

Reflections on Lament Of 30 % Matric Pass Mark In South African Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the minimum matric pass mark of 30 percent in South African schools which has remained one of the most worrisome concerns in the education sector in terms of the quality of education delivered by schools and the number of pupils produced each year. The 30 percent figure contradicts one of Department of Basic Education's core objectives, which is to commit to quality, because 30 percent cannot reach perfection. Therefore, this study's primary aim was to show reflections on lament on 30 percent matric pass mark in South African schools and the predicted end result of this 30 percent matric pass mark if it is not adjusted. The long-term goal of the project was to investigate the implications of maintaining the matriculation cut-off score of 30 percent rather than raising it to a threshold of 50 percent. This study makes use of content analysis to analyse data from social media that include Facebook, twitter and blogs post. The results made it clear that there is a need for the government to take education seriously by upgrading the pass rate from 30 percent going up, the study shows that the policy should be reviewed or amended with a minimum pass mark of 50 percent in order for learners to be able to qualify for NSC on HC entrance requirements. The results show that with at 50% pass mark learners will have various opportunities, such as continuing their education in tertiary education or entering the job market. The study suggests recommendations such as the matric learners must be awarded certificate based on 100 percent exam percentage by removing 25 percent of school based assessment as it counts to the final promotion mark in Grade 12.

Keywords: 30 % pass mark, 50 % threshold, achievers, School-based assessment

1. Introduction

Booth (2016:30) states that researchers investigate scientific inquiry whenever they need to collect evidence in response to a research challenge. The minimum matric pass mark of 30 percent in South African schools remains one of the most causes of concern in secondary education regarding the quality of education delivered by schools and the number of pupils produced each year. The school community, including teachers' unions, student organizations, politicians, various media outlets, and the general public, are concerned about the thirty percent matric pass rate in South African schools. Due to its gravity, this topic has received extensive local media and social media such that it provokes people's emotions anytime it is discussed. According to UNISA (2019:1), digital media rapidly transforms South African society and politics, with digital communication dominating social media. Several organizations and individuals (such as politicians) use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to improve their electoral support or enable policy change. The Department of Basic Education announced that South Africa's matric passed the threshold of 30 percent. Social media concerns have been raised mainly when the National Senior Certificate pass rate is revealed regarding its reliability as an indicator of student achievement. The 30 percent figure contradicts one of the departments of basic education's core objectives, which is to commit to quality because 30 percent cannot reach perfection. On the other hand, education attempts to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to improve their circumstances and contribute to the development of healthy, sustainable communities (Janks, 2014).

Consequently, the DBE's educational goals are commendable. Still, their implementation is substandard as no student with a 30 percent average will be highly successful in life, but they will encounter limits owing to a non-competitive credential. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) stated, "it is aware of arguments that raising this threshold to 50 percent would improve the education system, but it stated that this change would not be made because it aims to encourage varying levels of achievement." Following the DBE statement, Umalusi, the quality Council for General and Further Education and Training as stipulated by Act No. 58 of 2001 has released the conditions that each learner must meet to be eligible for the National Senior Certificate (NCS). This council declared that to be endorsed for the National Senior Certificate, a candidate must earn 40 percent in three courses, one of which must be an official language at the Home Language level, and 30 percent in three other topics. Based on this statement, it is evident that 30 percent will remain in place for an extended period due to the department's insistence that 30 percent is part of its established policy fostering various degrees of performance.

Because not all kids in schools are intellectually brilliant, there may be moments when major doubts are raised over the precise nature of the 30% pass threshold. In addition, it is surprising that 30 percent will not be amended shortly; this could be considered the instrument or primary cause of developing inequalities among students or in society as a whole, which can lead to unequal opportunities. A learner with a minimum of 50 percent in his subjects has a greater chance of being admitted to an institution of higher education; four years later, he is likely to be in the workforce performing his ideal professional job. While the learner who obtained at least 30 percent in most of his subjects qualifies for the higher certificate admission criterion, he is largely at a disadvantage. The 30 percent achiever, after four years, is likely to work under the 50 percent achiever, earning low wages and renting a small room, having difficulty sustaining his life, and having the potential to become a criminal or a beggar due to the loss of self-esteem that is rooted or planted at the school level and continues to develop until adulthood or post-schooling. The first learner can buy a house or automobile and live a life of luxury, and they have a chance or benefit of getting promoted to a top position that pays a respectable salary. The 30 percent matric pass score will inflict more long-term damage than the current situation, in which excitement is strong because the school or country has attained a higher percentage than any other province. Those with less education or who spend less time in school are likely to have lower earnings, fewer opportunities, poorer health, and shorter life expectancies (de Kadt, 2020).

