



## TIME FLEXIBILITY OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: DEBATE IN PRACTICAL USE

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### Abstract

*Non formal schools are now playing a great role for supporting the rest of students who do not get chance in formal schools. The main object of the study is to explore the present debate of the use of flexibility of time of non-formal schools. The study is descriptive in nature based on qualitative approach. Quantitative approach is used to support the qualitative data. Data and evidence were gathered from teachers of the Non-formal schools by using a combination of in-depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion instruments. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected qualitative data and Ms-Excel was used to present the quantitative data. The study area was basically the Dhaka district. Form the study it is found that, flexibility of time opens a new door to education for vulnerable children and at a time creates a barrier for teachers for achieving the goal within the fixed time.*

**Keywords:** *Time, Flexibility, Non- formal Education, Debate, Practical use*

### 1.0 Introduction

Non-formal (NFE) has been defined as any intentional and systematic educational enterprise (usually outside of traditional schooling) in which content is adapted to the unique needs of the students (or unique situations) in order to maximize learning and minimize other elements which often occupy formal school teachers (i.e. taking roll, enforcing discipline, writing reports, supervising study hall, etc.) (Kleis, 1973, p. 06). Non-formal education characteristics are found when the adopted strategy does not require student attendance, decreasing the contacts between teacher and student and most activities take place outside the institution e.g. home reading and paperwork. The Educational Process consist of flexible curricula and methodology based on the

needs and interests of students, for which time is not a pre-established factor but is contingent upon the student's work place; certainly do not correspond to those comprised by formal education (Dib, 1987, p. 02). In Bangladesh, The education system is comprised of four separate systems: government run schools, private schools, Madrassas (Islamic religious schools), and schools run by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Moreover, Non-formal Education (NFE) is simple and flexible and can be delivered at any place convenient to the learners. It is generally designed to meet the basic learning needs of disadvantaged groups and can be availed of at any age. NFE is provided to those sections of the community who have no access to or are dropped out from formal education (Ministry of Education). The





Bangladesh government is proud that its education programs dramatically improved in the 1990s, especially during the latter half of the decade. The 90s saw a rekindled dedication to the expansion of primary education and as a consequence the Bangladeshi primary education system experienced significant enhancement during this period. A large part of this renewed commitment was a direct result of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), which encouraged all participating nations to expand their vision to meet goals in the education sector, especially the goal of making primary education universal. Following this conference, donors in Bangladesh invested in the education sector much more heavily and NGOs increased their involvement in assisting the Bangladeshi government in meeting its primary education goals (BANBEIS, 2005 as cited in Ministry of Primary and Mass Education). Most of the Non-formal primary schools have flexible time and space facilities and also have two or three shift according to their work schedule. However, when it comes to ensuring quality education, flexibility of time could be one major issue of these Non-formal schools. This study was conducted to find out the present debate in Non-formal primary schools of Dhaka city.

## 2.0 Rational of the study

According to Dib (1987), a systematic analysis of the main features of non-formal education, diversely from formal schooling, shows that participants are led to non-formal programs because these offer the expertise that they hope to acquire and the necessary assistance for a better understanding of their own selves and of their world (p. 02). It is but natural that if the education offered by schools is without value for a student's life and fails to prepare him/her to deal with daily problems, s/he will simply

refuses to participate in programs that may finally disappear or, at best, have to be reformulated to gain significance for students. As non-formal education is focuses mainly on students' need, it presents flexible features, objectives and contents. It is, therefore, quicker to react to the changes that may affect the needs of students and of the community. As depicted by Carron (1991) that the system that provides a 'ladder' by which children and young people may progress from primary schools through universities (although many drop out on the way) (p. 7). It is thus designed and intended for children and young people aging five to seven up to the early twenties. The fact is, we always say about our goal to give opportunity of education to our new generation but the quality was always ignored. Non-formal schools of our country help government to achieve its given promise but yet there are some queries about the flexible system of non-formal education. The study will explore one issue of non-formal education which is 'time flexibility'. This will help all the non-formal education service holders to take into account again about the system of their time flexibility. These will also help the policy maker to rethink about time flexibility and implement it their way.

