

## INFLUENCE THE LOWER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF GRADE 8 STUDENTS OF NORTHERN PROVINCE IN NATIONAL LEVEL ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED BY NEREC IN SRI LANKA

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### ABSTRACT

*Assessments related to educational planning and development are essential. The importance of proper assessment is felt today. These are essential for new changes and fixing backlogs. In Sri Lanka, the National Educational Research and Evaluation Center at the Faculty of Education of the University of Colombo conducted national level assessment tests in 2012, 2014 and 2016 to evaluate the academic performance of grade 08 students. In these tests the performance of Northern Province were found to be at a very low level. In this background this study was undertaken with the aim of identifying the reasons for underachievement in the Northern Province. A mixed method study was carried out following a descriptive quantitative research design. 200 students, their parents, 100 teachers and 25 principals were selected from Kilinochchi e, Tunukai, Vavunia North education zones using random sampling method from the target population. The information obtained through questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Explained. It was found that students scored less than 40 marks in math 52, 25%, Science 65% and English 81%, This trend is also observed in performances of GEC O/L Examination, Moderate use of communication devices, Parental indifference, lack of Parent-school involvement, occupation of parent, family income, fewer restrictions found in schools, moderate resource shortage in schools were identified as important factors influencing low achievement. It was found that there is a moderate correlation between household income and private expenditure on education, positive correlation between private expenditure on education and educational attainment, and parents' educational level and Parent's involvement also has impact on students' academic achievement. Teacher student interactions have significant relationship. Further there is lack of teacher students' interaction, lack of quality inputs for learning, lack of, modern technical equipment, classrooms that cannot use modern communication devices, shortages in computer lab resource and maintenance, these are factors that have a strong impact on learning teaching activities*

**Keywords:** NEREC, Achievement test, Northern Province, Low achievement

## INTRODUCTION

Free Education system which was introduced by C.W, W. Kannangara in 1943 in Sri Lanka is still in practice after 76 years. Nearly 4.3 million students are getting free textbooks, free uniform, and free mid-day meal under free education scheme. The period of School education is organized into three categories such as primary education, Secondary education, and collegiate level in this education system. Contemporary education system has provision for the students to appear G, C, E O/L and G.C.E A/L examinations at the end of secondary and collegiate levels. Students can appear for nine subjects in total namely Mother tongue, Mathematics, English, Science, History and Religion and three subjects from basket.

Schools in Sri Lanka are not seen homogenous or equally resourced or providing similar quality education due to differences in regional and administrative structuring. These differences are also influencing learning and teaching process and the national level examination performance. There are provincial wise, zonal wise and school wise differences in G.C.E O/L, schools in urban areas with adequate facilities have shown better performance than that of schools in difficult and the most difficult areas with inadequate facilities National Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) of the faculty of education, University of Colombo carry out National Assessment of students in grade 04 and grade 08 with the financial and technical support of the World Bank. Among these assessments especially the assessment of students in grade 08 aim to make appropriate curriculum revision and changes in leaching process at secondary level. NEREC conducted evaluation studies in the years 2012, 2014, and 2016 in grade 08 and differences were found in provincial, zonal and school levels. Achievement of schools in Northern Province have drawn attention because the education zones in the Northern Province showed relatively lower achievement level than the other schools. And their averages were also lower than the national average. Schools in Northern Province have shown lower standards in G.C.E O/L performance. It is noteworthy that the education zones in Jaffna district were excellent in the earlier period. Despite thirty years of internal conflict and Northern as a province that directly experienced internal conflict and migration, its' performance at national level was in satisfactory level. However, the evaluation studies carried out after the internal war showed that their performance were low. In the above background the present study was carried out with the aim of identifying factors influencing the low achievement of students in grade 08 in the Northern Province.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Northern Province was affected by 30 years civil war. Since 2009 the war has been ended. Northern Province was under the control of Government of Sri Lanka for more than a decade. During this period, like other provinces, government of Sri Lanka has taken action to improve the quality of education in Northern Province. According to Research Reports of National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) and the reports published by the Department of Examination of Sri Lanka, academic achievement of students of Northern Province has been decreasing. .

