

Students' Perceptions of ESP Online Pedagogy during COVID-19 and Pedagogical Transitions in a Nepali University: Case Studies and Embedded Action Research

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Abstract

This study explores undergraduate students' perceptions of online pedagogy (OP) practiced during COVID-19 pandemic and blended pedagogy (BP)/ blended teaching and learning (BTL) currently in practice in the post-pandemic times in ESP courses at Kathmandu University School of Law (KUSL), Nepal. While essentially a study of two case studies, it also develops as embedded informal action research (Beck, 2017). The study reveals that both OP and BP/ BTL, despite many transitions, function(ed) only as makeshift pedagogies in the local context, which is not how they are taken in their mainstream uses. It first highlights the majority voice for continuing using helpful elements from OP (with improvements) in the conventional mode, diagnoses numerous problems associated with the pedagogy, and identifies spaces to bring about improvements in. It then examines the transitions, including BP/ BTL, which reveal that OP has been instrumental in encouraging the practitioners to increasingly embrace BP/ BTL for its immense usefulness. However, (collective) institutional readiness in investing in major OP and BP/ BTL resources and technologies seriously lacked/ lacks. These findings, with local and global literature aside, also help to successively build and refine the conceptual framework used. Finally, the study forwards useful implications and suggestions for those who have been practicing similar pedagogies in similar contexts.

Keywords: *ESP, COVID-19, makeshift pedagogies, pedagogic transitions, student perceptions*

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic posed unforeseen challenges all over the world and seriously affected all social systems, including education (Allain-Dupré et al., 2020). This was true also in Nepal (Shrestha et al., 2020). Globally, under the threats of the pandemic, both teachers and learners practiced different types of alternative pedagogies (e.g., online,

on-air, and other media forms), but with various ensuing hurdles, especially in online medium (Koh & Daniel, 2022; UNESCO, 2020). In Nepal's case, because proper planning and technological infrastructures seriously lacked (Dawadi et al., 2020; Paudel, 2021), what posed protuberant challenges were, among others, recurrent power outage, no or slow internet connection, lack of online teaching skills and resources, and lack of

learning devices (laptops, etc.)—mostly in case of young learners (Khatai & Bhatta, 2020; Khataiwada, 2020; Sah, 2021). These problems, with the pandemic threats in the background, significantly contributed to temporary or indefinite closures of most schools and universities in the country during 2020 – 2021 (Dawadi et al., 2020; Karki et al., 2021). As per UNESCO (2020), nearly nine million students were affected during the pandemic and it was school education that was affected more severely (as cited in Adhikari, 2023, p. 2). The case of public schools is best explained by the data from Central Bureau of Statistics 2019: Out of 29, 707 public schools in Nepal, only 8, 366 had computers and much less—3, 776 offered IT-based study with internet connectivity. Against this backdrop, even radio and television were (and are) not widely accessible and affordable in the country (as cited in Thapaliya & Pradhan, 2021).

However, according to Dawadi et al. (2020), independently well-equipped stakeholders (private and community schools, colleges, and universities plus their teachers and students), except in situations of power cuts and internet disconnections, benefitted from the shift to online teaching-learning (OTL). This was more so in higher education (Sah, 2021). These findings are also backed up by the sudden increase in internet penetration (by 3 million) in the country, mostly through mobile connections (Kemp, 2020). Besides, there was an increase in the use of other means of remote education such as radio, TV, newspapers, and telephone in this emergency shift widely identified as pandemic pedagogy (PP). UNESCO (2020) stated that “the country’s mountainous landscape and its remote hard-to-reach communities made distance learning through radio a suitable way to maximize continuity of learning.” *Radio Pathshala*, a UNESCO-supported pilot radio broadcast

with live call-in support, and *Hamro Ghar: Hamro Paathshala*, another educational radio program, proved effective for students up to secondary levels (UNESCO, 2020; World Vision, 2020). And so did the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology’s 2020 development of an e-learning portal for school students, mostly when not disturbed by power outage and internet disconnection.

Despite these efforts, educational stakeholders, including unprivileged students and teachers from schools and universities, did face digital divide. This led to increased inequality in access to education, adverse impacts on assessment, and chances of loose gatekeeping, the last of which potentially aggravated the already deteriorating standards of education (Dawadi, 2019; Dawadi et al., 2020). On the other hand, teachers’ and students’ lack of digital literacy, followed by lack of administrative support and proper assessment designs, constrained technology use in higher education (Laudari, 2019; Laudari & Maher, 2019). Also, large classroom sizes, low quality teaching environments, and lack of training or adequately trained professionals (Aryal et al., 2016; Dawadi, 2019) posed even more challenges. However, from mid-2020, the recurrent problem of power outage was slowly resolved (Subedi, 2020) and teachers and students enjoyed comparatively better teaching-learning situations.

The initial paucity of literature on teachers’ and students’ experiences of OTL (by using mobile, Google Meet, YouTube, etc.) gradually gave way to new literature: Teachers pictured OTL both as fruitfully productive or participatory and not as effective as in physical classes (Shrestha et al., 2020) whereas students took online classes as comparatively problematic and less effective than physical classes (Manandhar et al., 2021). More importantly,

a few studies (Dangal & Bajracharya, 2020; Shrestha et al., 2022; Singh & Shrestha, 2021) reported that practices and aspects associated with OTL, following the pandemic-caused anxieties, negatively affected the mental well-being of students and teachers. Amid this, the issue of collective, cyclical, and gradual pedagogic improvements in the OP mode was also stressed (Dawadi et al., 2020; Rauniyar, 2020), which is what comes closer to this study.

The present study first explores undergraduate students' perceptions of OP practiced in ESP teaching-learning during the pandemic and then of BP/ BTL in the post-pandemic times at KUSL, Nepal. The critical issues of OP being reported by my students and colleagues at this institution made me embark on this project—also with an intention to individually and collectively address them with proper reflections and actions while learning from the pedagogic transitions. This purpose was also backed up by what was going on in my community of practice: Confusions about or questions of relevance of emergency education, including OP, in the context of Nepal (Kafle, 2020; Khatiwada, 2020; Paudel, 2021), vested motives in this new practice (Kafle, 2020), and urgent need for critical reflections on stressful pedagogic practices affecting students not only in learning but also in life (Rauniyar, 2020; Vahid, 2020). According to Dawadi et al. (2020), the latter issue was highly important to be guided by in online teaching (p. 9).