If a student gets at least 50 percent in all of his classes, they have a better chance of college. Four years later, that student is likely to be working in their dream job. The student who achieves the 30 percent matric pass mark will have trouble making ends meet and may become a criminal or a beggar because he has lost self-esteem, which starts in school and gets worse as the person gets older or stops going to school. The research problem in the current study emanates directly from the 30% pass mark that the Department of Basic Education announced. The qualitative research will reflect on lamentations made about the 30% matric pass mark in South African schools. In addition, this study will show the result of this 30 percent matric pass mark if it is not adjusted. The long-term goal of the research is to investigate the implications of maintaining the matriculation cut-off score of 30 percent rather than raising it to the current threshold of 50 percent. The research findings will shed light on why the majority of people on social media are irritated about this pass threshold. The Department of Education stands to gain from the study. It explains why it is necessary to increase the minimum pass mark for the matriculation exam from 30 percent to 50 percent.

2. Materials and Methods

According to Saunders et al. (2012:45), when conducting research, two primary methodologies should be made clear: whether an inductive or deductive research approach was employed. The current study investigates the narrations that show a lamentation on a 30 percent Matric pass mark in South African schools using an inductive research strategy. The researcher intends to collect unique data with the deliberations to gain new insights from influential people quoted mainly from social media. The research uses content analysis as the most relevant methodology. In this current study, the method is defensible because it is not strictly scientifically based, unlike other data analysis methods. Human units of analysis are referred to as subjects, while nonhuman units of analysis are considered objects. In this study, the unit of analysis will consist of both nonhumans and humans. The nonhuman population consists of media reports, Twitter and Facebook posts, and newspaper articles, while the human population consists of influential

people in South Africa. The non-probability sampling technique to be used in the current investigation is convenience sampling.

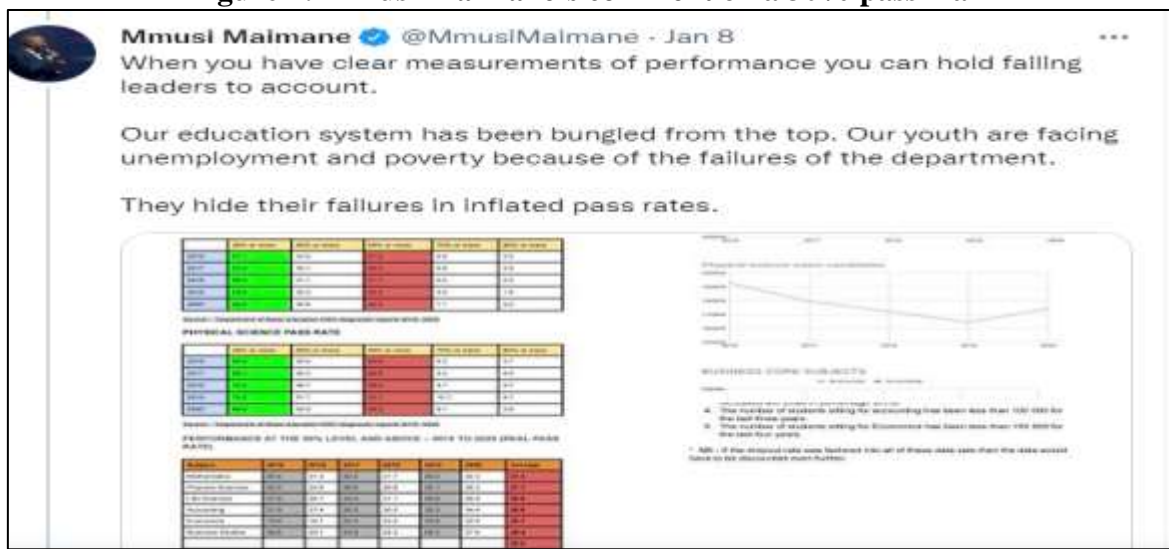
3. Findings And Analysis

This section explains data analysis. The analysis is based on qualitative content analysis of social media and media. Documents yielded the discussion points. This qualitative study uses categories or themes. All categories are listed and discussed.

