers, students, and parents assists in recognising issues on a nascent stage and even provide support; teaching students to study effectively and better time management skills can lead to improvement in the academic performance; last but not the least, is the focus on extracurricular activities involving programs reinforcing academic concepts via practical applications enriching learning experiences. All these key elements or factors concerned cannot be typically followed with utmost dedication in any institution as they only strive to achieve it and it is more sort of goal oriented.

On the contrary the latent factors mostly accounted as unfavourable that remain underneath might not be even pondered or discussed upon and some of them encompass firstly, manipulation in grades involving adjustment in the scores often by teachers or administrators for meeting the desired pass percentage; cheating and plagiarizing entails allowing or encouraging students to cheat not only exams but also submit their daily work with or without plagiarizing the content; irregularities in examination implies either providing the answers in advance or permitting them to take exams under unusual conditions; reducing the standards by decreasing the passing criteria or easing the assessments ensuring that all students meet the requisites; pressure on the educators for creating an environment of only higher-stakes; they feel compelled for achieving some pass rates that leads them to engage in unethical practices; selectively reporting only those results of students who are likely to pass while omitting those who don't succeed thus, creating misleading cumulative percentage; under social promotion it is advancing students to the next class despite of their actual performance for maintaining facade of success; inadequate oversight indicates non-effective monitoring and accountability sanctions through which unscrupulous practices to go on rampant; fake data submission, as the administrators providing defective data for either enrollment or performance to the higher authorities or regulatory bodies lastly, there is lack of consequences in the form that a culture of dishonesty is created due to deficient repercussions for dodging or grade manipulation. All these practices sabotage the integrity of the present context educational system and can have enduring negative consequences for not only students and teachers but for the institutions as a whole.

Literature Review:

Apart from the superfluous availability of literature related to cent percent pass percentage only a few reports suggests that everything can be accuracy there are some loopholes that do exist and still remain to be addressed. Here is a handful a few of literature that points out the gaps that the system needs to be relooked into and timely reforms have to be added to improvise it. These include:

Sarkar (2012) in its study mentioned about a rapidly altered world, wherein India was reforming and reshaping its education system day by day. Alteration in the assessment and evaluation system was the most sensitive part of curriculum change. For the assurance of quality and maintenance of public confidence connections had been thought to be considered crucial with authorities such as international assessments for Indian schools and different foreign institutions. The Ministry of Human Resource Development of the government of India had been the controlling authority for the systems and procedures of assessment. The different states and union territories educational boards and councils had still been making use of their own strategies for assessing and evaluating the learners to keep homogeneity with the standard and norms as been utilized in CBSE and ICSE. A number of national levels Council bodies such as NCTE, IMC, AICTE, NCERT etc. had also been directly associated with this system. In the study it was revealed that assessment would continue to be an issue of contention. The most crucial factor for this system and the educational institutions had been the establishment of equilibrium between evaluating and estimating achievements encompassing the pragmatic consequences on the process of teaching-learning. This being due to the educated members of the privileged class have been of the view that the learners could be accessed via global standard norms and criteria of some universities also, other academic institutions of national as well as international repute had introduced their own admission tests.

Bhattacharji and Kingdon (2017) in their article entitled “The great Indian exam debacle” depicted about the marks moderation debate making headlines in the summer, resulted in frantic, yet incomplete media coverage. There had been a legal dispute as well as hindrances in the declaration of results of high-school students of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and various state boards. The research results puts forth the way the dependence on a simplistic metric of a 101-point scale for awarding aggregate scores in every subject had led to almost the complete breakdown of the standards of assessment in the Indian board examinations, mainly due to the existence of multiple systems. The boards in order to keep up with the relevancy had awarded higher scores henceforth, attenuating academic standards and ruining the trust of public in the assessment system.

Swarup (October, 2020) being a former Secretary, Government of India and an author of the book in his article entitled “The farce of cent percent marks” taking into consideration the report in leading English daily under the titled i.e. “Delhi University’s LSR college sets cut-offs at 100% for three UG courses” explicated that the farce was discovered within the year when he was appointed as the Secretary, School Education, Government of India in 2016 wherein many students in India were scoring cent percent marks in English Literature along with other subjects of humanities as well. As scrutinized, it was disclosed that several examination boards had been spiking marks just in the name of moderation. The cumulative exercise came into existence by providing grace marks to the students of both classes 10th and 12th only for passing but slowly it transposed into practise hence, enabling the examinees of these boards for securing admission in Central Universities mainly in Delhi University. Generally if a child secured 16% marks in a specific subject and could pass with grace marks of approximately 5% and the consistency in case of each and every subject came to around 10%. Henceforth, as per the situation the students who were in dire need of detention managed to pass with ease. Another issue was that, in the past, almost all students received 10 percent higher than the due marks. Since the board had set a 95% ceiling for spikes, as a consequence; in this situation many students received 95% in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Almost all of the students who previously received a score between 85 and 95% had now achieved a score of 95%. What bigger farce than this could be there as per the writer. There were other boards where the ceiling reached as higher as 100%. As a result, students received perfect scores in both Hindi and English language exams. Even though the situation resembled as if Shakespeare would be turning in his grave, India did not think that the issue was serious enough because the present was becoming better at the expense of the future. The 80 percent pass rate for CBSE across all of India was a dismal indictment in the country’s educational system, notwithstanding this absurdity. If this inflation of marks had been prohibited, the pass percentage would have drastically decreased. Nobody was ready to accept the reality. The head of a state board was even fired for refusing to accept inflated markings and for facing the truth. The following principles served as the foundation for CBSE's moderation policy:

