

Boost education budget for enhancing quality

Speakers insist at Campe, CPD dialogue; also press for competent teachers, rule of law, training

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation is alarmed over the quality of education, said Md Abdur Razzak, chairman of parliamentary standing committee on finance ministry, at a discussion on education budget in the capital yesterday.

"We have to address the concern," he said, adding that there should not be any doubt that budgetary allocation on education must increase.

The MCQ pattern of question in the name of creative exam method has been rampantly abused as an easy way

to obtain A and golden grades, he said.

Such random high grades have been meaningless in most cases and has done harm to the young learners, said the ruling party lawmaker, adding that this may lead to students committing suicide in despair as it happened in Korea.

Razzak also said only five schools in his constituency got merely new buildings over past seven years, lacking educational facilities, equipments and sanitation.

"A rule of law should be established in the education sector," he said.

Campaign for Popular Education (Campe) and Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) jointly organised the dialogue on Budget for Education in Bangladesh at a hotel in the capital on the occasion of the ongoing Global Action Week on Education with the slogan "Fund the Future: Education Rights Now".

Officially, cent percent enrollment is claimed at primary education but only 66 percent of them go to secondary level, said Prof MM Akash of Dhaka University.

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Again, only one-fourth of those from the secondary level go to the higher secondary, he said, so the foremost challenge is to contain such huge manpower loss with quality improvement at the very foundation level.

The rate of achieving GPA-5 has doubled from 3 percent to 6 but those do not qualify in the university admission tests, he said, adding, the number of teachers must be increased, to improve the quality of education.

According to Unesco, 20 percent of budgetary allocation and 6 percent of the national GDP should be invested for quality education but in Bangladesh it has been around 12 percent with only 2 percent of the GDP, he said.

Bangladesh cannot graduate to a middle income country without increasing the resource allocation by 1 percent to 8 percent of the GDP, as stipulated in the National

Education Policy, he said.

Towfiqul Islam Khan, CPD research fellow, while presenting a research finding showed that the total expenditure on education was 1.6 percent of the GDP in 1990 which increased to about 2 percent in 2000, and since then it has been around that level.

Dearth of competent teachers of science and mathematics and lack of quality-enhancing training facilities remain one of the key challenges to attaining quality education at primary and secondary levels.

High dropout rates at primary and secondary levels are also core challenges.

The budgetary allocation for education has either been stagnant or declined over the past one and half decades, he said.

The budgetary allocation was 15.9 percent for education in 2007, which decreased to 11.6 percent in 2016. According to the World Development Indicator, Bangladesh

with education budget to the tune of 1.9 percent of the GDP has been ranked 155th, out of 161 countries.

Among the south Asian countries, it is 5.6 percent in Bhutan, 4.6 in Afghanistan, 4.1 in Nepal, 3.9 in India and 2.5 percent in Pakistan.

For Bangladesh the figure has been around 2 percent for the last 14 years, he said.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campe, who chaired the discussion, said the government has made a global commitment that it would increase the allocation on education to 4 percent of the GDP and 15 percent of the national budget.

"It is not understandable how Bangladesh can achieve the other 16 goals of SDG without achieving the SDG goal on education," she said.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of CPD, said that increasing expenditure on education is a must for quality education in keeping with the 7th five-year

plan and SDG, but it requires an efficient plan.

MA Mannan, state minister for Finance and Planning, said that the finance ministry alone cannot prioritise and determine the budgetary allocation, there are compulsive forces.

Nurul Islam Nahid, education minister, said that the foremost challenge is to increase the quality of education.

Lack of quality schools and colleges and quality teachers are the principal hindrances, he said.

As to GPA achievement, he said that students today are much more informed with the blessings of information technology. Next year, MCQ marks in public examinations would be 30 instead of 40, he added.

Deputy Speaker Advocate Fazle Rabbi Miah, member of Planning Commission Prof Shamsul Alam, and Prof Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed, also spoke.