

Education in NorthEast

An updated report on equal access
to education for Tamil children

NorthEast Secretariat On Human Rights (NESOHR)
Karadipokku Junction
Kilinochchi
Sri Lanka
Telephone: 0094-21-228-5986
nesohr@hotmail.com
www.nesohr.org

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1. Introduction

Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 28.1

Article 28.1 - States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
- (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

In September 2005 NESOHR issued a report on the unequal access to education for Tamil children in NorthEast. In the report the sub-standard quality of Tamil students' textbooks was shown in presenting the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook for 2005, and the Grade 7 History, Civics, and Geography textbooks for 2004.

It is impossible to cover the wide range of sub-standard quality as well as its effects on Tamil students in a single report. NESOHR shows in this report additional examples of the sub-standard level of education for Tamil students and the inequality that Tamil medium schools face in NorthEast. Similar to the previous Education Report issued, this report points out errors in Tamil textbooks and the ethnic representation of Tamil speaking education staff. This report also points out the deprivation of human resources, teaching material, building facilities to Tamil medium schools and the effects this has Tamil students' performance and achievement.

2. Aspects of discrimination

2.1 Lack of Tamil speaking employees in Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education oversees all education matters island-wide and also oversees sub-institutes such as the National Institute of Education (NIE). The NIE, functioning for 20 years, is responsible for overseeing the production of books, curriculum development, and teacher training.

The breakdown of ethnic representation of the staff within the Ministry of Education is as follows. Out of 1,200 staff at the Ministry of Education, which serves 75% Sinhala, 25% Tamil medium students, 96% are Sinhala, only 4% of the staff is Tamil speaking. A similar misrepresentation follows within the NIE. Among the higher-positions at NIE, 7% are Tamil speaking and of the rest of the positions at NIE only 2% are Tamil speaking.

2.2. Lack of Tamil medium Teachers

The teacher shortage for Tamil medium schools existed as early as the 1970s and has continued on for the last 30 years. For the last 10 years there has been a 40% teacher shortage in Tamil medium schools. From 1971 to 1974 a total of 21,344 teachers were appointed island-wide. Of that number, 17,060 were Sinhala teachers, 2,507 were Muslim teachers and 1,807 were Tamil teachers. In 1982 25,081 teachers were appointed island-wide and of this number 2,632 were Tamil teacher appointments.

Table 1 shows the deficit for teachers is significantly higher for Tamil medium schools than for Sinhala medium schools for Grades 1 to 5 in General subjects as well as Grades 6 to 11 in Math/Science, English, and other subjects.

Table 1

Subject	Tamil medium				Sinhala medium			
	Req	Avail	Deficit	Excess	Req	Avail	Deficit	Excess
1-5 General	16,224	12,519	3,705		41,237	41,893	-	656
6 -11 Math/Sci	5,816	4,320	1,496	-	18,604	19,417	-	813
6-11 English	2,807	1,841	966	-	8,967	9,371	-	404
6-11 Others	9,431	8,551	880	-	31,181	37,844	-	6,663

In 2005 3,000 graduates were given teaching appointments in the NorthEast and 2,000 took positions. However, these appointments were merely political appointments and did not take into account the needs of the schools in the NorthEast. Without properly identifying the needs of schools in the NorthEast, the arbitrary appointments lead to poor education. In the South, there is a 15,000 excess of teachers.

Due to the shortage of teachers in the NorthEast, voluntary teachers took teaching appointments, establishing themselves in schools throughout the NorthEast. The unsuitable teacher appointments made by the GoSL is taking away the voluntary teaching positions, creating greater inconsistency and poor education standards for students in the NorthEast.

2.3. Quality of Text books

The Sri Lankan government Ministry of Education is supposed to provide free textbooks to the students. Tamil educationalists have complained about the quality of Tamil medium textbooks provided by the government for a long time. A good example is the history of the textbook for Social Studies. In 2005 the single Social Studies subject was divided into three subjects, History, Geography and Civics. The quality of these new textbooks has remained poor in spite of the long history of complaints made by Tamil educationalists.

The number of mistakes in the three Grade 7 three textbooks for History, Geography and Civics is show in Table 2.