## 3.0 Review of related literature

The current Education for All (EFA) agenda provides the best opportunities yet to re-visit and re-write the agenda for reforming basic education. In recent decades, initial formal education for children and adults has been subjected to many changes. There is also a much broader recognition of the educational needs and rights of large groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable children as well as the (potential) benefits of non-formal alternative programs or supplementary initiatives that help such children attend regular schools.





### 3.1 The term “flexibility” in non-formal education:

The characteristics of Non-formal education are found when the adopted strategy does not require student attendance, decreasing the contacts between teacher and student and most activities take place outside the institution. Educative processes endowed with flexible curricula and methodology, capable of adapting to the needs and interests of students, for which time is not a pre-established factor but is contingent upon the student's work pace, certainly do not correspond to those comprised by formal education (Dib, 1987, p. 02)

According to Carron (1991) The growth of non-formal education being organic —indeed one of its supposed advantages is that it is flexible, responsive etc. — attempts to superimpose a classification which is derived from the experience of a limited number of countries at one point in time are bound to run into problems. The distinctions have to take into account the origin and purpose of the different activities (p. 17).

NFE methods can help to promote Community Content-Based Instruction within the formal educational system, because it:

- Involves students actively in identifying needs and finding solutions.
- Promotes learning that is practical, flexible, and based on real needs.
- Focuses on improving the life of the individual and/or community.
- Encourages students to assess, practice, and reflect on their learning (PCC, 2004)

According to (Kamil, 2007), matters of the curriculum and teaching learning materials, the length of the learning program, the form and

timing of the evaluation process are all matters reserved to the providing agency. There is an assumption (often shared on both sides) that the participants are not capable of determining such matters. This is what I would call flexible schooling – the standardized elements common to all such learning groups are clearly schooling but the participatory elements mean that it is schooling made flexible to the local group concerned. Also Fordham (1993) suggests that in the 1970s, four characteristics can be associated with non-formal education:

- Relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups.
- Concern with specific categories of person.
- A focus on clearly defined purposes.
- Flexibility in organization and methods.

In many northern countries the notion of non-formal education is not common in internal policy debates - preferred alternatives being community education and community learning, informal education and social pedagogy.

According to Carron (1991) Non-formal education is more learners centered than most formal education. It has to be. Learners can leave anytime they are not motivated. NFE tends to emphasize a cafeteria curriculum (options, choices) rather than the prescribed, sequential curriculum found in schools. In NFE human relationships are more informal (roles of teachers and students are less rigid and often switch) than in schools where student-teacher and teacher administrator roles are hierarchical and seldom change in the short term. NFE focuses on practical skills and knowledge while schools often focus on information which may have delayed application. Overall NFE has a lower level of structure (and therefore more flexibility) than schools.





According to Banglapedia (2013), **Non-formal Education** (NFE) organised educational activity outside the formal system of education. It is simple and flexible and can be delivered at any place convenient to the learners. It is generally designed to meet the basic learning needs of disadvantaged groups and can be availed of at any age. NFE is provided to those sections of the community who have no access to or are dropped out from formal education.

In the view of Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, The NFE Policy Framework approved and instituted by the Government in 2006 defines NFE, as “Non-formal education is a purposeful and systematically organized form of learning that generally occurs outside the formal educational institutions. It is designed to meet the learning needs of educationally disadvantaged persons of different ages and backgrounds, flexible in terms of organization, time and place and may cover basic and continuing educational programs to impart basic literacy, including life skills, work skills, general culture, and facilitates lifelong learning and enhancement of earning capabilities for poverty reduction. It ensures equity in access and human resource development; it may or may not follow a "ladder" system, and may be of varying duration”.

