

Education needs shift from rote learning

Roundtable told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country needs a complete shift from a memory-based education system to the one that enhances students' creative and rational thinking for the elevation of the overall education quality, which remains a major concern, educationists told a roundtable yesterday.

They recommended focusing on elementary education by boosting the quality of teachers, engaging children more in classroom activities, and increasing learning hours

TO-DOS

Focus on primary education

Train teachers

Increase classroom learning

Invest more

in schools.

Over the years, Bangladesh has developed a good education infrastructure and increased primary school enrolment to nearly 100 percent, but quality is still a major concern, they told the discussion, "Seeding Fertile Ground: Education

That Works for Bangladesh", at the office of the Prothom Alo, a Bangla daily, in the capital.

"The purpose of education is not memorising something and answering the questions... but to help them develop learning and understanding

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skills," said Shamse Ara Hasan, director of the education programme at Gonosahajjo Sangstha, a development organisation.

Citing a 2012 baseline survey on class-III students conducted under the Third Primary Education Development Programme, she said only 20 percent of students had the competence level of class-III, 30 percent had the level of class-II, and 50 percent had the level of class-I.

"We are failing to think independently because of following the rote learning method," said Dr Kazi Saleh Ahmed, former vice chancellor of Jahangirnagar University.

Recognising the facts, Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman said the quality of education remained a question though Bangladesh had achieved many millennium development goals. He blamed teachers' "lack of sincerity" in schools for this.

Shamse Ara, however, said it was the lack of teachers' training, adding that teachers should engage every student in practical activities, using various supportive learning materials.

Dr Shamsher Ali, president of Educational Quality Assurance Foundation, recommended training teachers in practical teaching techniques that best help students' learning.

The teaching process should be arranged in such a way that primary school students learn everything in schools, said Dr Ahmed.

James Jennings, an education expert at the Australian Agency for International Development, called lack of learning in schools as a major contributor to drop-outs. Poor parents stop sending their children to schools when they found their kids not learning anything, he said.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed, vice chair of the Campaign for Popular Education

(CAMPE) which organised the discussion with the Prothom Alo, said the teacher-student ratio in Bangladesh was very poor. For 1.7 crore primary school students, there are only four lakh teachers, he added.

CAMPE Executive Director Rasheda K Chowdhury said that in real sense, the education budget was declining whereas it should have gone up.

In the 2012-2013 fiscal, the education sector received 11.3 percent of the budget, which experts say should be 20 percent.

Chowdhury said, "We should think if we will invest more in military or in the future generations."

Bangladesh usually spends about two percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education and 1.5 percent on the defence.

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman was present at the discussion, while its Associate Editor Abdul Qayyum spoke among others.