In Recent years, ranking order in academic achievement Northern Province according to NEREC studies is 9 out of Nine Provinces. Especially Achievement in GCE Ordinary level Examination as well as Grade five examinations also comparatively low. For Example, Percentage of students failed in all subjects in GCE O' Level Examination (2016) 3.18 % in the national level. This percentage is very high in Northern Province. (4, 96 % in Jaffna, 4.82% in Mullaitivu 8.64% in kilinochchi). According to the Northern Education System Review report (2012), percentage of students who obtained C or Higher than C grade pass in GCE Ordinary level Examination in Northern Province is also low (Science - 22.41 % Math - 25.2% English - 15.41%). In Grade five Examinations, the percentage of Students who got marks above 70 is 75, 67% in all island level but, in Northern Province that is 69.98% as well as Percentage of Students who got above 100, and 50.59 % in Island 43.83 in Northern Province.

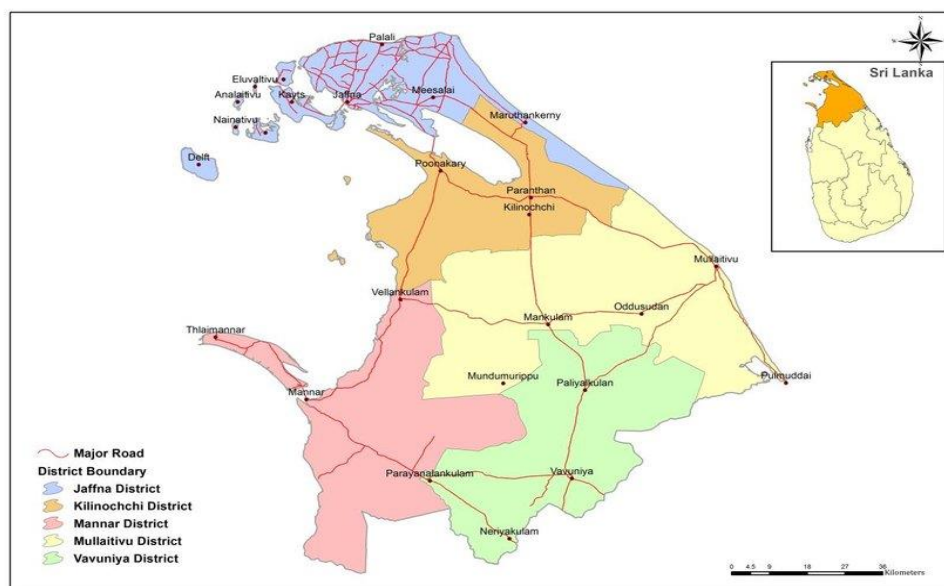
National assessment of achievement studies in grade 08 were conducted by the NEREC in the years 2012,2014, and 2016 under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and the sponsorship of the World Bank with the aim of finding out to what extent the students have achieved the competencies in grade 08. It was found that the achievement levels in

Northern Province was relatively low, Table1 indicate that the performance of students in Mathematics. Northern Province is at a very low level, and the Northern Province was ranked 09<sup>th</sup>, 07<sup>th</sup> and 08<sup>th</sup> respectively in the years 2012, 2014 and 2016 in comparison with other provinces. In relation to G.C.E O/L examination held in 2020, the students who appeared for subjects 06 and above from Northern Province, about 2.9% were failed in all subjects. When compare with other provinces in Si Lanka the highest number of students were failed in the Northern Province (see table) having completed 06 and above subjects and qualified for G.C.E A/L 76.59 % nationally. It was 72.76 in Northern Province (NEREC, 2020) and Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu District were 69.27% and 72, 01 % respectively. In terms of qualified students

to G.C.E A/L Northern province has been in the end position for the last 06 years from 2015 to 2020.

## STUDY AREA

Northern Province in Sri Lanka, which exhibited the best learning outcomes before long lasted internal conflict and have seen at a level in recent times. Especially schools in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya districts are performing at a low level. The extension of this trend was also found in the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level Examination results. The present study was conducted in Kilinochchi Tunukai and Vavuniya South education zones in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.as a comparative study with the aim of identifying the socio-economic, socio-psychological, and school-related factors that influence low educational attainment. In the past, especially in the post-war period, the achievements of students in the Northern region of Sri Lanka which was the best. Studies conducted by NEREC in 2012, 2014 and 2016 also found a remarkable differences in learning outcomes of schools in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya. The extension of this trend has also been identified in the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level Examination. With the above background, the present study. Focusses on the schools in Kilinochchi, Tunukai, and Vavuniya South Education Zones in the Northern Province.