With all these impetuses, my objectives in this study are to identify (1) what works for or better facilitates students in OP/ PP and BP/ BTL, (2) what hinders fruitful learning in OP/ PP and BP/ BTL, (3) what particular spaces in OP/ PP and BP/ BTL, in connection with cyclic reflections and actions following

students' (agentic) inputs, help bring about pedagogic changes and transitions, (4) which one—OP/ PP or BP/ BTL—is perceived better and for what particular reasons, and (5) what conceptual understanding/ misunderstanding about the interconnections among different types of pedagogies (conventional, OP, PP during the pandemic, and BP/ BTL in the post-pandemic times) are revealed.

Conceptual Framework

Amid the local confusions regarding what the OP being practiced during the pandemic was and was not, it was necessary for this study to develop a conceptual framework alongside so that the act of locating oneself in the local pedagogic practices would be well-informed and easier. The framework developed here has been successively refined (here and in the discussion section) with the help of the review of local literature on (ELT) pedagogic practices during the pandemic, global literature on interrelated concepts of pedagogies, and participants' perceptions of PP (here OP during the pandemic), BP/ BTL (practiced in the post-pandemic times), and their (inter-)connections to other pedagogies, in particular OP and conventional one.

Intersecting Concepts from the Local Literature

Educational stakeholders practiced emergency education and its various means, including OP, in complete tracklessness, anxieties, and frustrations, with learning losses in majority cases of school and university closures, primarily because of the lack of practical policies, planning, and technological readiness, mostly at the governmental and institutional levels, and this was followed by chaos and confusions regarding what the makeshift teaching-learning was (Gyawali &

Bhatta, 2021; Khati & Bhatta, 2020; Shrestha et al., 2022). However, there were some strengths in MoE's responses to COVID-19 despite the fact that its plans and policies were formulated with little examination of diverse situations and without clear directions for implementing them into actions (Shrestha & Gnawali, 2021, p. 178). Overall, problems abounded.

Sangroula (2021) wrote that COVID -19 pandemic "created the largest disruption of education system" in the country, primarily because of "traditional approach of teaching and learning." Teachers lacked knowledge and skills needed for OP (Shrestha et al., 2022) and students became clueless, feeling "a lack of strong pedagogic support." This was more so for "students from disadvantaged/marginalized spaces" (Devkota, 2021, p. 145). According to Kunwar et al. (2020), there were challenges regarding technology integration, support for students, equity, curriculum and pedagogy, access to OTL, and stakeholders' attitudes (pp. 208-215). Public campuses, lacking clear policies and infrastructures, were unwilling to implement online classes. And there were limited motivating factors for faculties and students (Panthee, 2020). In addition, pedagogic practices were identified as giving rise to health issues such as depression, which underscored urgent need for psychological counseling for students (Shrestha et al., 2022). Considering these problems, R. Paudel (2021) wrote that online education was "not yet a necessity in Nepal." Amid this, issues of academic misconduct, such as cheating or plagiarism, also increased (Pandey, 2021; Sangroula, 2021); and this seriously called for ethics or netiquettes in OTL and assessments.

Against this backdrop, OP during the pandemic was taken in a number of ways. Initially, it was identified as a new (Paudel,

2021) or recent phenomenon (Gurung et al., 2022); and therefore a challenge, considering unpreparedness and lack of necessary technologies at all levels of education, excluding well-equipped institutions and stakeholders (Chaudhary et al., 2022; Thagunna, 2020). Alongside, it was a forceful shift/ paradigm that lacked proper course designs, suitable pedagogies, and sound ICT infrastructure (Baral, 2022; Kunwar et al., 2022). Gradually, it became a new normal and game changer in teaching-learning and assessments (Acharya et al., 2021; Gautam & Gautam, 2021). Dawadi et al. (2020) viewed education during COVID-19 and beyond as needing to be reimagined as a community-embedded practice (p. 3). Later, it emerged as a new field of inquiry that sought seriousness in many fronts (Gautam & Gautam, 2021; Shrestha et al., 2020) while many stakeholders were taking it as heavily influenced by conventional teaching-learning or pedagogies, also in ELT (Laudari & Maher, 2019; Shrestha et al., 2022), or as essentially not different from conventional modes and systems in several aspects of education (Sangroula, 2021). These intersecting local aspects, issues, and perceptions, including OTL's makeshift nature and reliance on conventional measures of education and pedagogy, helped me see OP as being more or less (cyclically) affected by PP and conventional modes. This further led me to global literature on OP or OTL and other pedagogic influences from the past and the COVID situation, for they also helped shape the cycle of local pedagogic practices and discourses during the pandemic.

Intersecting Concepts from the West/ Global Literature

In the global literature also, OTL or OP has dynamically enriching cyclical relations, either directly or indirectly, with PP and

conventional pedagogic principles or measures of education. Yet it is not pictured as a makeshift in global practices. Broadly, it is part of online education and involves Web 2.0 technologies, their uses, and the knowledge and skills associated with them. A range of online tools and apps, both simple and complex, are used in it; and its practice is influenced by how it is used in the connected society, with newer innovations (Anderson, 2007, p. 5). To effectively practice it, users “must be able to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of all the tools available” to them so that they can match “the appropriate tool and activity” to achieve their learning or teaching objectives (Dawley, 2007, p. 3). Similarly, proper planning and policies, reliable technology, strong connectivity, suitable ICT-based course design and assessment, and time management, among others, contribute greatly to it, to its being effective and manageable (Cross & Pollk, 2018).

Of late, it has been enriched with Web 3.0 technologies, such as intelligent search engines and 3D visualization; and with platforms like ‘Deschool’, Web 3.0 technologies have drastically decentralized learning environment where students are no longer bound by the formal constraints imposed by school or university administrators (Driscoll, 2022). However, according to Ko and Rossen (2004), it has to be taken as involving both synchronous and asynchronous modes (as cited in Dawley, 2007, p. 3) and cannot be severed from asynchronous learning environment, particularly from human resources, learning/ enabling resources (e.g., books/ e-books and their content knowledge, followed by pedagogical knowledge and skills received and developed from the past) and technological resources (Anastasiades, 2008, p. 35) or newer innovations, such as the free promotional Google Meet.

More importantly, the rising over-reliance on technology in online education/ OP has been critiqued as detrimental to quality teaching-learning. Nichols (2011) observes that “an overall educational framework is still missing” in online education, which calls for “a synergy between pedagogy and technology” (pp. 322-323). This reminds of Postman’s (1993) warning that we are increasingly inclining to be “tools of our tools,” to blindly take orders from technology (pp. 3-5). Therefore, OP’s effectiveness is a towering concern (Pelz, 2010, p. 103), which should now place importance also on inventive abilities, ethics, use of sixth sense, and prompt thinking (Tirri & Toom, 2020, p. 1-7). Similarly, Serdyukova and Serdyukov (2014, para. 2) caution that in the name of “embracing new educational format and technologies” we should not undermine “fundamental pedagogic research.”