3.1 Theme 1: Inflated pass rates and the 30% pass rate

The passrate can be inflated by different individuals for different purpose but the nortable worry will exist when it is done for political reasons. Next, the analysis start with the Twitter account Mmusi Maimane, a notable political figure.

Figure 1: Mmusi Maimane’s comment on a 30% pass mark



In relation to the statement made above, Mmusi Maimane concludes that the Department of Education is to blame for its high unemployment rate and widespread poverty. He thinks that the current government is to blame for the decline in economic performance indicators, which he attributes to the current maladministration of the education department. Additionally, he thinks that those in positions of authority ought to be held accountable through clear performance measures (not a 30% pass mark). South Africa has made significant progress in expanding access to education. However, the country's educational system is still significantly lagging behind the rest of the world's overall quality. Since the end of apartheid, significant efforts by the government have resulted in almost everyone in South Africa having access to primary education. This has been possible due to the country's high literacy rate.

Additionally, there has been a rise in the number of pupils attending secondary schools. However, enrolment in higher education is at an all-time low, which can at least largely be attributed to the substandard education provided at the basic and secondary levels. Only 55 percent of South Africa's learners were able to complete the secondary school level of their education in 2017 (DBE, 2020). The following Facebook video shows a public official struggling to explain the water issue in Kimberley, supposedly due to the ill education system.

3.2 Theme 2: Incompetence and the 30% pass rate

The inflated pass rate based on the 30% pass rate not only affect the poor people but it have a negative effect on the competence of public officials who have been subjected to the unrealistic pass of their national certificate and have tricked the educational system and attain degrees. The following is an extract of the incompetent public official.

Figure 2: Incompetent public officials and 30% pass rate



From the preceding facebook post by Brentski Kuttschreuter, it is evident that the person who posts the video is blaming the ANC government for employing incompetent employees who even go and occupy public offices to institute a 30 percent pass rate. The Facebook post also has hashtags that support the need for a new administration, for qualified people to be given jobs, and the need to end corruption. Corruption in South Africa comprises the improper use of public resources for personal objectives, including bribery and improper favoritism. The 30 percent rate issue seems to be claiming that failure in the government is a result of this.

3.3 Educational quality, politicians and the 30% pass rate

It is common knowledge that the greatest influence by politicians can be made in the education sector. As such, politicians can use the 30% pass mark to act as if they are doing great job that is yielding positive results. The following extract shows the minister of basic education showing the deliverable outcome of a student who have just surpassed the 30% pass rate.