## AIM OF THE STUDY

Identify the background factors influencing on low performances of Northern Province of Sri Lanka in the assessment test conducted by NEREC in various years

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. Explain the trend in Academic achievement of grade 08 students in Northern Province Based on National Level Assessment conducted by NEREC
2. Identify the Family related factors which had influence on lower Academic Achievement.
3. Identify School Related Factors which had influence in Lower Academic Achievement
4. Suggest measures to minimize the negative effect of the background factors

The chapter on literature review presents the theoretical and empirical research related to this research problem carried out at the national and international level. These are addressed under the following headings. Impact of Socio-Economic background on students' learning, effects of Psycho-social factors on educational achievement and impact of school related factors on student's educational achievement.

## **POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

Population of the study is students who studying Grades 11-13 in the schools of Kilinochchi, Thunukai and Vavuniya North zones of Northern Province of Sri Lanka and their Parents, Teachers and principals.

## **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SIZE OF SAMPLE**

In this study, 200 students studying in grades 11, 12 and 13 have been selected from 25 schools using stratified sampling technique. 100 teachers who taught them and 25 principals from the above three zones. The technique given below is used to determine sample size.

## **TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION**

Questionnaires, interview, observations and focus group discussions were used to collect data for the study. Questionnaires for students, and their parents, and teacher, interviews with principals and assistant principals and Focus group discussion with teachers were administered

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

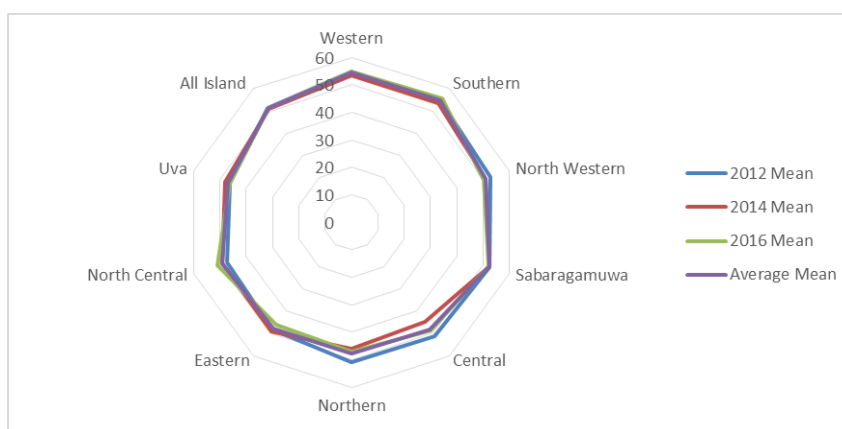
Quantitative and qualitative data obtained through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed in a direct and comprehensive manner. In that way descriptive and statistical analysis has been employed and interpreted. SPSS 16 software was used for this

purpose

### *Patterns of achievement in Mathematics of Northern Province*

The performance of students in Mathematics, in national level test conducted by NEREC in the years of 2012, 2014, and 2016 were given below:

Table 4.1. Shows the average attainment level of achievement at provincial level. Northern Province is ranked 6th with an average of 50.79 in 2012, 7th in 2014 with an average of 46.05 and 8th in 2016 with an average of 47.02. Further, the average score for the three different years (2012, 2014 & 2016) of North Province's mathematics is found to be 47.95 and it ranks eighth out of nine provinces.



**Figure 4.1: Patterns of average mathematics achievement in the year of 2012, 2014 & 2016**

The average of the Northern Province in three different years given below is compared with the national average of top ranked province and found differences with 3.98, 7.61 and 8.61 in the years 2012, 2014, and 2016 respectively. (Table 4.2).

The Northern Province performance are on average 6.72 lower than the first ranked province and 3.19 below the national average (see Table 4.2).