- To indemnify for the time lost by candidates while attempting to answer a question in the allotted time owing to misunderstandings, errors or obliquity in the question, if any, which resulted in several performances and limited time for subsequent questions.
- For indemnification of the whims of the moment and standardized the assessment procedure.
- To achieve balance because the evaluation process involved some subjectivity.
- Raising the candidates' mean set-wise performance results that could be attributed to variations in the difficulty of the various sets of question papers as per the multiple sets scheme.
- To keep the pass rate of that year particularly of applicants almost equal to that of previous years, both overall and across academic areas.
- To prevent haphazard and arbitrary evaluation stemming from variations in competency of examiner.

One of the points above which was the dead giveaway, as it said, "To maintain a near parity of pass percentage of the candidates in the current year vis-à-vis preceding years, subject-wise and overall." This clause permitted the absurd pass percentage to stay in place. An error that was made once had to be repeated. It was exaggerated yet for another reason. Everyone involved was content with this illusion. The fact that the students felt cherished whenever they received higher grades. It wasn't a deliberate thought that he/she didn't earn as many points. Since each student scored higher on average, the teacher was pleased. Even though the school was a fabrication, it was nevertheless able to claim distinction. The governments were pleased with the state's perceived

performance. Although there was nothing illegal about it, it was misguiding the thoughts of all parties involved and not beneficial for the nation. It has to be fixed as a result. A plan was developed to address this issue. As per the visits of the writer to the states he addressed this issue with the relevant authorities. Although almost everyone felt that this harmful behavior ought to end, some were forced to carry on because others didn't want to stop. The matter was then brought up at a meeting. Unexpectedly, an agreement was formulated. With the exception of Kerala, all state boards who had chosen to discontinue moderating the marks for upward revision or spiking starting in that particular year, subjected to any necessary changes to state regulations. The Kerala Board did, however, officially declare that moderation would end till the next year. Following this ruling, the corresponding state administrations abandoned the marking spiking practice in the sake of moderation. Karnataka saw a roughly 8% decline in the pass rate. The state government was even commended by the Union Minister for taking a risk. Now, the passing rate in Punjab state dropped over by 10 percent. Numerous other states also made the decision to confront the reality. Now, CBSE was preparing to remove spikes as well. However, powerful parents of the Delhi wards were unwilling to give up the false impression of a higher percentage based on ludicrous spikes. Strangely, the list contained advocates, public professionals and politicians whose kids had passed standard XII and weren't ready to give up the lucrative spiking marks. Half-truths were spread by those with an interest in the situation, including the media. It was claimed in a petition that was also submitted to the High Court that CBSE was altering the "goal post" in the middle. It was hard to understand how "changing the goal post" could apply to the elimination of uniform mark spiking. The moderation of marks needed to proceed as it did in prior years, according to order of the High Court. Spiking was not mentioned in the order. CBSE decided to comply with the Union Minister's directives in letter and spirit. Since the pass rate remained constant, everyone appeared contented. In actuality, a morally righteous action was relinquished. The sacrifice that was actually made was a moral decision to outlaw spiking. It was really embarrassing for the writer because we hadn't kept our commitment. It also made him question about the true academic standing of the students who were currently being evaluated using the system.