Table 2

Textbook	No. of pages	No. of mistakes
History	62	667
Geography	52	319
Civics	47	231

A similar quality issue has existed in the case of Grade 9 Social Studies textbook since 1998. **The 54 maps in this textbook are all consistently smaller in the Tamil version than in the Sinhala version.** An example of this is shown in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 is a map in the Sinhala version of the textbook and Figure 2 is the corresponding map in the Tamil version.

After the first version of this textbook was published in 1998, many protested about the numerous errors in the Tamil version and wrote letters to the Education Ministry. When the second edition of the textbook was published in 1999, all of the errors were still in the textbook. This same practice of reprinting errors happened over and over again until 2004, creating seven editions where Tamil students received textbooks with 2,000 errors. Yet these were never corrected and reprinted as is for the following seven years.

The detrimental effects of using textbooks with errors puts Tamil students in a harmful position, literally robbing them from quality education opportunities. This is one example of the scheme that the Education Ministry is carrying out to damage the future of Tamil students in the NorthEast.

Language and math are core subjects. The NIE agreed to send three sample textbooks for each of these two subjects to schools so that the school can chose a textbook for its use. NIE will then send copies of the selected textbook to be distributed to the students. Last year the samples were sent to schools in NorthEast. But, after the schools in NorthEast selected the books it wished to use, copies of the books were not sent to the schools until third term. This year, the sample books for selection have not even arrived. This lack of education materials puts children's education in serious jeopardy.

In 1997 a new subject about fishing was introduced to Sinhala medium schools. A teacher's guide to teach this subject was also produced in Sinhala. The same teacher's guide in Tamil was not produced until the year 2004, indicating that Tamil students were not considered as an important group for teaching this subject for seven years. Despite the fact that there are more coastal fishing areas in the Tamil majority regions, Tamil students were not included in this new education offering. The educationalist in the NorthEast, realising the importance of fishers in their region, trained volunteers to teach this subject. In 2004, more than 800 Tamil students sat the national Year 11 examination of this subject as opposed to just under 120 Sinhala students. This clearly shows that the need for teaching this subject is much greater in the NorthEast region than in the Sinhala majority areas.

Figure 2: Grade 9 Social Studies Textbook, Tamil medium

கண்டல் தாவரங்கள்

இலங்கையின் காட்டு வளம், புல்நிலங்கள் பற்றி விளங்கிக்கொண்ட உங்களுக்கு இவற்றைப்போன்ற முக்கியத்துவம் வாய்ந்த இயற்கைவளம் ஒன்றை நீங்கள் அறிந்துகொள்ள முடியும். இலங்கையின், ஆற்றுக் கழிமுகங்களையும், களப்புக்களையும் சூழ அமைந்துள்ள கரையோரப் பிரதேசங்களில் விருத்திபெற்றுள்ள சிறப்பான தாவர வகை காணப்படுகிறது. இவைகள் கண்டல்கள் என அழைக்கப்படுகிறது. இன்று இலங்கையில் ஏறத்தாழ 10,000 ஏக்கர் பரப்பில் இவை பரம்பிக் காணப்படுகிறது. ஆறாம் தேசப்படம் இவற்றின் பரம்பலைத் எடுத்துக் காட்டுகிறது. கண்டல்கள் அதிகளவில் பரம்பி இருப்பது புத்தனம் மாவட்டத்தின் கழிமுகப் பிரதேசத்திலாகும். அடர்ந்தியாக வளர்ச்சி பெற்ற கண்டல்கள் வடமேற்குப் பகுதியிலும் வடகிழக்கின் தென்பகுதியிலுள்ள களப்புகளின் அண்மையில் இடையிடையேயும் சிதறிக் காணப்படுகிறது.

கண்டல் தாவரங்கள் மூலம் மனிதர்களுக்கு பல நன்மைகள் கிடைக்கின்றன. முற்காலத்திலிருந்தே கரையோரப் பிரதேசத்தில் வாழ்ந்தோரின் பல தேவைகள் நிறைவேற்றப்பட இக்கண்டல்கள் உபயோகப்பட்டுள்ளன. இறால்கள், நண்டுக்கள் போன்றவற்றைப் பிடிப்பதற்கும், இக்கண்டல் தாவரங்களை விறகாகப் பாவியதற்கும் வீடுகளுக்குத் தேவையான வளைகள், தூண்கள் ஆகியவற்றை உற்பத்தி செய்வதற்கும் மருந்தாக உற்பத்தி செய்யவும் சாயம் போன்றவற்றை தயாரித்துக் கொள்ளவும், காய்களுக்கு மருந்தாக உபயோகிக்கவும் இவைகள் பயன்பட்டன.