### 3.2 Non-formal education in Bangladesh:

Non-formal education is defined as “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended for specific objectives and to serve an identifiable clientele” (BANBEIS, 2005 as cited in Ministry of Primary and Mass Education). NPA defined NFE as "That form of education which consists

of mostly assortment of organized and semi-organized educational activities operating outside the regular structure and routines of formal system, aimed at serving a great variety of learning needs of different sub-groups of population, both young and old". UNESCO states, “Non-formal education may take place both within and outside educational institutions, and may cater to persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programs to impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life-skills, work-skills, and general culture. Non-formal education programs do not necessarily follow the 'ladder' system, may have varying duration, and may or may not confer certification of the learning achieved”.

Moreover, according to MOPME, The NFE Policy Framework approved and instituted by the Government in 2006 defines NFE, as “Non-formal education is a purposeful and systematically organized form of learning that generally occurs outside the formal educational institutions. It is designed to meet the learning needs of educationally disadvantaged persons of different ages and backgrounds, flexible in terms of organization, time and place and may cover basic and continuing educational programs to impart basic literacy, including life skills, work skills, general culture, and facilitates lifelong learning and enhancement of earning capabilities for poverty reduction. It ensures equity in access and human resource development; it may or may not follow a "ladder" system, and may be of varying duration”. NFE sub-system in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, cover four types of non-formal learning by age ranges as shown in tabular form below:



**Table 1: The areas covered by Non-Formal Education in Bangladesh**

ECCE (Age group 3-5 years)	NFBE (6-14 years)	Adult Literacy (15 + years, generally 15-45 years)	CE and life-long learning opportunities
It can be provided at both Family and Community levels. Introduces children to pre-school education and deals with their health, nutritional and personal, motor and mental development needs	It provides a safety net and a second chance to un-enrolled and dropout children of primary school and adolescents (age-group 6/7-10 and 11-14 years)	Provides NFE covering literacy, numeracy, life skills for Youth and Adults (age-group 15-45), consisting of three levels: I. Basic level II. Middle level III Self-learning level, And special work skills training for 15-24 age group	Types of Continuing Education* · Post-Literacy Program · Vocational Education/Livelihood skills Training Program · Equivalency Program · Quality of Life Promotion Program · Individual Interest Promotion Program, · Future-Oriented program

**Source:** UNESCO PROAP, 1992; \* Only PL and Skills Training under CE programs are available now in Bangladesh

NFE provides an alternative channel, a second chance to dropout and un-enrolled primary school-age children, adolescents to go to mainstream; and adults who missed formal education, to acquire basic literacy and life and employable skills to improve their social and economic conditions. Both the government and NGOs organize and manage NFE programs for different age groups as indicated above and discussed in details in Chapter XI. The Government (MOPME) has developed through wide consultations an NFE Policy Framework to guide and help coordination of NFE programs in the country; and has published it in the official gazette in February 2006.

According to Banglapedia (2013), Non-formal education was formally launched in this country in 1918 when an attempt was made to

start adult education in night schools. By 1926, over a thousand night schools were functioning. Several attempts had been initiated from 1935 onwards at the central, community and individual levels for adult literacy and universal primary education. In 1939, Frank Luebac's campaign of 'Each One Teach One' gained popularity among the masses. Adult education programme was brought under the newly formed rural development department of the provincial government. But the programme approached a closure due to the Second World War.

After 1947, it was revived through individual initiatives. In 1956, HGS Beaver, a bureaucrat of government established a 'Literacy Centre' at Dhaka and his associates developed a primer and some charts as learning materials. Inspired and encouraged by Beaver, the East Pakistan Adult Education Cooperative Society



came into existence. It produced 24 books for adult learning including 12 for neo-literates. After the death of Beaver in 1962, the programme stagnated. In 1963, an adult education section was opened at Comilla BARD campus under a pilot project of the directorate of public instruction. This project continued even after independence of Bangladesh.