This brings us to what the term ‘pedagogy’ actually stands for. Its concept has been defined variously. Shulman (1987) takes it as a vitally associated factor in his “categories of the knowledge base” that involve “content knowledge,” “general pedagogical knowledge,” “curriculum knowledge,” “pedagogical content knowledge,” “knowledge of learners,” “knowledge of educational contexts,” and “knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds” (p. 8). Similarly, a trio of “knowledge about subject matter, students, and self” is what McDonald (1992, p. 27) emphasizes, implying that there should be a harmony between teaching pedagogy and learning pedagogy. Teachers, according to van Manen (1999), need to be reflexively aware of what influences they are exerting upon their students (p. 19). Therefore, pedagogy is the combination of what, how, and why instructors/ learners do what they do, which also involves assessments

Further, scholars of pedagogy suggest practicing (situated) praxes. Watkins and Mortimore (1999) put it as “any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another” (p. 3), while Alexander (2001) goes a little beyond this, yet only from teachers’ point of view: “Pedagogy is the domain of discourse with which one needs to engage if one is to make sense of the act of teaching” (p. 513). Drawing on Freire’s radical model of education, Leach and Moon (2008) highlight the dynamic process in it, which is informed by critical theories, beliefs, and dialogues (as cited in Niemi, 2018, p. 3), and Kumaravadivelu (2001) stresses more on context-sensitivity in pedagogic explorations.

Apart from its links to the above dimensions of ‘pedagogy’, online education/ OP also has its important share in PP. PP, a makeshift way of teaching and learning dating back to the times of Spanish Flu, involves various means of education such as radio, telephone, TV, and newspapers (McCracken, 2020). During the pandemic, it became part of OP or vice versa and involved “developing an understanding of ourselves and how we teach” and/ or learn in times of crisis (Smith & Hornsby, 2020, pp. 1-2). However, OP was not identified so much as PP in developed countries, primarily because of their long-established online programs (Gentles & Leask, 2021; SEHS-KU, 2020). But in certain cases, say of England, remote online education during the pandemic was “a partial substitute” (Stokes & Lewis, 2021, p. 2). In the US also, access to distance learning was not uniform for a few reasons (SHES-KU, 2020). Yet OTL or OP in developed countries did not appear

as a forceful phenomenon. However, like in Nepal, global experiences of these crisis pedagogies (including OP) do highlight the increased need for (1) more student-centered, interactive, reflective, and healthful teaching-learning (Li, 2022), (2) building futuristically needful infrastructures, and (3) improving professional development of teachers and teacher educators (Martin AO, 2020).

Clearly, the above forms of pedagogies mutually inform one another and are more or less interdependent, cyclically and/ or dynamically, both in practice and discourse—more so in times of educational crisis. Evidently, PP was (heavily) supported by OP. Both PP and OP were also seen in relation to principles of and discourses on (conventional) pedagogies. In Nepal’s case, PP (as part of OP) also revealed the makeshift nature of OP. Their relations can be visualized as presented in Figure 1.

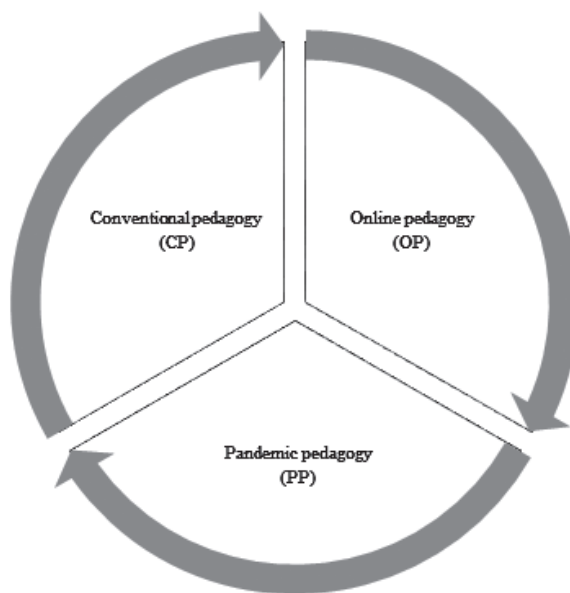


Figure 1: *Cyclic influences on different forms of pedagogies as seen in the initial phase of the present research*

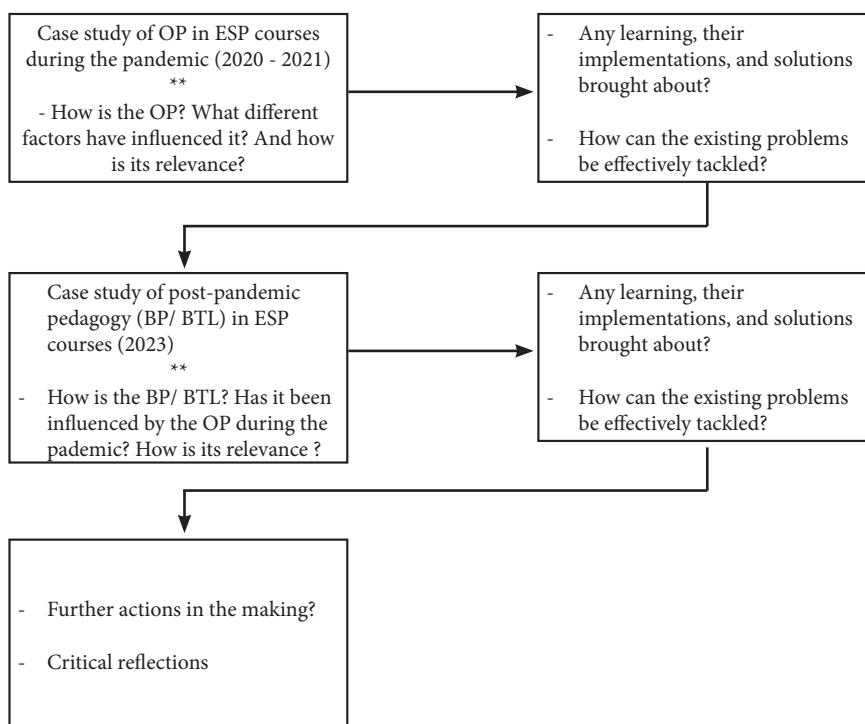
Research Design

This study is inspired by constructivist and social constructionist paradigms. I employ a combination of two case studies (pandemic and post-pandemic pedagogic practices) and action research (AR), for such approach effectively helps solve (a) classroom problem(s) with extending critical issues by first helping to explore, describe and/ or understand it/ them in greater detail (Bondía & Gracia, 2021, pp. 2-3). For methodological clarity regarding the use of AR, I lean against informal AR (Beck, 2017), which broadly meets—as realized in this research in embedded ways—three criteria of AR: dialogical and cyclical nature [via (re-)reflections and refinement of thoughts, decisions, and actions, etc.], agentic criticality, and improvement—by way of “constantly building on the positive features of current practice” (pp. 37-40, 43). The reasons behind using this very form of AR is that it supported our situations: We were facing one after another emerging problem in the pedagogic shifts and transitions, and we, as teachers, had to either immediately decide and act on pressing pedagogic problems or collectively (mostly with students) decide and act—to effect immediate or future pedagogic improvements. This involved both research in/ with action and action in/ with research (Franco, 2005, p. 494)—as already embedded in our practices/ natural activities (Feldman & Atkin, 1995) or meta-practices (Kemmis, 2009, p. 467).

