

Statistical Moderation in High Stakes Examinations in Hong Kong: Statistical, Political and Educational Issues

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In Hong Kong, a former British colony with a strong Chinese tradition and culture, education is strongly emphasized and the competition for places in prestigious or selective schools starts as early as Grade (G.) 1. There are also high stakes examinations at end of primary (G.6) and secondary education (G.12) respectively. Allocation of students to schools has taken into consideration students' examination performance (meritocracy) and parental choices. Complicating the issue is the incorporation of results of internal school examinations or projects so as to reduce examination pressure and to enhance the validity of the assessment. Moderation of these marks across schools is not only a statistical problem, but one that involves political and educational consideration. Particularly in the secondary school place allocation, we have deliberately included random noise and collapsing of marks into broad banding to create a good mix of students ability in the same school. Furthermore, in this secondary school place allocation, despite the profiles of performance (mark distribution, means, SD, etc.) of girls and boys in primary school and public examinations may differ, separate statistical moderation for the two genders is not legally allowed. At the university entrance (i.e., G.12) examination, both statistical moderation and expert judgement have been used to moderate the school-based assessment results across schools before these marks are combined with the public examination scores to become the public examination grades. We will describe and discuss how students are being selected and allocated at the kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and university levels, as well as how these processes and related issues affect the school curriculum and teaching practices in schools. Among these issues, some are unique to the Hong Kong local educational system while others are common problems faced by many other countries. Assumably the choice of one system over the other is often an art of compromises, with the eventual selection of the less evil.

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