

Pry students lack competence

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PRIMARY level students struggled to answer questions that tested their ability to think and write independently of their academic textbooks, during the latest Primary Education Completion Examination.

A government survey based on the 2014 exams found students in general fared much better with the 65 per cent questions that came directly from textbooks

— allowing for rote memorization — than the 35 per cent of the exam questions that tested their competence at real-life situations.

Students performed badly in both English and Mathematics in the competence part of the exam.

Government officials blamed the new system saying students were unable to cope with it while academics blamed lack of proper classroom teaching and the

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inability of students to think creatively.

The government has now decided to increase the competence component of the exam to 50 per cent in this year's PECE scheduled to begin on November 22, and 100 per cent in 2018.

The competence-testing part was introduced with only 10 per cent of the questions in 2012.

In Bangla, the average scores of the students on the competence-testing part were 61 per cent while the average score on textbook-based questions were 67 per cent.

In English, the students' average score in competence were 47 against 51 per cent in textbook questions, according to the National Academy of Primary

Education study on PECE 2014.

In mathematics, the average score of students on competence was 63 per cent against 66 per cent in textbook-based questions.

'Students performed badly in English and Mathematics, which are considered tough subjects in Bangladesh. The students might not be able to cope with the new system,' said NAPE director general Fazlur Rahman.

Directorate of Primary Education director general Mohammad Alamgir said that students will need some time to cope with the system. 'We are providing training to teachers on how to teach competence skills and give lessons to students on how to tackle such questions,'

he said.

NAPE conducted the sample survey to find how students performed in the competence part and reevaluated 1,260 answer scripts. The Mymensingh-based organisation finalised the study in the last week of September and New Age got access to it during the first week of November.

'Students found most difficulty in answering questions where they had to think and write the answers in their own words,' said the study.

Campaign for Popular Education executive director Rasheda K Choudhury said 'the skill of teachers to deliver good quality teaching is in a worrying state'.

Large classrooms, poor

student-teacher ratio and lack of training of teachers play a significant role in students' inability to answer competence-testing questions, she said.

Academics said Bangladeshi students rely on private tuition and coaching as there are serious doubts about the quality of classroom teaching in the country. The sad truth is that the students who can reproduce better score higher marks, they observed.

BRAC University Institute of Educational Development professor emeritus Manzoor Ahmed said 'most of the schools, especially those in remote and rural areas, do not have skilled teachers in English and Mathematics.'