

**FOSTERING EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY:  
LEVEL OF COMPETENCIES ON REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION  
OF JUNIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA**

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Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) aims to develop students' sensitivity, awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices related to the environment and the sustainable use of its resources. It not only empowers students on environmental concerns but also connects them to more sustainable lifestyles, enabling them to become environmentally literate. This cross-sectional survey was conducted to assess the environmental literacy of junior secondary students (Grades 6 to 9) in selected Sri Lankan schools. The aim of the study was to determine students' competency levels in reducing environmental pollution. The sample included 442 students from three districts in the Western Province (Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara), selected using random stratified sampling techniques. A questionnaire with multiple-choice questions was used as the research instrument. Students' competency in organic farming, eco-friendly energy sources, reducing/recycling, and judgment on eco-friendly practices was assessed. Competency was measured by students' ability to identify and analyse environmental issues, ask relevant questions, evaluate and make personal judgments, and use evidence and knowledge to defend their positions. The findings revealed that students' competency levels in the focused areas improved with more effective EES implementations in school education. Students in the Colombo District recorded the highest competency level ( $\mu = 0.55 \pm 0.26$ ), while the lowest was recorded in the Gampaha District ( $\mu = 0.53 \pm 0.26$ ). Competency varied from 0 to 1 across all three districts. Grade 8 students showed the highest competency ( $\mu = 0.55 \pm 0.22$ ), while Grade 6 students recorded the lowest ( $\mu = 0.48 \pm 0.28$ ). A significant association was observed between the student category and organic farming ( $p < 0.05$ ), as well as reducing/recycling and willingness to engage in pollution reduction activities ( $p < 0.05$ ). There were significant variations across districts and among the three grades ( $p < 0.05$ ). In conclusion, the findings underscore the critical role of EES in enhancing students' environmental literacy and greater awareness and promoting active participation in sustainable practices, paving the way for a more environmentally responsible generation.

**Keywords:** Education for environmental sustainability (EES), Educational pedagogy, Environmental literacy, Junior secondary level students