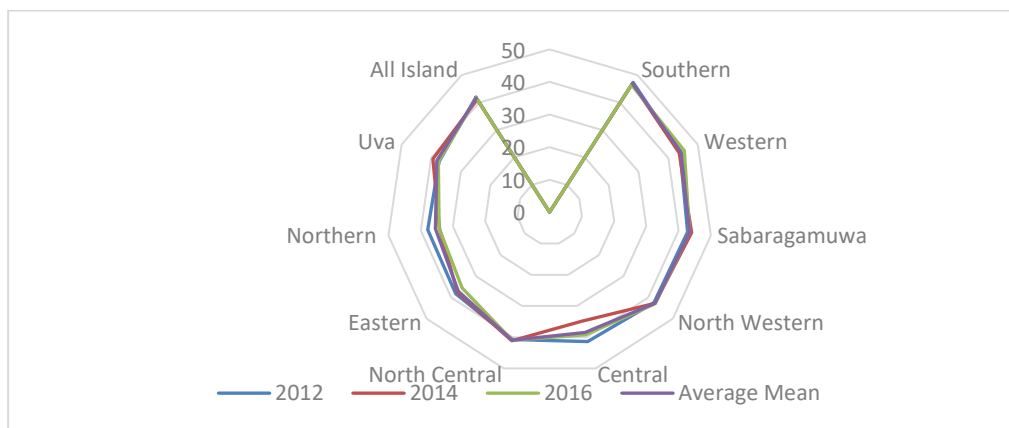
Figure 4.3 shows the rank of Northern Province's mathematics performance in 2016 test. The percentage of students scored less than 50 marks, was 57.22 % this depicts the poor quality of mathematics learning among Northern Province students. The percentage of students scored below 50 marks is 37.69 in southern province. The number of students having less than 50 marks is 19.53 percentage higher in the Northern than in the Southern province.

### *Patterns of Science achievement of Northern Province*

It is significant to note that the national average of science subject achievement is less than 50

in these three years (41.62). Northern Province is the lowest when compare with other provinces in science achievement and it is the last among the nine provinces with the lowest average in these three years. The average score of science subjects of Northern Province for three different periods is 35.44. Southern Province is the first province with a relatively high average (46.95) in three different achievement tests.

The performance of Northern Province is on average 11.51 lower than the first ranked province and below the national average of 6.18 (see Table 4.4). Northern Province achievement in science never reached 40 in any of these years (2012, 2014&2016).



**Figure 4.4: Patterns of average Science achievement in the year 2012, 2014 & 2016**

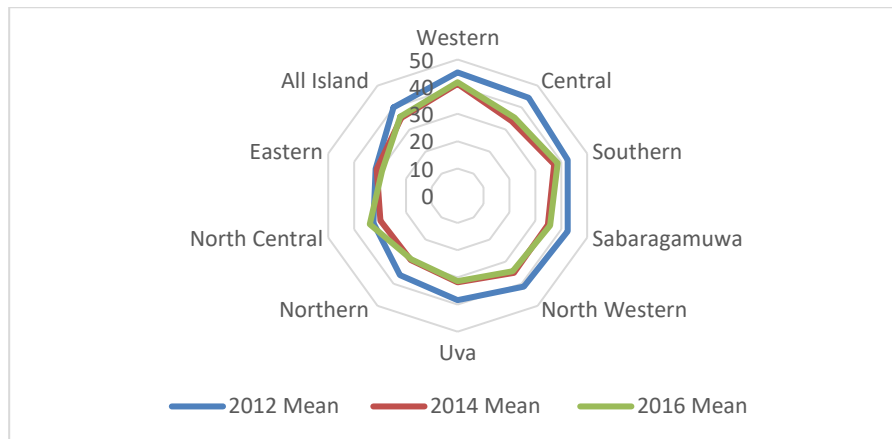
Comparing the Northern Province with the Southern province and rank one province in science subject, the Northern provinces as recorded a continuous decline (see figure 4.5). And low level reflects t100% uncertainty level used in national-level estimates (less than 40).