Like a backdrop, the NGOs started programs of non-formal education in addition to poverty alleviation and other development activities. BRAC, CARITAS, CCDB, DANIDA, CONCERN, Gonoswasthya Kendra (GK), Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), Swanirvar Bangladesh (SB), Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (rdrs), and Village Education Resource Centre (VERC) played the pioneering role in introducing NFE for the disadvantaged people of the country. They were followed by Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS), Saptagram Nari Swanirvar Parishad (SNSP), proshika, Jagarani Chakra, CMES, and many other NGOs. Initially, the emphasis was on adult literary programmes and eventually, they introduced pre-primary, primary, adolescent, adult and continuing education. Over the last three decades, NGOs acquired considerable experience and expertise in NFE sector by working at the grassroots level. They also initiated some innovative programs in this area.

In 1996, the number of NGOs involved in education programs increased to around 435 and they had 2.5 million learners. In 1994, the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) installed a comprehensive database of the NGOs that had NFE programs. At the initial stage, information was collected from around 435 NGOs regarding their NFE coverage, types of programs, number of centres and students, enrolment status, materials production,

curriculum/ primers used by them and other activities. According to CAMPE, 4.8% NGOs had pre-primary education programs, 72.2% had primary, 41.8% had adolescent programs, and 79.8% operated adult education programs. A total of 86,929 centres were organised: 917 pre-primary centres, 38,413 primary, 11,907 adolescent and 35,692 adult centres. Out of the total learners, 68.25% were female and the rest 31.75% were male. The major NGOs such as BRAC, PROSHIKA, Ahsania Mission, FIVDB, VERC, CONCERN, GSS, and RDRS produce learning materials for NFE. The smaller NGOs adopt the curriculum/primers developed by the well-established NGOs. BRAC, which has been running a large non-formal primary education programme since the mid-1980s, is well known for its own materials.

### 3.3 Challenges for NFE in Bangladesh:

Educational obstacles to the progress of non-formal education include: the narrowness of the concept of education; fragmentation of organization and program; resource problems; problems of knowledge, techniques, and capabilities; and the responsibilities of international agencies. Major features of the new learning system, if continued progress is made, will be: wider distribution of education and structural flexibility, freedom of education from lock-steps of levels and grades, enlargement of educational resources, shared responsibilities between schools and employing agencies for occupational preparation, and local variations and flexibility. (Ahmed, 1972)

### 4.0 Objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to find out the present debate of the use of flexibility of time. The specific research questions are:





- What are the positive and negative effects of time flexibility in schools?
- What are the present debates of flexibility of time in attendance and dropout rate?
- What are the present debates of time flexibility on teaching learning, school administration and examination system of schools?

### 5.0 Methodology of the study

The purpose of the study was to find out the present debate of the use of flexibility of time. The study is descriptive in nature based on basically qualitative approach. Quantitative approach is used to support the qualitative data. Data and evidence were gathered from teachers of the Non-formal schools by using a combination in-depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion instruments. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected qualitative data and Ms-Excel was used to present the quantitative data. The study area was basically the Dhaka district. The researcher selected this area because of easy communication system, availability of time and financial support. To complete the research perfectly and thoroughly with the assigned time, researcher chooses seven Thanas of Dhaka city purposively. Only Non-formal schools of working children, aging 7-14, were chosen for the study. From a large number of schools of seven Thanas 55 teachers from seven schools were selected as sample to complete the study within assigned time.

### 6.0 Analysis and findings

From the collected data the researcher tried to find out the real scenario of flexibility of time. The major findings of analysis are shown

as the headings of each analysis part. The analyses along with the major findings are given below:

#### 6.1 Practical debate in Non-formal schools in Bangladesh:

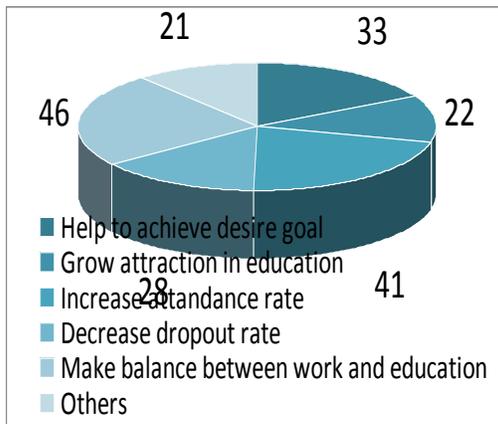
Flexibility of time is a general characteristic of Non-formal education. The researcher tried to find out the impact of time flexibility on Non-formal education system and its present debates. On the way of analysis the researcher has got an overall scenario about debate of time flexibility of Non-formal education system. The present analysis shows the current state of time flexibility categorizing by the merits, demerits, debate in teaching-learning process, examination system and administrative system of Non-formal schools and also the scenario of time flexibility on attendance rate and dropout rate of Non-formal education.

#### 6.2 An open door for Education:

Non-formal education system creates an open door especially for underprivileged people in Bangladesh this is what most of the respondents have to say while giving the data about advantage of time flexibility of Non-formal education. According to them, most of the working and poor children can come to the schools agreeing to their allowed time because of time flexibility. They can help their parents in home and outside without hampering their chance of education. The respondents also said that, the teachers can easily finished the yearly course within six months and can without difficulty achieve their desire goal because of time flexibility and *condense or accelerated* syllabus. One of the respondents said that, time flexibility helps to increase the attendance rate and decrease the dropout rate. Another respondent also said that, time flexibility



increase the motivation of poor children and parents for education because they do not have any pressure to go for work as they are taught in their free time. Therefore, they can earn more money and get the chance to educate themselves at a time. Information regarding this statement is shown in the table below:

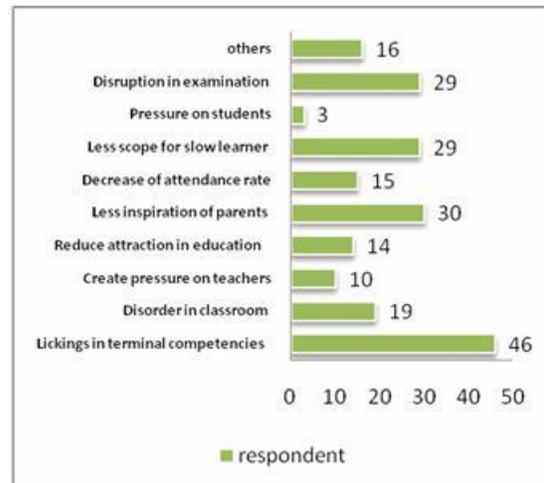


From the graph above it is found that, among (n= 60) respondents 46 of them agreed that time flexibility helps to make balance between work and education, also 41 respondent said that, it helps to increase attendance in the schools. Overall according to them, time flexibility makes an open door for education for vulnerable people.

### 6.3 Barrier for achieving goals:

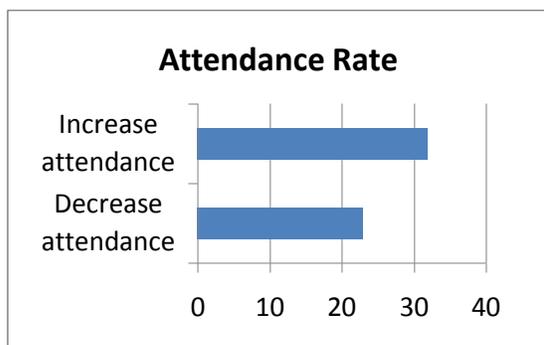
In contrast of the above statement, the same respondent (n=55) also accused time flexibility for achieving their desire goal. According to them, students can come to the schools rendering to their importance because of time flexibility. As a result, student could not complete their static syllabus within desire time and suffer for lack of terminal competencies. Sometimes teachers have to face over crowded classroom and could not serve properly to their