Swarup (August, 2021) being a former Secretary, Government of India and an author of the book in another article of his titled "Board exam results: Farcical spiking and delusion of high percentages" wherein he took into consideration as the CBSE board results were just declared. Compared to the typical 80%, over 99% of youngsters passed. The writer was wonderstruck as to what happened to the other students? Furthermore, doesn't this pass rate negate the need for exams? Additionally, it appeared that a few of the students achieved a perfect score in English literature once again. Perhaps this also applied to other humanities areas. The writer was aware of a similar "story" back in 2016, when he became Secretary, School Education and Literacy, and made efforts to rectify it. The further details carry similarities with the previously stated article firstly, i.e. moderation for spiking in addition to the universities were using the marks scored by the students in the board exams as a standard score for admission. Hence, as a result, students who should have been detained by a significant margin were able to pass with ease. There was a related issue. Thirdly, the technique of pass percentage along with the associated subject; it also encompassed that since the present was gaining at the expense of the future, the problem was not witnessed as serious enough in India. The other crucial issues include compromising the future, intervention of authorities, major features of the moderation policy, situations pertaining to granting of grace marks. Furthermore, there was nothing illegal about what was taking place. However, as per the writer it was not only unethical, but it was also misleading all parties involved, which was disgraceful for the entire nation. Therefore, it required correction. A plan was developed to address this issue the write being a part of the process spoke with the relevant authorities about the matter during his visit to the States and Union Territories. Although almost everyone felt that this harmful behavior ought to end, some were forced to carry on because others would not. He made the decision to call a national meeting to address the matter because there was now an informal consensus in place. The unofficial agreement was formally approved. In continuation with these issues, active role of government and decrees taken in lieu of the government put forth that one of the offenders who connected with the bandwagon of spikers was CBSE according to the writer mentioned in the article itself. Apart from this, involvement of parents, functioning of the board specifically inflation of marks last but not the least, propitiously, the National Education Policy too made an effort to address the problem by suggesting entrance tests for admission to universities. Thus, ideally, one of the main reasons for "spiking" marks which will no longer be relevant.

Sharangi (August, 2024) in her article titled "Over 50% of students failing class 10, 12 exams are from MP, Gujarat, UP, Bihar, Andhra boards and CBSE, finds govt study" reported the findings from a study of the result of the exams of secondary and higher secondary education boards taken by the union ministry of education (MoE) depicting that more than half of the students failed 10th and 12th board exams in India in 2023 from majorly the six school boards of states namely Madhya Pradesh (MP), Gujarat, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Andhra Pradesh as well as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The school education department's analysis examined the class 10th and 12th results of all 59 of the nation's school boards, three of which were at the national level and the others were at the state level. According to the survey, the central boards class 10th student failure rates were 6%, and the state boards' were 16%. It is 18% in state boards and 12% at the central board for class 12th. The study found that the majority of students from MP, Gujarat, Bihar, UP and Andhra Pradesh i.e. 56% who failed their class 10 board exams. The five school boards of Gujarat, Bihar, MP, UP, and CBSE were also home to a large number of students who did not pass the class 12th board exams. In accordance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the MoE conducted this study which aimed to standardize different school boards and give everyone an equal chance in national competitive admission exams like JEE, NEET and CUET, among others. Ten of the 59 school boards namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Kerala, Manipur, Odisha, West Bengal and Telangana had independent higher secondary boards, whereas 41 are common secondary and higher secondary boards. Six state boards which included Andhra Pradesh (AP), Odisha, Telangana, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal followed their own curricula rather than the NCERT. The report emphasized how these boards' exam durations varied, with class 10th exams lasting from 8 to 34 days (in Bihar for 8 days, in CBSE for 34 days) and class 12th exams lasting from 10 to 63 days (in Bihar for 10 days, in CBSE for 49 days, in Punjab Board for 63 days). The ministry said that there were 60 school boards till last year, but that number dropped to 59 when the Karnataka government merged the SSLC Board and PU Board in 2023. According to Sanjay Kumar, secretary, school education, MoE, "one of the biggest challenges in implementing NEP 2020 is working with 59 different school boards. For states at the bottom of the passing percentage and higher number of students failing in classes 10 and

12, we have referred the analysis to the states to come up with strategies to improve the existing scenario. We hope some of them like Karnataka will want to merge eventually.” States were not required to abide by any of the orders from the federal government because education was a topic on the concurrent list. Furthermore, as per the study, approximately 33.5 lakh pupils in class 10th were not advancing to class 11 (5.5 lakh were not showing up and 28 lakh failed). About 32.4 lakh kids in class 12th were not finishing the last stage of education (5.2 lakh were not showing up, and 27.2 lakh failed). It was further stated in the report that “this is one of the causes for low retention rate and Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at higher secondary level. Open schools are yet to pick up with only 4.2 lakh students enrolled, of whom 2 lakhs passed for class 10 while in case of class 12 only 6.5 lakh enrolled, 6.2 lakh appeared and 3.3 lakh passed (2.9 lakh failed).” 86% of class 10 pass-out pupils were from state boards, while fourteen percent were from central boards. This percentage was 88% from state boards and 12% from the central board for class 12th. It was also depicted in report that “there is a need to try innovative ways to retain students. For example, Andhra Pradesh (with effect from 2023) allowed failed students to repeat for one more year as regular students.”