In the studies conducted in the years (2012-2014 and 2016), the science subject achievement of the students of Northern Province is less and the quality of achievement is also very low. In the study conducted in the year 2016, 77.08 percent of the pupils in the Northern Province scored less than 50 marks. In the meantime, 65.77 percent scored less than 50 marks while in the Southern province, it is seen as 52.26 and, 47.79 percent of students in the Northern Province scored between 00-30. Only 8.19 percent have scored between 70-100 percentages (figure 4.7)

#### ***Pattern of English subject achievement in Northern Province***

Patterns of achievement in the subject English is given below. Table 4.3 shows the achievement in English test conducted in 2012, 2014 and 2016. It is noted that the national level average of achievement in English is below than 40 in these three years (31.42). Northern Province got last rank in the assessment test conducted in years 2014 and 2016. Average achievement of Northern Province is 31.42. Western Province is the first province with a relatively high average (42.64)

in these three achievement tests.



**Figure: 4.7: Patterns of Average achievement in English (2012, 2014 & 2016)**

The performance in English at the provincial level is shown in Figure 4.8. North Province is lagging in English like other subjects in three different assessments. It is noteworthy that in the next two consecutive assessments (2014 & 2016) excluding the year 2012, the average score of Northern Province is less than 30 and according to those two ranking Northern Province is the 9th out of 9.

Table 4.7 illustrates the range of mean scores for Mathematics, Science and English in the achievement tests conducted in three different years. It is worth pointing out that the average score of the students in Northern Province is less than 50 marks in three subjects and in all the years.

#### ***A comparison of National Level assessment results with GCE Ordinary level Examination***

Table 4.8 and Figures 4.14 and 4.15 below briefly illustrate the correlation between the scores obtained by the Northern Province in the tests conducted by the NEREC and the results of the G.C.E. O/L. It can be observed that the low-level results obtained by the Northern Province in National Assessments are reflected in the Northern Province G.C.E O/L Examination results. Especially in the years 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, the results of the G.C.E O/ L examinations conducted by the Examination Department are exceptionally low. These two examinations results are highly correlating with each other. This means that in all the years the performance of North Province is lower than the national level performance.



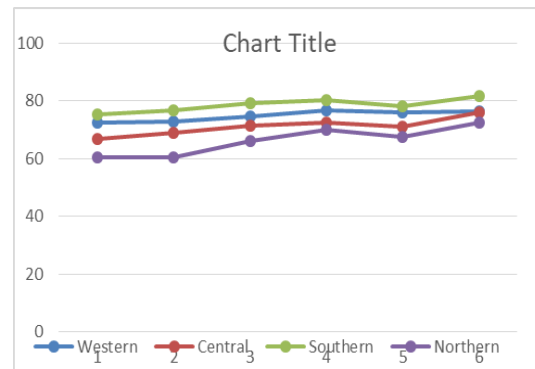
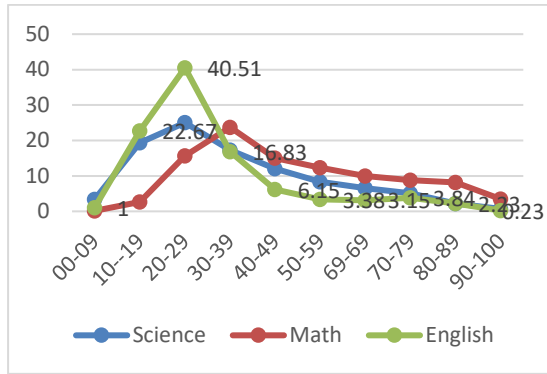


Figure 4.14: Achievement in NEREC Assessment      Figure 4.15: Performance in GCE O/L

Table 4.9 and Figure 4.16 show the G.C.E.O/L. results and failure rate for the districts under North for the years 2019 and 2020. The results of year 2020 are higher than the year 2019, nevertheless the performance of Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya districts are comparatively low.

**Figure 4.16: Performances Northern Province in the GCE O/L Examination by District**

Table 4.10 shows the performance in G.C.E O/L of educational zones under North Province selected for this study. The percentage of students who passed the exam from Tunukai and Kilinochchi North educational zones and qualified for G, C.E A/L is low and the percentage who failed in all 6 subjects from Kilinochchi South and Tunukai educational zones is relatively high.