This blended approach draws on the aims of both case study (CS) and AR, which are mutually helpful. CS aims for in-depth understanding of a “contemporary phenomenon” in real-life context/s (Yin, 2009, p. 2) or holistic description and analysis of the phenomenon

being studied (Merriam, 1985, p. 206) while AR aims for, among others, helping teachers improve educational contexts (Chen et al., 2018; Elliott, 1991) or pedagogic practices (Niemi, 2018, p. 2), by encouraging them to practically promote long-term, responsible, and reflective teaching (Burns, 1998, p. 3). With two cases to study, this also draws on Stake’s (1995) collective-instrumental case study approach—to see “multiple realities” by probing into “issues dominant” (pp. 16, 64). Such an amalgam of interrelated concepts of CS with no epistemological clash is well-justified by Yazan (2015, pp. 135, 141).

By design, the inquiry does not involve large-scale case studies and is informed by McDonough and McDonough’s (2014) observation that “it is particularly at the more ‘micro’ end of the spectrum” that case studies “are arguably most appropriate for teacher-generated research” (p. 203). In particular, I follow Yin’s (1984) suggestion, ensuring that I carefully scrutinized and articulated at the outset pertinent research issues and boundaries of the case/s—to make the study focused, detailed and rigorous (as cited in Tobin, 2010, p. 288). Together, I employ Bassey’s (1999) story-telling and picture-drawing approach, which involves “narrative stories and descriptive accounts” of educational events or programs with “careful analysis” (p. 58). I follow this blend because even narrative case studies inescapably involve descriptions (McDonough & McDonough, 2014, pp. 60, 230). To show relational coherence involved in these two case studies that have housed informal AR, I present each CS findings in succession, with outcomes of AR embedded within.



As is clear from the chart above, each CS did not simply exist, were never fully static. They also involved evolving chains and/ or cycles of events and actions typical of informal AR. In particular, the functional aspects—if not the nature—of these pedagogies variously involved individual and collective efforts and actions for pedagogic improvements, which is both palpable and visible (in embedded, implicit, and, in some cases, explicit ways) in the findings section.

Context, Setting and Participants

Voluntary consent was gained from all the participants, whose anonymity has been strictly maintained. During the pandemic and extended lockdown, the Ethical Review Committee at Kathmandu University (KU) was not functioning, therefore to capture the

‘live’ experiences of the students, I strictly abided by the ethical principles of the Review Committee at KU.

Context, Setting and Participants

In November 2020, I, as a teacher of undergraduate level first semester General English (GE) course at KUSL, came to know that several of my students experienced challenges in the OP being practiced. I discussed this to my colleague, who taught Managerial Communication (MC) in the third semester. He also shared similar experiences reported by his students. This drove me to embark on this inquiry, taking participants from these two classes. First started as a case study, this inquiry later embraced AR in the process, following our reflections on teaching-learning, the data received, and subsequent individual and collective efforts

for improvements in our pedagogic practices.

There were 21 female and 19 male students in the class of GE (intercultural communication plus academic writing) and there were 20 female and 21 male students in my colleague's class of MC. The semester started in September 2020 and lasted until February 2021. During this time, these students took their classes online, mainly through Google Meet, Google Class, and Moodle, from their respective homes in different districts. Other tools that were mostly used were phone calls, Facebook Messenger, Gmail, and Moodle.

The data for the first CS were collected from December 2020 to February 2021. For the second CS (conducted also as a step and follow-up in AR—primarily to see pedagogical transitions and critical needs as perceived by students), data were collected in January 2023—from among the students taking the same subjects (as above) in the first and the third semesters (October 2022 – March 2023) at the same institution. The school, during this post-pandemic time, was gradually shifting to BP/ BTL. The first semester class had 23 female and 20 male students and the third semester class had 22 female and 19 male students.

Table 1: *First CS participants*

Details	Participants
- Survey participants	36 (GE) + 29 (MC) = 65
- Email interview participants (P1 to P5 from GE and P6 to P10 from MC) / with multiple follow-ups	4 + 1 (GE) + 4 + 1 (MC) = 10
- Teacher triangulation	1

Table 2: *Second CS participants*

Details	Participants
- FGDs participants (fgdP1–fgdP6 and fgdP13–fgdP17 from GE and others from MC)	12 + 10 = 22
- Teacher triangulation	2

Instrumentation, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Initially, after briefing about the research issue via Google Meet, I conducted a virtual survey (see Table 1) to see whether or not the students saw the relevance of OP and wanted it as part of the conventional mode. This also helped me frame interview questions. 'Email interview' proved most appropriate, providing the participants with sufficient time to reflect and respond in a risk-free manner (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). Later, whenever in doubt or confusion, follow-ups (through phone, Google Meet, etc.) were also conducted. Similarly, to corroborate certain data from the participants, triangulations (one over phone; two in person) with their English teachers were also conducted. And, all the triangulations and FGDs (1 + 1 hours) were recorded and safely stored.

For data analysis, I used the six steps in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis (TA), which is an appropriate and powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a data set (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). For data coding, I relied on Ryan and Bernard's (2003) suggestions by using the following four techniques: repetitions, similarities and differences, transitions, and missing data (What is missing here? Why? Power relations, etc.).

Data saturation: For the first CS, following the survey, I recruited 8 email participants and later added 2 more but nothing new came from the last 2 participants. Similarly, for the second CS, I conducted two FGDs, first with 12 participants and second with 10 participants. Except for doubts (from 2 students) and concerns (from 3 students) regarding institutional readiness and investments to effect further practical changes by utilizing the present research knowledge, nothing new came from the second FGD.

Prolonged engagement (Bassey, 1999): To clear certain confusions, and later to keep track of any pedagogical challenges and transitions, I conducted several follow-ups with the email participants—followed by semi-structured interviews and follow-ups with 3 colleagues for cross-verification and pedagogical reflections respectively. These instances also helped me progressively refine, of course in light of both primary and secondary data, the conceptual framework used in this study.

