

National Report

National Assessment of Achievement of Students Completing Grade 04 in Year 2015

**Ministry of Education
National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC)**

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Senior Professor Marie Perera
Director
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Message from the Secretary, Ministry of Education

I consider it is a privilege for me to write this message to the report on 'National Assessment of Achievement of Students Completing Grade 4 in Year 2015 in Sri Lanka'. Conducting periodical national assessments has been one of the major activities of the Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) (2012-2016). This is an important national action which is exercised with a view to reveal the achievement levels of students in various grades. Findings of these assessments help teachers to understand the levels of achievement of students and policy-makers and planners to determine the performance of the education system by means of learning outcomes, to what extent the educational development programmes and investments have been successful and what further steps should be taken in order further to upgrade the performance of the system. Considering the importance of this exercise, the Ministry of Education has planned to continue these assessments regularly and effectively.

In this context the Ministry of Education, with the financial assistance of the World Bank, has commissioned the National Education Research and Evaluation Center (NEREC) of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo the task of conducting national assessments to determine the levels of achievement of students in grades 4 and 8, during the past several years. Its latest national assessment report reveals factors that are particularly significant in order to enhance teaching and learning, analysed by various aspects such as types of schools, gender, medium of instruction, location and competency levels of students who completed grade 4 in the year 2015.

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Abbreviations

EFA	Education for All
ESDFP	Education Sector Development Framework and Programme
ESS	Effective Sample Size
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
NEREC	National Education Research and Evaluation Centre
PPS	Probability Proportional to Size
roh	Rate of homogeneity
SD	Standard deviation
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Executive Summary

A world wide focus on the need for timely and credible data on student learning, that may inform the design of effective mechanisms to improve educational outcomes, rather than only on education inputs could be seen. National Assessment of learning outcomes has become an important component of education policy analysis and programme monitoring in Sri Lanka. The National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo has been the forerunner in conducting these assessments.

NEREC has conducted National Assessments of Learning Outcomes both at primary as well as at secondary level. At primary level National Assessments of learning outcomes were conducted at Grade 4 in 2003, 2007, 2009 and 2013. This report presents the findings of the national assessment conducted in grade 4 for first language – Sinhala and Tamil, the second language – English and mathematics in the year 2015.

The national assessment of learning outcomes of 2015 used instruments that were designed and used in the 2013 study to test cognitive skills in the three subjects. Hence, this report presents the patterns of achievement of learning outcomes of students completing grade 4 in 2015 as well as compare the achievement with that of 2013 to identify the trends in achievement.

The national assessment covered the entire country and the sample was drawn to enable analysis by province, type of schools, gender, medium of instruction and location. The final sample consisted of 15462 students from 448 schools.

Data gathered through the achievement tests were analyzed on a national and provincial basis in relation to school type, gender, medium of instruction and location. Patterns in learning achievement was discussed using measures of central tendency-mean and median, skewness values of the distribution, cumulative percentages and percentile ranks. In addition, graphs – frequency polygon and box plots were also used.

The findings revealed that there is disparity in achievement in all three subjects in relation to provincial performance, school type, gender and medium of instruction. Provincial wise some provinces such as Sabaragamuwa and North Western performed well in most of the subjects. However there was disparity in achievement within the province in relation to school type, gender and location. A trend that was observed was that some of the provinces that were not performing well in 2013 in certain subjects had improved considerably in 2015. For example, the Northern, Eastern and Uva provinces' performance in the Sinhala language had improved while in the Southern province the performance had decreased. On the other hand, the Tamil language performance in the Southern province had improved significantly. With respect to school types while 1AB schools performed the best, Type 3 schools performance had improved very much. However, the gap between these schools and the Type 2 and 1C continues. Girls performed better than boys in all subjects. Medium wise Sinhala medium students' performance was better than the Tamil medium students except in the first language performance. Location wise urban schools performance was higher than the rural schools performance and the gap between rural and urban continues.

It was also revealed that skill wise the writing and syntax were the weakest skill in all three languages. On the other hand, in mathematics achievement the problem solving skill had slightly improved but the knowledge of concepts had declined. It was also revealed that there is an imbalance in the identified Essential Learning Competencies (ELCs). Further, there is a mismatch between the ELCs and the syllabuses and textbooks.

The findings revealed that there are disparities in achievement at all levels – provincial, school wise, gender, medium wise and location wise. As a result students are at different levels. Developing standards for each key stage and linking them with the ELCs would be a solution to this issue. Further, there is a need to upgrade the ELCs. National assessment findings should feed into teacher development programmes and for further research at provincial, zonal as well as school level.