**Socio- Economic and Psycho - social factors**

The impact of socio-economic factors on learning outcomes of the sampled students focused on the study area is explored here. Descriptive statics used to analyze data obtained through questionnaire and interviews. Responses of parents, teachers and principals on socioeconomic factors influencing children's learning are as follows.

Relationships with inappropriate peers, changed social structure, increased use of drugs, modest use of telecommunication devices, less restrictive schooling, distance between school and home, teachers from other districts and distant places, lack of resources in schools, absence of support activities for educational development, incoherent educational planning carried out at the provincial level, foreign relations, parental indifference, low parent-school relationship, educational qualification of parents, parent's occupation etc. were identified as the primary factors.

### *Distribution of family income*

In terms of family income, approximately 58 percent of the population falls under the income group of less than Rs 39,000/=. The percentage of low-income earners is higher than that the percentage of high-income earners (about 16 percent).

There is a direct correlation between income level and private expenditure on education. The difference in cost of private education between low-income group (below 20000) and high-income group (above 100000) is found to be Rs 16600. Also, the Pearson's correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.47, which indicates that there is a moderate correlation between these two variables. For income, Pearson's correlation coefficient between academic indices found to be 0.13. This shows that there is a less linear relationship between income level and educational attainment i.e., educational attainment tends to increase at lower levels as income level increases.

### *Impact of Parent's occupation and prenatal School involvement on Students academic achievement*

One way ANOVA for the effect of occupation on parental involvement on student achievement

Group Statistics	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	538.087	5	177.332	177.341	.044
Within Groups	13760.058	167	68.762		
Total	14226.032	172			

As shown in the above table, the null hypothesis, there is no significant relationship between family income and parental involvement on student achievement has a p value of .044. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that Relationship between family income and parental involvement on student achievement is significant is accepted. Thus, it demonstrates that there is a significant impact of income on parental involvement and student achievement

### *Impact of Parents Education level and Parent's involvement on students' academic achievement*

One way ANOVA for the effect of qualification on parental involvement in student achievement

Group Statistics	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1519.653	5	502.231	7.799	,000
Within Groups	12721.421	167	65.001		
Total	14246.146	172			

Above table indicates that the hypothesis “there is no significant effect of qualification on parental involvement and student achievement is rejected and it is concluded that there is significant effect of occupation on parental involvement in student achievement and the value is .000, so the null hypothesis is rejected

Based on the median and standard deviation of the student scales for statements related to student attitudes toward school education. statements of there are not enough financial support for continuing education (Mean 3.2631, SD=3.501), corporal punishment is a hindrance to education at School (3.01163; SD=3.466618) and Education can lead to a dignified life (Mean 2.8655; SD=3.414794) are agreed by students On other hand, the statements given below such as schooling can bring high economic benefits in the future, education is essential to get a career, school education is stressful, this education is useless if you go abroad, a career is required to share the financial burden of the parents, corporal punishment is a hindrance to education are not agreed by students.

### ***School Resource related issues and impact on student achievement***

It has been revealed that the information of the principals and the teachers are having a significant impact on the school's resources. In that way, the lack of quality inputs for learning, the lack of modern technology equipment, the lack of modern information communication devices, the classrooms that cannot be used, the learning resources, the efficiency of the learning centers, and the problems related to the development of the school. Below the table is shown in the order of the teachers and principal opinions

Principals point out that the financial resources provided by the government are not enough to sustain learning inputs while the economic cooperation of the society is very low and the maintenance of electronic devices is a huge problem for effective use of electronic devices.

### *Issues related to academic staff*

Principals' opinion regarding the relevance of academic staff resources in the teaching process was observed as follows. About 60 percent of the educational staff have very little knowledge of modern technology devices, about 50 percent are unable to use innovative teaching methods, about 40 percent of teachers are visiting from other districts or distant areas, and the teachers appointed as volunteer teachers (about 10 percent) are not qualified enough. Principals are showing off.