In addition, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestions: investigator triangulation, methodologic triangulation (multiple methods and strategies), and thick description (for rich description). The first involved taking help from a colleague for data coding separately. The colleague came up with one additional theme— 'initial tracklessness', which I had initially kept only as a category within the theme 'hindering factors'.

Findings

Initial Tracklessness

Amid the clamor of educational disruption following confirmations of COVID positive cases in Nepal, majority of the participants, like their friends, felt anxious and saw unpreparedness and makeshift mentality in many fronts of their university environment. To begin with, initially they did not receive timely informational updates from the institution and teachers, which made them feel confused and trackless. Following the announcement of the first lockdown and university closure, many students packed their bags in rush and stress and headed towards their respective hometowns; whereas others stayed back in dilemmas. Meanwhile, they received the first notice for online class, which most of the participants described as entirely new for both teachers and students. So they talked to their friends and teachers about how they could proceed further with this unusual mode of learning. Initially, though full of curiosities, they found the OP mode quite clumsy, irritating (primarily because of recurrent power outage and/ or weak internet connectivity), and time and effort demanding—also in GE and MC classes. They, like their teachers, were curiously figuring out what in the OP mode was similar to and different from conventional teaching and learning. They noted their teachers' long pauses, wonders, such as "why it's not working..." (P9) or gestures of frustration. Three participants noted that some of their older teachers were navigating the new space with difficulty, lacking certain ICT skills and sometimes exhibiting lack of preparation, and most teachers were still equipped with lecturing method and discussions. Yet some presented pdf books, navigating highlighted sections in them. But this was not easy for

many of them to follow and was stressful. It was only after a couple of weeks or so that teachers gradually shifted to PowerPoint, with ample preparations and suitable presentation of contents, and to activities and collaborative projects.

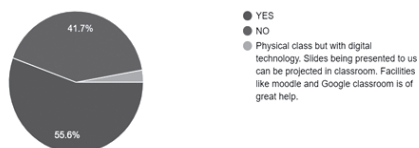
OP's Relevance

“Personally, I have found the switch to online mode not only time-relevant but also required for innovative and autonomous learning...” (P5)

The initial surveys showed the respondents' mixed responses regarding whether they saw OP's usefulness and liked it to continue as part of conventional mode in future. In class of GE, out of 40 students, 20 voted for 'Yes', 15 voted for 'No', and 1 went for 'Other' option. However, in class of MC, out of 41 students, 16 voted for 'No', 13 voted for 'Yes', and no one went for 'Other' (see the second chart below). However, as time passed, especially after power cuts were significantly reduced in the later part of 2020, their preference for it further grew.

QUESTION: Do you think the online pedagogy [online teaching and learning principles and practices, including the use of any resources, tools and methods] being practiced at KUSL during COVID-19 should continue as part of conventional teaching and learning English language and communication even in future? [Note: You can either go for YES or NO options or you can choose to write your own answer against the third option, i.e., 'OTHER']

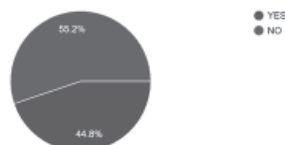
36 responses



Figures 3 and 4: Initial survey responses from the classes of GE and MC

QUESTION: Do you think the online pedagogy [online teaching and learning principles and practices, including the use of any resources, tools and methods] being practiced at KUSL during COVID-19 should continue as part of conventional teaching and learning English language and communication even in future? [Note: You can either go for YES or NO options or you can choose to write your own answer against the third option, i.e., 'OTHER']

29 responses



Of course, the new space of learning had other problems too. Yet the majority of students, including the email participants, found OP's relevance. The participants projected this through two categories: *pandemic scenario* and *suitability*. The first category involved threats of Corona viruses, which caused fear, health consciousness, and carefulness in them. The second one highlighted OP's necessity for age-suitable education. OP, according to 7 participants, involved not only more liberal space but also more practical approach with much emphasis on ICT skills development. Also, 5 participants preferred incorporation of OP's beneficial elements in physical mode in future, which stood as a sub-theme in this branch of abstraction. They also realized that it can be highly useful in times of bandas/ political strikes, which are commonplace in Nepal.

Facilitating Factors

“The links to articles and audiovisuals provided to us saved my time. They were written so cogently and to the point. Earlier, I used to randomly search on Google. Now I know about some good online platforms and have understood the value of authentic reading materials.” - P5

With its problems aside, OP had many factors that augmented better teaching and learning

and other pedagogic practices during the pandemic. Within this theme, four sub-themes, namely, (a) empathy, flexibility, and social support (primarily from teachers, friends and family, and marginally from the institution), (b) supportive features and qualities associated with online technologies, (c) learners' own excitement, and (d) increased (re-)sources of learning stood prominent. Similarly, there were four categories of codes related to OP: (a) (improving) human aspect, (b) institutional support, (c) economic aspect, and (d) technology-enhanced and enabling experiences.

Within human aspect in OP, the participants found a number of easing qualities. To begin with, empathy, flexibility, and social support towards them gradually increased when immediate human agencies (teachers, friends, family members, etc.) realized how technological barriers (such as recurrent power outages), fatigue resulting from technology use, and academic workloads, among others, created in them a range of stressors such as restlessness, tension, anxieties, and sickness. Often, their friends and teachers provided them with quick help when sought, even in late hours, and when necessary, deadlines were extended. Similarly, as 5 participants noted, they, like their classmates, benefited from collaborative and/ or collective learning—more so when faced with their lack of multimedia skills. Care and support from family members also played an important role in their learning experiences. Besides, teachers, after listening to the students, cyclically tried to improve other pedagogic practices and communication (to avoid confusions resulting from their short text messages via informal means). For example, they actively supported the students' concerns for more liberal exams for the end-semester assessments, which previously were worth of 50% marks. They helped bring

this percentage down to 30% with complete teacher-autonomy over preparing questions and administering exams in multiple ways, such as in forms of home assignments, collaborative (online) projects and flexible online exams (for which students got 20 minutes more time than usual). Even in class, they practiced, alongside lecturing, learner autonomy-supportive teaching, because of which the students increasingly got to choose projects of their interests. Further, their classes were more planned and organized and involved descriptive teaching, discussions, experience sharing, fun-filled activities, and group collaborations. "Collaboration among friends comparatively increased and in a way eased our anxieties," wrote P2. Similarly, P7 wrote: "Visual representation of ideas/ contents made learning much easier, helped in better understanding..." 6 other participants noted that they both benefitted from and increasingly resorted to this approach. Even the initial orientation they received from the teachers on ethical use of virtual academic space and its contents was practically helpful, as per 3 participants. On another front, their own excitements in the newer platforms of the virtual space significantly contributed to their actively focused, engaged, and curious learning. And, most of these qualities more or less helped reduce the stress they were going through.