Varma (May, 2024) in her news report titled “High pass percentage, marks in SSC exams not enough to ensure quality education, says official” elaborated that unlike in the past, when a school's performance in class 10th class board exams was measured by the pass percentage or the highest marks earned, these metrics have been insufficient in the contemporary era to ensure quality education, according to Department of School Education Principal Secretary Praveen Prakash on May 19 (Sunday). Mr. Praveen Prakash stated in a statement that a fresh method was required for analyzing the 10th grade results was required. To guarantee that every high school student received the intended scores in the upcoming academic year (2024–25), administrators need to examine the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam results from current academic year (2023–24) from a fresh perspective. According to him, raising the calibre of instruction at the individual level and the breadth of students' knowledge has to be essential for increasing their employability. He further mentioned that “A school may record a pass percentage of 100, but if all students barely scrape through with 40% marks, it does not reflect high educational standards. Similarly, a school where only one student excels with 99% marks while the rest barely meet the passing threshold of 40% marks; it would not serve any purpose.” According to him, a school's genuine quality would have been evident when its pupils' mean, median, and mode grades exceeded 70% or 420 points in absolute terms. He cited that the SSC results from last month, stating that the Zila Parishad schools had mean, median, and mode of 358, 371 and 385 respectively, while the municipal schools had mean, median, and mode of 357, 366 and 390 respectively. The figures fall short of the target of 420. However, he noted that the Andhra Pradesh Model Schools' data showed a substantially higher mean, median, and mode of 437, 452 and 509 respectively. District education officers should use the new method to analyze the mentioned year's results, according to Mr. Praveen Prakash. The figures fell short of the target of 420. However, he noted that the Andhra Pradesh Model Schools' data showed a substantially higher mean, median, and mode of 437, 452 and 509 respectively. According to Mr. Praveen Prakash, the District Education Officers ought to use the new method for evaluating the mentioned year's outcomes in order to guarantee an improvement for the school year ahead.

Conclusion:

The conclusion from the above material includes the following indicators i.e. manipulation which includes inflation in grades wherein schools award higher grades than required mostly to meet the performance targets; practices of probably excluding less than average students from assessments thereby boosting pass rates in totality last but not the least, putting teaching into evaluation wherein standardized test preparation is over emphasized at the expense of a versatile education. Only a handful few of the studies have depicted that schools report cent percent pass rates however, have been under scanner due to discrepancies in performance and engagement of students. The impact on student outcomes which includes the disruption between reported pass rates in comparison to the actual student readiness for further education or being a part of the workforce. Along with this as witnessed that there is a push from the authorities for a mere emblazon of marks for making the fit into the criteria of progression and accomplishment that might have catastrophic effects on the student's growth and development.

Pass rates that are flawed not only undermine educational quality but they also mislead stakeholders' along with compromising student preparedness. The major call to action emphasizes the need for educational stakeholders for prioritizing meaningful assessments techniques over superficial metrics that don't even reflect any true learning outcomes. The reforms in the exam patterns need to bring in time and again whenever and wherever required. More and more focus needs to be put in to improve the writing skills of the students. Quest for self learning and exploration needs to be generated amongst the students so that they waiver away from rote learning instead try and grab more than the required information which will prove beneficial for their future. Along with this, suggestions for improving transparency as well as accountability in assessment in education including unconstrained audits of reported data is need of the hour.

References:

1. Bhattacharji, P., & Kingdon, G. (2017). The great Indian exam debacle. The Observer Research Foundation Brief, (191), 1-8. Retrieved September 30, 2024, from <https://www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20230604150150.pdf>
2. Sarkar, T. K. (2012). Assessment in Education in India. SA-eDUC, 9(2). Retrieved September 30, 2024, from https://law.nwu.ac.za/sites/law.nwu.ac.za/files/files/p-saeduc/New_Folder_1/1_Assessment%20in%20Education%20in%20India.pdf
3. Sharangi, V. (2024, August, 22) Over 50% of students failing class 10, 12 exams are from MP, Gujarat, UP, Bihar, Andhra boards and CBSE, finds govt study. NEWS18. Retrieved on October 22, 2024, from <https://www.news18.com/education-career/over-50-of-students-failing-class-10-12-exams-are-from-mp-gujarat-up-bihar-andhra-boards-and-cbse-finds-govt-study-9023338.html>
4. Swarup, A. (2020, October 17). The farce of cent percent marks. CNBC TV18. Retrieved October 1, 2024, from <https://www.cnbctv18.com/views/the-farce-of-cent-percent-marks-7226311.htm>
5. Swarup, A. (2021, August 14). Board exam results: Farcical spiking and delusion of high percentages. CNBC TV18. Retrieved October 1, 2024, from <https://www.cnbctv18.com/views/board-exam-results-farcical-spiking-and-delusion-of-high-percentages-10368861.htm>

6. Varma, P.S. (2024, May 20). High pass percentage, marks in SSC exams not enough to ensure quality education, says official. The Hindu. Retrieved on October 22, 2024, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/high-pass-percentage-marks-in-ssc-exams-not-enough-to-ensure-quality-education-says-official/article68194165.ece>