student; they also have to face mental and academic pressure to complete their syllabus. Some of the respondents also said about time flexibility that, because of this, students sometimes loss their attraction for education and it creates a fall in attendance rate. Moreover, parents sometimes fell less fascination to admit their children in non-formal schools as the schools have flexibility of time. They think that, flexibility of time means less attention and less control. Additionally, some of the respondents also said that, because of time flexibility it is hard to find out the weaker student and give them any intervention. It also creates problems in examination system of non-formal schools. As there is a chance of flexibility of time sometimes students take chance to drop their exam of that day and take chance to sit for this exam on other day. Sometimes they come for their exam about one hour later, these creates pressure on teachers and also increase obstruction of parents and students about the schools. In general, they think time flexibility is one of the barriers for achieving their goal. Information regarding this statement is shown in the graph below:



**6.4 Time flexibility and intensification or diminution of attendance rate:**

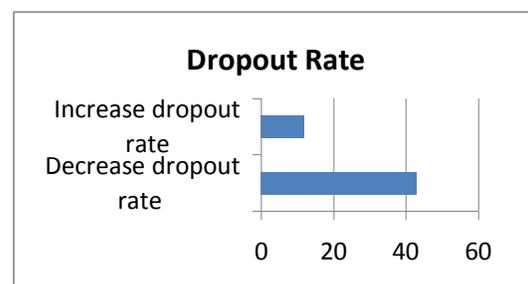
About attendance rate respondent could be divided into two groups. One group said that, time flexibility helps to increase presence rate in schools while other said that, time flexibility is reason for decreasing presence rate. The graph below shows the number of respondent of two groups:



The group that said that time flexibility helps to increase attendance rate said that, as most of them are vulnerable and working children, they can come easily and anytime to their schools which helps to increase children affection about their learning and attendance rate of the schools. But according to the other group, if one student of one shift come to another shift, there creates a problem in attendance register; as the name of the extra students are not registered in another registered sheet of that shift. So the average attendance rate falls down. Moreover, as there is facility of time flexibility, sometimes parents and employers of the students do not want to give them chance to come to schools in proper time and these create sometimes over-crowdie situation, low attendance average rate and less affection of students to their study.

**6.5 Dropout rate drops vividly or upsurges intensely:**

In the case of dropout, most of the respondent said that, flexibility of time helps to decrease the dropout rate of schools. By supporting their statement they mentioned that, because of time flexibility working children can come to school in their free time which helps to decrease the dropout rate of the schools. Also sometimes parents and employers willingly send their children to the schools as they have no worry about reduction of their family income. One of the respondent said that, ‘Once one of the students’ mother came to school and said that, she would not send her daughter to the school as she admit her daughter in a embroidery shop; then I tell her about our another shifts and flexibility of time, the mother got happy and withdraw her words. However, some of the respondent accused time flexibility as a reason for dropout. They utter that, because of this students have the chance to come to schools at their free time. This sometimes creates inattention to their study which results in dropout from the school. The number of respondents in two groups is given below:





#### **6.6 Helps teaching learning process or creates a barrier:**

Time flexibility of non-formal education system has excessive impact on teaching learning system of non-formal schools. As respondents, the teachers of non-formal schools said that sometimes students of one shift come into another shift. As a result teachers could not concentrate at their lesson plan as different students have different level of completion of their syllabus. Also, excessive students have impact on teaching learning process. Teachers could not complete their targeted lessons properly. Moreover students also face inferiority complex because of excessive students. One of the respondent share his experience that, 'because of time flexibility about 15 of my students come into the class in different time within the class period. After they come into the class, most of the time they do not understand what I am saying or teaching and I have to teach them again and again the same topic' In contrast, some other respondents said that, as there is constraint in time, teachers focus on time carefully and focus more on repetition; so that the students got more chance to learn and resolve their problems. Moreover, because of this students can come to school at their free time and can easily seek help of their teachers which make them attentive to their study.