Second, though amid some rigidity resulting from authority, institutional support involved more autonomy for teachers for flexible semester plans, classroom activities, and assessment designs, some free Internet data packages, and some technical orientation on OP (first for teachers, and for students via teachers). The institution was more rigid on maintaining the conventional end-semester assessment initially. Third, OP economically stood favorable. There was no need for the

students to travel to school, which saved their 2 to 4 hours per day, apart from travel cost. This also made it hassle free. P1 connected this to learning situations when he was able to have “peaceful composure.” 6 other participants noted that it offered cost effective online tools and educational resources such as books, papers, and audiovisuals.

Finally, technology-enhanced and enabling experiences made OP a promoter of better teaching and learning. According to 6 participants, different online tools, such as the promotional Google Meet, its recording facility, and Google Classroom, not only afforded them much needed flexibility in the learning environment, which came with numerous helpful features and teachers’ and students’ agentic qualities, but also reduced their stresses—via their user-friendly features and the ease of use and quick collaboration supported by them. In this flexibility, as put by 6 participants, the students did not have to follow rigid schedules, and this augmented self-paced teaching and learning, the latter of which was long-lasting and more enabling, as put by P6.

When not disrupted, OP made it possible to have easy and quick access to numerous online contents and resources and provided easy storage and retrieval. For example, as per 4 participants, the recorded classes were a big relief. They did not have to fear about losing anything, and this interestingly made “undivided attention in class” possible, as put by P2.

More importantly, by supporting both synchronous and asynchronous learning, both lecturing and discussions/ reflective interactions, OP’s tools and practices increasingly and beneficially promoted the following learning types: visual/ descriptive,

independent/ autonomous, personalized, creative, collaborative, practical, and customized. This was something unique about OP, for it significantly differed from conventional one-way lecturing. Further, as per 4 participants, the exposure to some multimedia-supported learning had the effect of encouraging them to improve their multimedia skills, leading them to better documentations/ presentations and growing self-confidence. With its evolving nature and local needs, OP also proved itself as futuristically empowering.

Hindering Factors

“I feel the university’s role in the pedagogy is very limited, if not next to nil.

Professors are doing what they can, but the institution also must have its presence in making

this mode a bit more effective... For example, we need an online library that can cater to our needs.” – P3

“Though a great relief, the pedagogy is not as flexible as is being talked about. For example, we do not get to choose assignments.” – P2

Like in any pedagogy, OP also had its drawbacks, and the participants experienced a number of barriers and difficulties, which, as seen in the previous theme, were tackled differently. Within this theme, there were three sub-themes: (a) problems in/ with educational technologies and teaching/ learning environment, (b) ‘health front’ issues, and (c) self-limitations.

Teaching and learning environment, together with OP’s technologies, covered the following five categories: In *technological/ state-level barriers*, issues of irritatingly recurrent power

outages, weak Internet/ Wi-Fi, old and slow devices, app-related fatigue/ glitches, and noise/ screeches did not support smooth learning. In particular, the first two reasons made it difficult for the students to collaborate. As per 3 participants, these issues also resulted in monotony or boredom. In institutional barriers, lack of proper infrastructures and (continued) makeshift/ ritualistic mentality and practices stood recurrently prominent. With insufficient internet data package and lack of online library, it was hard to manage for some participants. Similarly, lack of timely information, training and orientation, unsuitable/ traditional course design with no inclusion of multimedia skills, and conventional assessment modality posed further difficulties or confusions. Further, this was followed by nagging and negotiations in some cases. The third category—*issues at home*—involved occasional or intermittently noisy environment at home and lack of proper space for online class, as per 3 participants. 2 other participants noted that they could not go outside (frequently) for exercise or refreshment, for fear of the viruses, and felt “stale” or “sick.” The fourth category—*barriers/ issues in/ posed by virtual classes/ teachers*—included the following sub-categories: (a) nature of teaching/ teachers’ makeshift attitudes and practices and (b) connections among approaches/ in-class actions and consequences. According to 5 participants, initially there was a lot of one-way teaching/ communication in which teachers did not/ could not integrate ICT skills or lacked preparations. Though two-way communication was also practiced, its use was repeatedly limited to interactions among a few students and the teacher. “Students’ hesitation or shyness should also be counted in this regard,” wrote P4. Further, OP involved some lingering as to deciding on switching from summative approach to more and more

of formative learning (including process pedagogy) and assessments, which were the real need of the pandemic times, according to P9. Lack of timely update of information or reading materials was another problem, and so was the case with sending (or uploading) reading materials via multiple platforms, such as email, Google Class, and Moodle, because doing so caused distractions. Teachers’ short and informal messages via different means such as mobile texts or Facebook Messenger, on the other hand, caused confusions. Further, there was schedule pressure, followed by lack of time, that resulted from a number of things such as workloads and class postponements. Similarly, according to 5 participants, repeated teaching approaches and activities, such as lecturing and collaborative/ relay writing on Google Docs, caused monotony. P6 wrote, “Mentimeter quizzes are fun-filled but feel below our age, and when repeatedly used, really irritate us.” He further observed that repeated use of fun activities via Google Docs, blogging or YouTube videos cannot help make classes interactive in real sense, because “they block the real human interaction, especially with the teacher.” 2 participants co-related marks reduction for citation mistakes to lack of ‘ample’ orientation to citation rules. The final category—peer level barriers, as per 4 participants, included two issues: taking extra burden in helping friends out or taking the whole responsibility in collaborative works when technology did not support and the fact that a few students could not learn (much) when smart collaborators rushed to complete the projects.

Second and third sub-themes also stood prominent. Within *health front issues*, 5 participants noted cases of fatigue/ stress resulting from heavy/ prolonged exposure to technologies/ on-screen reading and writing. Other issues lack of rest (owing to classes

in unusual hours), personal time, lack of psychological help/ scaffolding, and irritation, which further added to the already existing anxieties. Third sub-theme revealed that learners themselves can be barriers to desirable/ fruitful online learning. Their reflections included the following: (a) lack of proper or ample knowledge and skills of ICT and online technologies, as revealed by 4 participants, (b) OP as “easy meal” (meaning that they did not have to work hard/ could pretend to work hard), (c) self-caused distractions on the Internet, (d) carelessness about plagiarism and lessons learned, (e) laziness resulting from disordered state of life, overdependence on teachers’ slides and lecturing, and/ or lack of stimuli, (f) and making excuses and procrastination. Interestingly, non-graded assignments caused laziness in P8.