### *Student's opinion towards teaching*

Among the school-related factors, teacher-related factors have been revealed as important factors. In that way, the average score of the students for the statement that the lack of teachers affects teaching is 3.263 (SD = 2.881) and it is accepted by the students that the shortage of teachers affects teaching and the average score of the principals is 3.4 (SD = 3.979). And teachers tend to teach more gifted children (mean value of students' scores 3.011; SD = 2.599 and mean value of principals' scores 3.12; SD = 3.730), learning and teaching activities are affected by the high leave taken by teachers (mean value of students' Response 2.865; SD = 2.536

(Source: Students Questionnaire)

In addition, mean value of principals' 3.12; SD 3.730) such as the statement that teachers carry out teaching in such a way as to meet the interest and expectations of students (mean value of students' scores 2.546; SD = 2.282: mean value of of principals' scores 3.000; SD = 3.593) is unanimously accepted by students and principals.

Teachers are teaching with enthusiasm (Mean value of students' response 2.122; SD = 1.864 and mean value of principal's response 2.24; SD 3.033), Effective usage of Teaching aids in teaching (Mean value of students response 2.117; SD = 1.884 and mean value of principals response 2.24; SD = 2.814) and Application of digital technologies in teaching

(Mean value of students response 1.936; SD = 1.635 and mean value of principals response 2.2; SD = 2.828). These statements were dis agree by Students and principals.

Teachers go to classroom with well preparation (Mean value 3.041; SD = 3.605), Often students motivated by teachers (Mean value 2.956; SD = 3.550) and Teacher interact with students in a friendly manner (Mean value 2.64; SD = 3.249) above statements were disagreed by principals. Anyhow according to students response Teachers come to class with well preparation

(mean value 2.151; SD = 1.922), Often motivated by teachers (Mean value 2.331; SD =2.085) and teacher interact with students in a friendly manner (mean value 1.929; SD =1.643) above statements were agreed by students.

Based on the interview data with principals,; In the achievement tests conducted by the National Education Research Assessment Center and the Sri Lankan Examinations Department, 76 percent of students indicate that the low efficiency of learning and teaching activities is the main reason for students to get low results. The following are important reasons for such low efficiency.

### ***Findings of the study***

- *Northern Province Mathematic average achievement is too low (less than 50), and its provincial wise rank is eighth out of nine in the assessment test conducted by NEREC*
- *Northern Province Science average achievement is also too low (less than 38), and the rank is ninth out of nine in the assessment test conducted by NEREC*
- *Northern Province English average achievement is also too low (less than 32) and eight rank out of nine in the assessment test conducted by NEREC*
- *Students scored less than 40 marks in math 52,25%, Science 65% and English 81%*
- *NEREC Findings are reflected in the GEC O/L Examination performance.*
- *The private education expenditure of the upper income group is five times more than the lower income group.*
- *Moderate use of communication devices, Parental indifference, lack of Parent-school involvement, occupation of parents, family income, fewer restrictions found in schools, moderate resource shortage in schools were identified as crucial factors influencing low achievement*
- *It was found that there is a moderate correlation between household income and private expenditure on education, and there is a positive correlation between private expenditure on education and educational attainment.*
- *Parent's occupation and prenatal School involvement influencing Students academic achievement.*
- *Parents Educational level and Parent's involvement also impact on students' academic achievement*

- *Teacher student's interactions has meaningful relationship. Further, there is lack of teacher students' interaction*
- *Lack of quality inputs for learning, lack of modern technical equipment, classrooms that cannot use modern communication devices, shortage of Computer lab resource and maintenance, are factors that have a strong impact on learning activities*
- *Among the factors related to teachers, more than 50 percent of the teachers are inexperienced in using modern technological equipment and modern teaching methods, and volunteer teachers are inexperienced in the subject matter. Also, teachers visiting from distant places get tired and distance travel affect the quality of teaching.*
- *The more leave taken by teachers that affect the learning and the teachers make the students more attentive and advance the teaching.*
- *They adopt special approaches towards learning backward students and follow less strategies to motivate them.*

## CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted with the aim of identifying the factors influencing the continuous decline in Northern Province in the national level. Through this study, the influence of social political and social psychological and school factors influencing the low achievement of Northern schools. By implementing systematic and organized measures, the impact of these factors can reduce and promote the performance of Northern Province schools to a higher level and identify specific measures for effective implementation of curriculum, especially in type 2 schools. Professionalization of volunteer teachers, monitoring of learning teaching process. Developing positive attitudes about national and international assessment tests among teachers and students. Etc.

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