Figure 3: Politician aiming to earn a political score, not educational quality

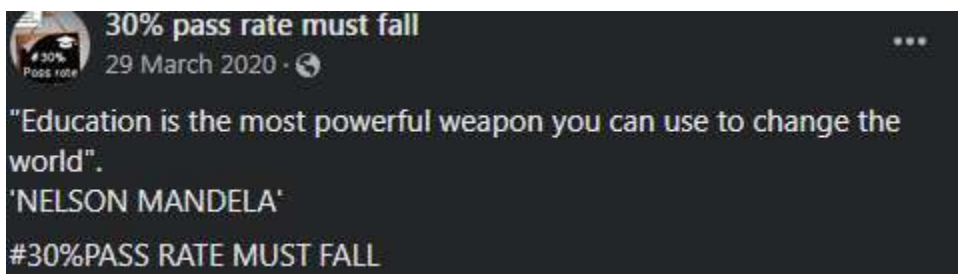


It is clear from the blog post made by Ramuntshi Windstone Nndavheleseni that politicians are concentrating more on their political careers than they are on doing quality work in the areas that fall within their different spheres of influence. Additionally, the blog post acknowledges that Mmusi Maimane is correct in his assertion that the resolution about the 30 percent pass mark must be reconsidered. The blog article says that even though education is not the sole path to success, there is still a need to generate kids who know 70 percent of what they were taught so that they may be considered achievers. This is necessary for students to be considered successful. If students are only permitted to get a pass mark of at least 30 percent, then they should not be regarded as achievers, and it is obvious that if they get to look for jobs outside of South Africa, then they are not going to get those opportunities. This implies that if students are only allowed to get a pass mark of at least 30 percent, they should not be regarded as achievers beyond South African borders.

3.4 Importance of Education and the 30% pass rate

Though the education has been quoted by respected statesman the 30% pass mark has sparked controversy as if actually show to be a high achiever is not that of significance as individuals can just achieve minimum pass mark. The following is the extract that shows an individual who is doubting the relevance of education system because of the desired 30% pass mark for students.

Figure 4: Relevance of a quote on the importance of education.



It is evident from the post on Facebook that Nelson Mandela's views on education are no longer applicable if there is a problem with the percentage of students who pass their courses in schools. It is quite evident that the previous posts take a stance contrary to this idea, and this time there is a reference made to words that the late Nelson Mandela had previously made. Next the extract shows the 30% threshold and its relationship with youth unemployment.

3.5 Youth unemployment and 30% pass mark.

It obvious no employers is motivated to employ half-baked candidates who understand on 30% of what they learnt at should. The 30% pass mark and its relationship with youth unemployment is shown in the following quotation.

Quotation 1: 30% pass mark and Youth unemployment

"With South Africa top of the youth unemployment crisis globally, the continued matric pass mark requirement of just 30% cannot continue day longer," One SA said in a statement on Friday.

"A meagre 30% pass hurts our pupils, the education system and the economy. A 30% pass mark undermines the intellect of South African youth," it stated.

Source: Mybroadband.co.za

It is possible to conclude from these assertions that the minimum passing score criterion of 30 percent is the root cause of the South African youth unemployment crisis. One SA for Mmusi Maimane argues that the current need for a minimum passing grade cannot continue for another day since it is detrimental to students,

the education system, and the economy. In addition to this, the post implies that the pass mark diminishes the intellectual capacity of young people in South Africa. The ramifications of this are that students who have completed their matriculation will not be admitted to colleges and will not even be able to acquire jobs. This is because no reasonable employer will hire a person who only received a 30 percent pass grade in their matriculation examination.

3.6 The need for good pass mark (at least 50%)

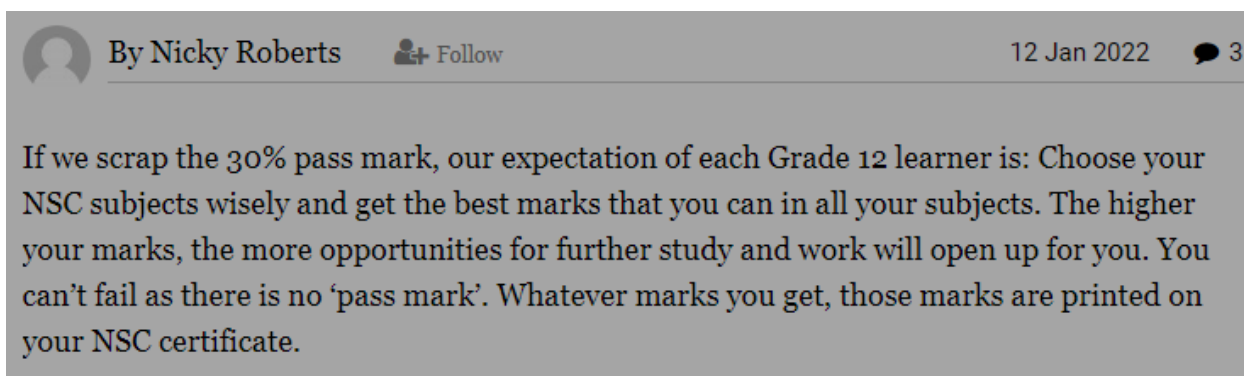
A good pass mark is needed in education such that having a 50% or more pass mark is durable for a student to guarantee success in every angle. The following two extracts highlight the need for a better minimum pass mark and how one may get it instead of relying on a 30% pass mark.