(Continuity of) Transitions and Spaces for Improvement

Changing perceptions of and preference for OP were caused by a number of favorable transitions brought about in OP’s different dimensions, including technologies, teaching-learning approaches and practices, and assessments. Some of these transitions are already clear from the embedded/ referential treatments under different themes and their categories above. These transitions, as seen by the participants, primarily resulted from the levels of or from (a) learners and teachers, (b) social/ moral support (from friends and teachers), (c) family, (d) state-managed technology, and (e) the institution. However, learners’ agencies, advocacies, and negotiations with teachers and the institution (via teachers) stood out in this regard.

First, following the solution of recurrent power outage, online classes were less disturbed and students enjoyed teaching and learning

and collaborative works fairly more. These collaborations (and other social support from their teachers, friends and relatives) helped them (further) refine, among others, their writing and ICT skills. Second, after realizing what barriers and stressors the students were going through, teachers, according to 6 participants, became increasingly empathetic and flexible and promptly guided them when approached even in late hours and often offered extra classes to compensate postponed classes and learning loss. Flexibility further increased when students’ voices regarding the lack of institutional facilities, lack of OP-suitable audiovisual contents, traditional assessment modality, and the issues of monotony in teaching and learning were heard, first by teachers, and then, to some extent, by the institution. This resulted in, among others, teachers’ initiative for free internet data package (initially 8GB; later 10GB), unofficial inclusion of some audiovisual contents, more graded assignments/ 70% internal evaluation (from 50%), removal of scores (5 points) for attendance (owing to impracticality; replaced with individual or collaborative creative assignments), and variety in teaching and learning approaches and activities. As noted by 6 participants, the teachers gradually shifted from lecturing to various kinds of learning, including descriptive, collaborative, and autonomously agentic, as dealt with in the *‘facilitating factors’* above. In/ for the descriptive kind, they also emphasized not missing out key steps or ideas in the name of decoration, primarily to address the issue of ‘contents lost in decoration’ that was observed by both teachers and students. This combined shift gave them not only a sense of better learning but also practical ideas for preparing presentations. Also, the teachers increasingly cared for students’ agency and autonomy. P9 wrote, “Autonomy for students fairly increased.” Further, the teachers also

shifted from repeating assigning the same types of activities (particularly Mentimeter quizzes and collaborative writing and editing on Google Docs) or assignments (particularly essay writing) to allowing them to do something different, autonomously desirable, and/ or contextually suitable. Their planning and preparation, on the other hand, made classes more organized and structured, which marked a clear transition from the initial “lackadaisical”/ “make-do” classes. Teachers’ and students’ cyclic reflections over how they could improve teaching-learning in the OP mode also consequently helped shape or foresee important concerns in BP/ BTL. On another front, teachers also practiced strictness or controlling measures. They penalized for plagiarized contents and some cases of fake excuses regarding assignment completion. They did not always provide slides to discourage students’ overreliance on them, but provided inputs for revision prior to presentation and/ or evaluation. This, as per P1, was new and helpful move.

What followed these transitions were ‘*spaces for improvement*’, the final theme that emerged from (a) technological, (b) institutional, and (c) ‘for / in-class’ spaces for improvement. As 4 participants noted, the ongoing pedagogic practices were not exploiting the full potential of what OP’s technologies could actually offer. Following the solution of recurrent power outage, what remained long-lasting problems were poor/ fluctuating internet connectivity, insufficient internet data package, the dire need of online library and other suitable subscriptions (such as JSTOR), and the need of plagiarism checking tools for teachers. Institutional investments in these areas, including multimedia training and orientation, also remained more or less overlooked. After the unofficial (but suitable) inclusion of some audiovisual contents in the

syllabi, the subject committee (SC) members, even when informed of the need to revise the syllabi, could not do anything throughout the pandemic, blaming the slow process between SC and the Academic Council. On another front, while clarity in communication (from the institution and teachers) was fairly improving (also with timely updates of educational materials), there was still the need of “more of two-way interaction” (P6). Regarding this, P1, like 2 other participants, suggested including more “ice-breakers” (fun activities) and both individual (which was lacking) and group attention/ interactions to ensure fruitful engagement. But in a follow-up, these participants agreed that the vary size of their class and the wall of the screen prevented individual attention and interactions in OP. Yet they, like few other participants, stressed on introducing further use of variety in teaching approaches and activities, in-class/ app-use netiquettes (to avoid unnecessary noise, confusion, unethical behavior, etc.), and a bit longer break time (from 5 minutes to 10-15 minutes) in their classes that ran for two hours. Interestingly, 3 participants noted that OP needed to have equal flexibility also for students, as for teachers, and 2 other participants wrote that there was a need for more scheduled activities—also to avoid pretexts/ procrastinations from teachers. More importantly, what 6 participants noted was the need for including in learning contents and empowering both teachers and students with necessary multimedia skills.

The Case of BP/ BTL

The collective realization of OP’s usefulness took us to see how it could be useful in/ as part of BP/ BTL and how it actually influenced BP/ BTL. The FGD participants’ perceptions of BP/ BTL involved the following themes: (a) relevance of BP/ BTL, (b) (continuity of) transitions, and (c) spaces for improvement.

Relevance

This theme was suggested by two categories of codes: *suitability* and *helpful experiences*. Most participants, even amid makeshift practices, saw BP/ BTL as age-and-modern education suitable, found it useful for promoting beneficial aspects of learning from OP, lived its usefulness (by switching to OP) in between or in times of long vacations (Dashain and Tihar) and difficult situations, saw more practicality and interesting qualities (see below) in each of its sides (face-to-face and online), and preferred it more—when compared to OP/ PP and conventional pedagogic practices.

(Continuity of) Transitions

“Even older teachers who mostly gave lectures in the online mode during the pandemic have now fully adapted themselves to visual teaching and learning, which is great.” — fgdP10

As per most participants, BP/ BTL, propelled by the post-pandemic times, has brought with it some sudden changes. It has significantly helped recover learners’ mental wellbeing that suffered under the stressful teaching-learning and monotony during the pandemic. Comparatively, OP involved less interactions because of several issues, including technological ones, learners’ personal nature, “unwillingness to disturb” (P6) or even “it’s so easy meal” (P10) attitude. In contrast, BP/ BTL is affording more interactions. This is because, to quote fgdP17, “we all, including teachers, open up more in physical classes. We joke, we laugh, we make fun, and this was often not the case in ritualistic online classes.” According to fgdP8, such environment eases her speaking anxieties and encourages her to interact more and contribute to classroom discussions.

Further, fgdP18 experienced “increased attention and eagerness to have one’s say” in physical classes and fgdP15 experienced “the university premise” as having “full of real learning stimuli” and “fun”. Similarly, fgdP2 and fgdP11 found the physical side of BP/ BTL more empowering, for it provided “real” space that worked far better for collaborative discussions with their friends. However, fgdP16, an “introvert by nature,” found online communication—the other side of BP/ BTL—more easing and enabling, for he could/ can open up more in online communications. According to majority of the participants, the online side of BP/ BTL is particularly useful for safe and reliable storage, quick retrieval and communication, online collaboration/ help, and online classes in difficult situations. Similarly, most participants said they are now friends with their teachers on social media, because of which it has been quite easier and quicker for them to seek help from their teachers, who, as most of them described, are often helpful.

