

Executive Summary

'National Assessment of Achievement of Grade 04 Pupils in Sri Lanka' is a national level research study carried out by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC), Faculty of Education, University of Colombo. This research is primarily aimed at assessing the achievement levels of pupils who have completed four years of schooling in Sri Lankan schools.

The study was conducted in March 2004, on a national sample of students representative of all provinces, districts and Zones. Gender, school type, medium of instruction and location (urban/rural) of school were variables identified for purposes of data analysis. Five questionnaires were administered to sub-samples, of Principals of schools, Sectional Heads, Class Teachers and Parents, to obtain background information on factors that influence learning Achievement.

Achievement test data was analyzed on national, provincial and district basis, by individual subject and as a composite of all subjects tested, and by the variables identified. Statistical treatment of data, and qualitative analysis has been adopted to facilitate meaningful data presentation and analysis.

Findings

The all island achievement level as assessed using mean values, in First Language (Sinhala Language / Tamil Language) and Mathematics is relatively high and poor in English. The mean scores in the three subjects is 63.32, 60.8, and 41.9, and the percentage achieving mastery scoring 80 percent of total marks or above, 36.5, 37.9 and 9.5 respectively. In sub-skills, the lowest student achievement is in writing - in the Languages, and in Mathematics - in problem solving.

In level of achievement, there are differences in mean values by school type significant at the level of 95 percent confidence. Type 1AB schools have consistently achieved the highest and type 2 schools the lowest, in all three subjects. The achievement levels of 1C and type 3 schools lie in between.

There is a difference in achievement by gender, medium of instruction, location (urban/rural) of school, Province and District, significant at the level of 95 percent confidence. In achievement in all three subjects, by gender - girls, by medium of instruction - Sinhala medium, by location - urban, and by Province - Western Province, lead consistently.

The findings indicate that average performance levels of students have remained constant, relative to student performance in comparable national level studies conducted previously. An improvement is noted only in the performance level in Mathematics.

In percentages achieving mastery in the three subjects, the gap to be bridged to reach EFA targets is considerable. The gap in master attainment, on an all island basis, in First Language, Mathematics and English, is 43.5, 42.1, 70.5 percent respectively. Province-wise, the range is wide, of the gap to be bridged by the respective provinces.

The findings on effects of background factors on learning achievement indicate that school, home and student background factors, in that order, influence learning achievement, and that all three sets of factors are closely inter-linked.

Recommendations

To address the three main areas of concern identified, eight recommendations were made.

- i) Student achievement in the subjects tested - intra subject and inter subject variations in student achievement and the variation in levels of student achievement that signal the urgent need to track student progress.
 - ii) Levels of attainment of mastery in terms of EFA targets.
 - iii) The disparities in achievement by the variables identified.
1. Development of an action plan for diagnostic and remedial intervention, for implementation on a national, provincial, district, zonal and an individual school basis.

2. Initiate a national level project on diagnostic and remedial teaching to provide the support base and services needed for the design and implementation of the action plan.
3. Determination of desired and essential learning objectives and indicators of achievement, in each subject for every grade, in the primary cycle.
4. Strengthening and linking the school based assessment programme to initiatives for outcomes based teaching and learning facilitation.
5. Implementation of a total quality improvement programme at school level.
6. Setting up of an Education for All Secretariat in the line ministry linked to a network of EFA Secretariats at Provincial level.
7. Declaring emergency basic education zones.
8. Transforming type 2 schools to schools of excellence.
9. Conduct a national symposium on the provision of basic education.
10. Develop and deliver a special media programme on basic education.