Figure 5: The need for a 50% minimum pass rate.



Because it will be difficult for those students to get places in universities to the extent that colleges will be their only option, the Facebook post makes it clear that there is a need for the government to take education seriously, thereby upgrading the pass rate from 30 percent going up to 50%. This can be seen clearly from the fact that there is a need for government officials to take education seriously there. Although the statistics did show that a significant number of students are graduating with a grade point average of less than 40 percent, the government should not be encouraged to reduce the standard of education. The post on Facebook also indicates that a pass percentage of at least 50 percent should be considered the bare minimum.

Figure 6: Choosing NSC subjects wisely to get the best mark



Source: Daily Maverick.

In perpetuation of what was stated above, this former matriculant has demonstrated interest in the 30 percent matric pass mark by stating his opinion that the 30 percent matric pass mark ought to be scrapped. Consequently, there must not be a pass mark, and all of the marks that appear on your National Secondary Certificate must be accurate.

4 Recommendations

(i) The 30% pass rate policy should be reviewed or amended with a minimum pass mark of 50 percent for learners to qualify for NSC on HC entrance requirements. The current policy indicates that learners can qualify for NSC on HC with a score of 30 percent or above in three topics. Learners will have various opportunities to continue their education in tertiary education or enter the job market. However, the strong points will be that all of them will be proud of having a quality or substantial certificate that can open many more doors for them than 30 percent, limiting them in the future opportunities.

(ii) The National Senior Certificate Dip-diploma admission pass (40 percent) and the National Senior Certificate HC Higher Certificate Admission pass (30 percent) should both be scrapped or removed away for the Department of Basic Education and Umalusi to adopt a standardized matric pass grade. This will contribute to developing an equitable education system that provides all students with equal opportunity to achieve their objectives. On the other hand, it will create a healthy culture of teaching and learning because the students will be driven to strive for higher scores to receive their National Senior Certificates as high achievers. This, in turn, will provide for a more conducive environment for both. Every learner ought to be awarded an NSC bachelor pass admission, which requires a score of at least fifty percent; consequently, it will be up to the learner to choose which path they will pursue; however, a quality pass does not imply that all learners ought to attend universities; rather, learners may select any path of their choice. To receive the standardized pass, learners will be deemed competent if they have met or acquired a minimum pass of 50 percent in each of their subjects. This means that learners must pass all of their subjects with a score of at least 50 percent.

(iii) Since the 30% pass mark is not a true measure of the abilities and competence of the learners, the matric learners must be awarded a certificate based on 100 percent exam percentage by removing 25 percent of Schools Based Assessment (SBAs) as it counts to the final promotion mark in Grade 12 because it is time consuming and because it does not truly reflect student competently. On the other hand, it causes learners to become relaxed because they have received high SBAs marks or grades, which leads to a relaxed atmosphere. As a result, they receive 30 percent, which is level 2 (elementary achievement). This is because they forget that if the SBAs mark does not match the exam mark, the SBAs marks are forfeited for all learners, not just the learners affected by this, which can be fruitless for those who have worked throughout the year.

5. Conclusion

The standards for advancement to the National Senior Certificate that are now being taught in South African schools have many flaws and should be overhauled as soon as possible. Therefore, the DBE cannot be responsible for implementing all policies independently. Consequently, they require the insights and points of view of the various education stakeholders. As a result, one could conclude that 99.9 percent of the school community is unhappy and unimpressed with the requirement that a minimum of 30 percent of students pass the matriculation exam. Consequently, the findings of the study present a challenge to either the South African government or the department of education to change this pass mark and at the very least make it a pass mark of fifty percent. By doing so, they will be able to prepare students better to become members of the community who are employable locally and abroad. They will also be able to apply to universities without encountering any difficulties.

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