இதனைத் தவிர களப்புகள், கழிமுகங்கள் என்பவற்றின் கரையோரங்கள் ஆரிக்கப்படுவ திலிருந்து பாதுகாக்கப்படுவ தற்கும் இக்கண்டல் தாவரங்கள் பயன்படுகின்றன. இங்கு கண்டல் பிரதேசத்திலுள்ள தாவரங்கள் உயிரினங்கள் (விலங்குகள்) பல்வேறு வகையினவாகக் காணப் படுவதால் உயிரியல் பாடத்தைக் கற்கும் பலருக்கும் கண்டல் தாவரச் சூழல் திறந்த விஞ்ஞான ஆய்வு கூடமாகக் காணப்படு கிறது. ஆகவே இக் கண்டல்கள் எவ்வளவு முக்கியத்துவம் வாய்ந்த



உரு. 95 9.6
கண்டல் தாவரங்களின் பரம்பலைக் காட்டும் படம்

2.4. Schools in Militarized Zones

As shown in Graph 1, throughout the NorthEast there are 67 schools that fall within High Security Zones, and are either completely not functioning or displaced to function in sub-standard facilities such as temporary sheds or simply under the shade of trees.

Graph 1

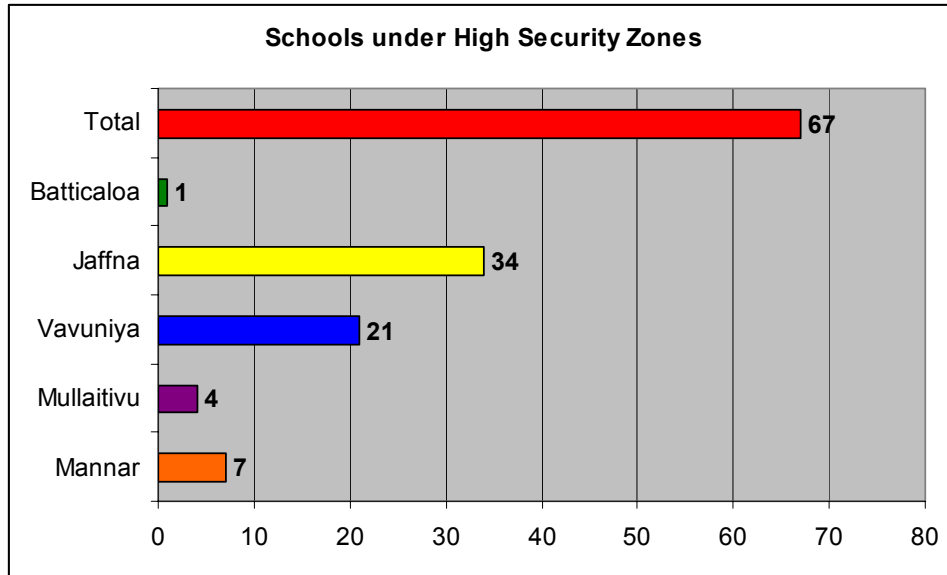
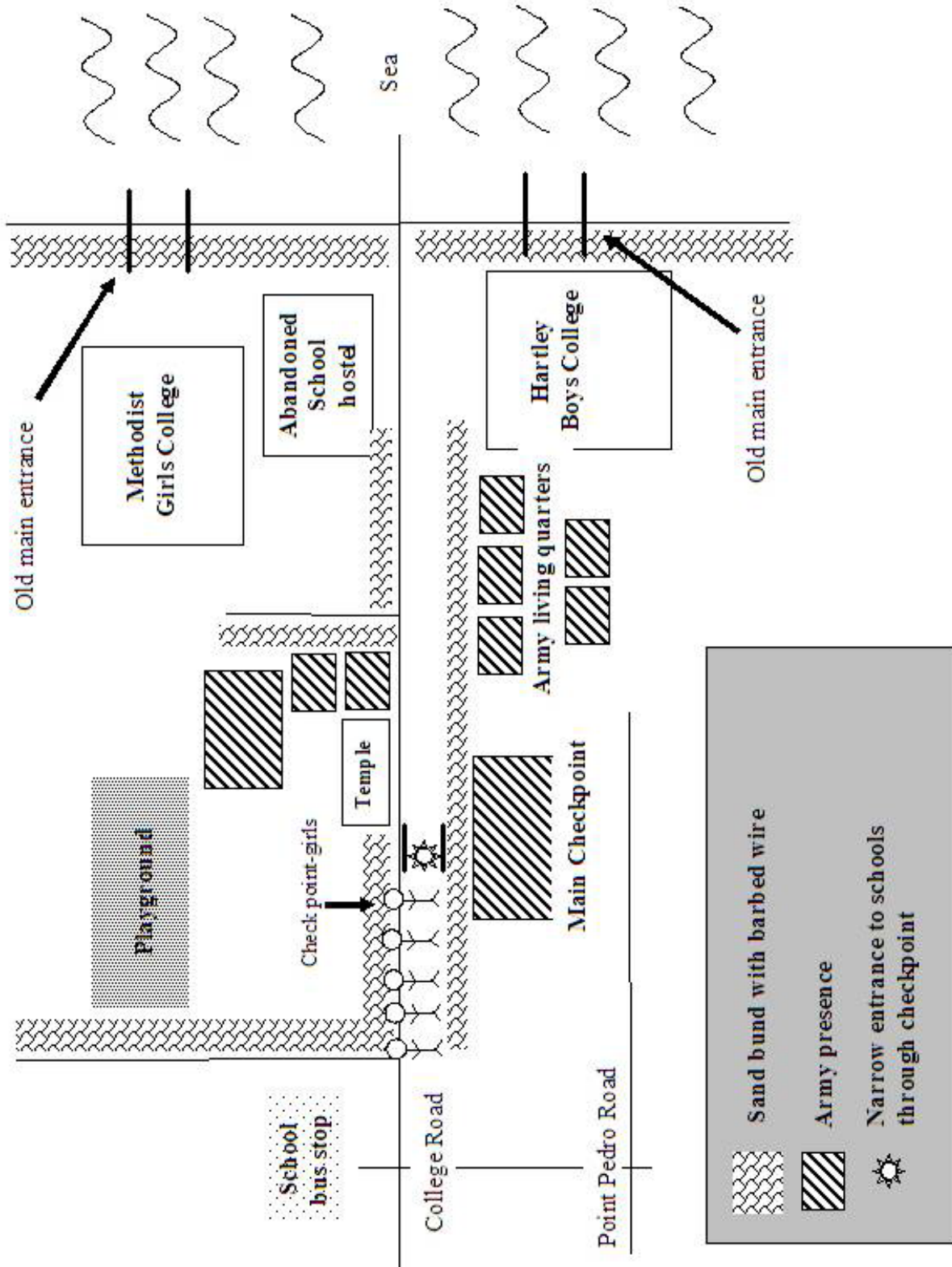


Figure 3 is a map of the area surrounding Hartley Boys College and Methodist Girls College, two leading schools in Jaffna. The schools are now located inside SLAFs camp complex. The main entrances to the schools used to be on the seaside, which was a wider and was easier access into school grounds. Presently, students must enter through one, narrow path which is heavily occupied by Sri Lankan Army soldiers and their checkpoints, camps and living quarters. It is a daily occurrence that students line up on the side of the road, as shown in Figure 3, and undergo severe checking, which students have said that lasts for at least one hour.

Furthermore, students and teachers are barred from entering the schools after 3:00 pm. Students usually enter college premises after school hours to do extra-curricular activities. SLAFs soldiers were seen doing physical exercises in the college playground. In 2002 and 2003 students reported that they were ordered not to travel to school after 8:30 am and they could not leave school before 3:00 pm. During this time, parents were restricted in visiting the school and were ordered to inform the army at the checkpoint

Figure 3: SLAFs presence around Methodist College and Hartley College, Jaffna



2.5. Disparity in University Funding

The Table 3 below illustrates the funds allocated (in millions of rupees) by the University Grants Committee to each university island-wide. Eastern University and Jaffna University are the only two universities in the NorthEast. Both these universities receive lower levels of funding in comparison to other universities. Jaffna university is receiving an extremely low funding in comparison with other universities.