#### **6.7 Administration of school is hard-hitting or well handling:**

Time flexibility has important impact on administrative behavior of schools. Most of the respondent said that, because of time flexibility, teachers sometimes find it tough to handle excessive students. Excessive students create chaotic situation in the classroom as well as in the schools. Most of the time students fell less interest in taking part in teaching learning

session and co-curricular activity. Also, arrangement of co-curricular activity for uncertain students seemed very tough for the schools. Moreover, maintenance of attendance register was also appeared problematic because of time flexibility of the school. In contrast, some of the respondent said that, it does not cause any harm of administration of the schools. Students feel free to come to the schools any time and these enhance the demand of education.

#### **6.8 Examinations held on time properly and or make a scope for student bigoted means:**

On examination system of Non-formal schools, time flexibility plays like a facilitator and at the same time barrier for achieving the desired goal of the schools. Some of the respondents gave positive response and some gave negative response about flexibility of time. According to the former group, students can come at their free time in exam day also, so there was no chance of dropout because of time flexibility. Moreover, students also sit for exam having no pressure of work in their mind and can easily pass their examination within a year or 6 months course. In contrast, other respondents said that, time flexibility makes a mess in examination system also. As the students have the right to come to their schools at their free time, teachers faced pressure to control extra students during the examination time. Sometimes there were chances of unfair means. Moreover, extra students creates unmanageable situation in terms of sitting in the examination hall as well as distribution of examination paper and questions which cause stress on the Non-formal school teachers.

#### **7.0 Interpretation and Discussion**

The analysis shows a debate about the use of time flexibility. Sometimes flexibility of





time opens a new door to education for vulnerable children and also creates a barrier for teachers for achieving the goal within the fixed time. Children can take the facility of education according to their free time, but this facility creates a barrier for teachers to complete their fixed syllabus within grade level time. Similarly, Ahmed (1972), one of the educational obstacles to the progress of non-formal education in flexible structure. Moreover, the debate about attendance rate is also visible in this study. From the analysis, it is found that time flexibility of non-formal school helps to increase attendance rate because most of them are vulnerable and working children and they can come easily and anytime to their schools which helps to increase children affection about their learning and attendance rate of the schools. However, the debate is that as there is facility of time flexibility, student of one shift come to another shift, which creates problem in attendance register; as the name of the extra students are not registered in another registered sheet of that shift. So the average attendance rate falls down. Moreover, sometimes parents and employers of the students do not want to give them chance to come to schools in proper time, which create over-crowdie, low attendance average rate and less affection of students according to their study. The debate about dropout rate also goes with the reasons of attendance rate. Although the dropout rate is low but the absent rate is very high in these schools. Furthermore, the debate about the teaching learning process was also highlighted in this analysis; the debate says that, because of time flexibility students of one shift come into another shift; for this, teachers could not concentrate to their lesson plan as different students have different level of completion of their syllabus. Also excessive students have an impact on teaching learning process. Teachers could not complete their targeted lessons

properly. On the other hand, students can come to school at their free time and can easily seek help of their teachers because of time flexibility which make them attentive to their study. Similarly, in the issue about administrative work, time flexibility at a time could be a reason of chaotic- crowded classroom, problem in register book and arrangement in co-curricular activity and also it could be a reason of opening the door of freedom of the students and increasing the demand of education. Last of all, there arises a debate in the examination system of non-formal education. The debate contains that, students can come at their free time in exam day also because of time flexibility, so there was no chance of dropout. Moreover, students also sit for exam having no pressure of work in their mind and can easily pass their examination. Meanwhile, flexibility of time makes a mess in examination system. As the students have right to come to their schools at their free time teachers faced pressure to control extra students according to examination time. Sometimes there were chances of unfair means or out of questionnaire before examination time. In a nutshell, though in the theories of non-formal education flexibility has assistance to give another change for education but in practical use in has debate in all aspect of education.

### 8.0 Concluding Remark

Non-formal schools in present times open a new door for the children, who have not enough facility of being admitted in formal schools. Thus Non-formal schools facilitate a most, but the debate about flexibility of time could be a reason of barrier for achieving the goal of quality education. Policy makers and implementers along with theorist also should think again about the flexible structure of time of Non-formal schools.





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