Even the funding for Eastern University is higher than the Jaffna University because Eastern University located in Batticaloa and thus has a substantial Sinhala population. This demonstrates that not only at island wide level but even within Northeast, Tamil students are put through extreme levels of discrimination.

Table 3

University	2001	2002	2003
Peradeniya	1,108	936	495
Colombo	594.6	546.6	238.6
Ruhunu	529	492	238.1
Jayawardanapura	580.9	390.5	421
Kalani	417.5	492.9	238.1
Moratuwa	336.1	391.8	344.2
Sabrahamuwa	158.9	118.4	144.1
Eastern University	189.3	175.7	85.2
Rajaratta	135.2	180.5	139.1
Vayamba	148.9	136.9	55.8
Buddhist and Paali	23.5	29.1	14.8
Jaffna	0.4	0.3	0.3

3. Outcome of discrimination

3.1. School drop out

The poor education that Tamil students are presented with along with the burdens of living in a war-affected area force thousands of students to drop out of school. Almost 100,000 students dropped out of school in the year 2003, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

District	Children
Jaffna	20,464
Kilinochchi	5,479
Mullaitivu	6,231
Vavuniya	5,801
Mannar	3,514
Trincomalee	13,804
Batticaloa	16,379
Amparai	23,123
Total	94,885

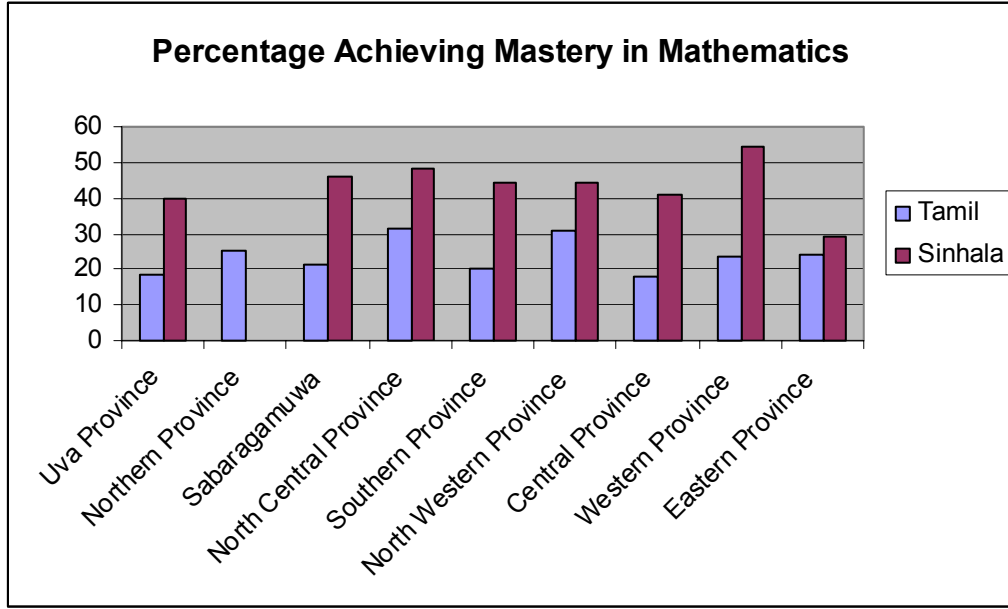
3.2. Performance and achievement

Data gathered by several organizations and Tamil Teachers Association show that the performance and achievement level of Tamil students is lower than Sinhala students on all measurement criteria. In considering all of the factors mentioned above, beginning with the representation of Tamils in the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education, the poor quality of textbooks, and the Tamil schools falling in High Security Zones, one can connect the links and see the results of these factors through Tamil students' performance and achievement in different subject areas given below.

Data from an assessment of achievement of Grade 4 students in Sri Lanka conducted by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) and World Bank show in Graph 2 that the Percentage Achieving Mastery in Mathematics throughout nine provinces is higher among Sinhala students.

The only instance where Tamil students' achievement is at a higher percentage is in the Northern Province and that is because there are no Sinhala students in the Northern Province. It is also important to notice that the district with best Tamil performance still does not reach the level of the district with the lowest Sinhala performance, showing how badly Tamil students are affected by the discrimination in education.

Graph 2



Results for Grade 5 scholarship examination in Table 5 show that Tamil students continuously make up the percentage that scores the lowest.

Table 5

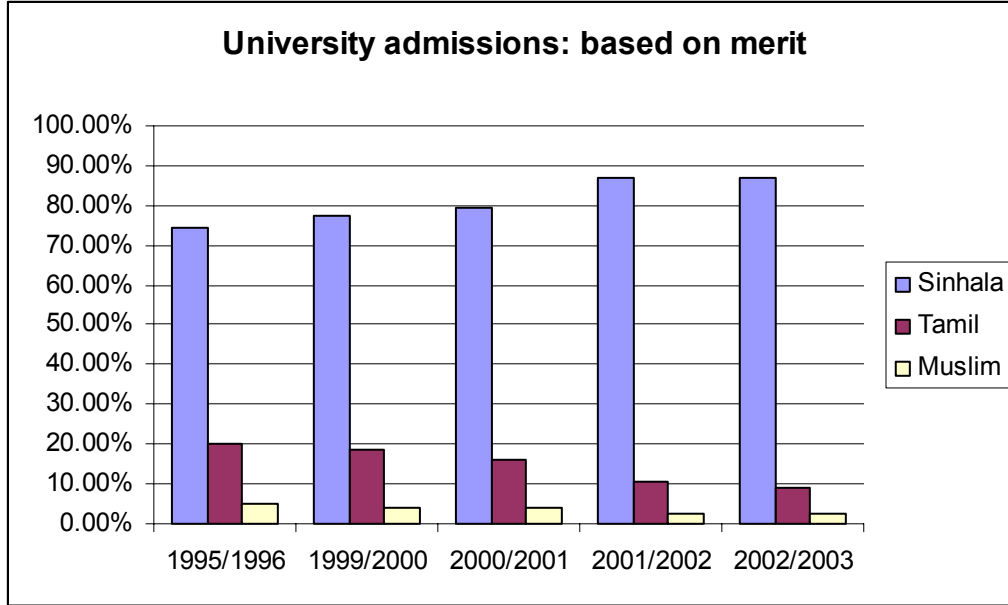
Grade 5 Scholarship Exam results								
Year	Above 80		Below 80		Below 40		Below 30	
	Sinhala	Tamil	Sinhala	Tamil	Sinhala	Tamil	Sinhala	Tamil
1995	11.07%	12.17%						
1998	10.09%	10.42%						
1999	10.25%	9.05%	46.40%	62.50%	12.30%	18.90%	4.50%	6.90%
2000	10.17%	9.07%	40.90%	53.60%	10.40%	18.40%	8.10%	8.10%
2001	9.17%	7.76%	51.20%	67.40%	13.60%	22.90%	4.50%	9.00%
2002	8.78%	7.55%						
2003	8.14%	7.09%						
2004	8.36%	6.80%						

3.3. University admission

A deterioration of standard can be seen in the percentages of university admissions between Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim students. From the school year 1995/1996 to 2002/2003 university admission percentage based on merit only for Tamil students dropped from 20.32% to 9.25%, as shown in Graph 3. During the same timeframe, the

university admission percentage for Sinhala students rose from 74.27% to 87.14%. A huge difference in university admission was already present in 1995. The chart below illustrates the percentages of university admission based on merit only.

Graph 3



4. Conclusion

Poor funding, poor teacher staffing, poor quality of textbooks, poor ethnic representation in the Ministry of Education, and a number of Tamil medium schools still in Militarized Zones directly affect the performance and achievement of Tamil students. The high rate of drop out, the low performance of Tamil students, the small number of university admission among Tamil students in the NorthEast are all proof of this depressed standards. This report has shown this using different sources of data.

There was a time when the performance of Tamil students was envied throughout the island. The Sri Lankan government considered it necessary to introduce standardization in University admission to increase the number of Sinhala students entering university because the Sinhala students could not compete on a merit only basis with the Tamil students. This standardization of University admission was one of the factors that fuelled the ethnic conflict, although it was not the root cause. The standard of education in the Northeast today stands as proof to the success of the discriminatory policies of the Sri Lankan government.