Employing OP’s features (e.g., of online tools and their practical functions) and qualities (e.g., positive or curious teaching-learning attitudes, agentic presence, empathetic care) in BP/ BTL has immensely helped both learners and teachers in a number of ways, according to most FGD participants, and later as per teacher triangulations. Now with the (continuity of) various helpful shifts, teaching-learning, including planning, organization and preparation for classes, has been much more structured and easy-to-go. As per 9 participants, their English teachers first, as before, provide them with reading/ watching materials, such as papers, YouTube videos, notes, and model questions, via email or Google Class, and ask them to come prepared for discussions in the physical class. In terms of storing and retrieving these materials also, it has been

far easier—unlike in conventional physical classes in which, if missed to note down from the board, everything would be lost, according to fgdP22. Also, students can submit certain assignments online. fgdP10 said that he had not seen teachers using PowerPoint prior to the pandemic, and now they (including the older ones who were slow to adapt to OP during the pandemic) are using it professionally in most classes. Another continuity of shift—that of reading and referring to up-to-date academic and other contents published online—was highlighted by 7 participants. Interestingly, a majority of participants noted that their prior experiences from OP and their teachers’ inputs, followed by their careful practices, helped them cite materials with proper or increased understanding of citations. Last but not the least, most teaching-learning types and methods practiced in OP still continue, according to 6 participants, and this continuity “values the worth of different needs and spaces (Teacher3) and “variety” in teaching-learning and assessments (fgdP1). However, fgdP1, along with 4 others, also noted that lecturing method, together with group discussions and interactions, is also slowly gaining momentum, as until the first few months in the practices of OP.

Spaces for Improvement

“We are saying we have shifted to blended mode. However, we are practicing it even more as a makeshift when compared to OP during the pandemic, for it barely involves 10 to 15 percent online teaching-learning and is way behind its standard global practices. So, there is a strong need for practicing it in its mainstream form.” – fgdP4

Within this theme, two sub-themes emerged: (a) makeshift attitudes to and ritualistic

practices of BP/ BTL and (b) need for gradual improvements and caution in/ for online educational/ pedagogic practices at different levels (teachers, students, and institution, plus technological). To begin with, according to 16 participants, institutional role/ investment is minimum in BP/ BTL. Though the institution has recently introduced Digital Boards in one of its new buildings, following occasional use of *Moodle* in the pre-pandemic times, most FGD participants mentioned that there is no clear long-term vision regarding development of online resources. For example, there is still no online library, and the lack of which makes it difficult to find certain new and important books that are not available in print. However, the institution has provided access to *Lexis Nexis* and *EBSCO* Host. But this access works only within the university premise, where the Internet connectivity is often slow and down. Similarly, 10 out of 22 FGD participants mentioned that they seriously need advanced multimedia skills, not only in ESP courses but also in other legal/ managerial subjects. According to these participants, revising curricula/ courses (including that of ESP subjects) in time—by incorporating these skills—is a must—also for better practices of BP/ BTL; and, as per fgdP5, lack of care in this regard reflects sheer continuity of makeshift/ ritualistic practices. Further, 3 participants did not like the school’s reversion to conventionally rigid end-semester exams. They maintained that in-semester evaluation should carry at least up to 70 percent scores. Interestingly, 2 participants in the second FGD expressed their experiences-informed doubts about the institution’s readiness as well as willingness to utilize the knowledge generated from the present research for practical changes in immediate future. Participants also saw spaces for improvements in both teachers’ and students’ levels: 4 participants noted that regular in-class critical reflections on

pedagogic practices is slowly and unfavorably decreasing in BP/ BTL—when compared to practices in OP. Similarly, teachers and students, according to 7 participants, also need to individually further hone their ICT skills needed for BP/ BTL. 5 other participants noted that they now feel like addicted to Internet use (mostly at home), and this has caused a decrease in in-depth reading or learning or has given way to increased reliance on easily accessible online tips and answers. This decrease in serious reading was what fgdP13 further revealed thus: “I took snapshots of the slides presented in class. I read the main points and neglected doing further research and making notes, as suggested by the teacher. And consequently, I could not do well in the exam.” Lack of feedforwarding and easing/ uplifting classroom environment is another problem, as expressed in the following quote.

“Even in BP/ BTL, teachers are not seen encouraging the silent (not weaker!) students to participate in interactions. On the other hand, there is generally a looming fear of feedback/ criticism or fun-making, mostly from students. This should give way to feedforwarding.” – fgdP17

Triangulations: Teachers’ Reflections

Remaining in constant contact, we the teachers regularly discussed the challenges faced by our students and ourselves in the OP mode, developing agreeable ways that could help us improve our pedagogic practices. One of our repeated concerns involved how we could make our students beat the monotony they experienced (as reported by some) in our classroom practices or collaborative works they did. *Teacher 2* noted that his students, however, had not spoken about the issue of monotony directly with him. He guessed that

perhaps they feared getting low grades later or something. The collaborative works he assigned primarily involved the use of Google Docs. He said that perhaps those who had not tried out Google Docs for group works might have found it not so very interesting, for the nature of this kind of collaborative work generally expects each student to answer one question in a list of questions, finally taking the group to a collective answer which may sometimes lack overall coherence in it. “Reading such writing might have been boring for them. In fact, its purpose is to make them write collaboratively and do the necessary editing together, learning from one another in the process, before receiving feedback from my side,” he observed.

Teacher1: OP during the pandemic gradually forced us—both teachers and students—to be more descriptive in our teaching-learning practices previously dominated by lecturing and discussions. Personally speaking, employing descriptive teaching through finely prepared slides helped me see how important ‘coherently projected ideas’ and ‘takeaways’ are for my students. My students became increasingly organized in their reading, writing and presentations. Another important benefit of it is that it helped me rescue my students from the zone of monotony... This practice is what I still cherish in BP/ BTL.

Teacher2: I also have observed this interesting shift. My students were quite interactive in the physical mode, which was not the case in OP for a number of reasons, one being the screen functioning as a big wall in between myself and 40+ students—the screen hid what the students were doing, how they were feeling or coping... The obligation to complete the course in time—amid disturbances created by technological and other issues—also pressurized and this had the effect of having

less interactions. Nonetheless, we did try to reflectively cover important issues, and this has been significantly transferred to the ongoing BP/ BTL practices now. Now my students interact more often.

Teacher3: The issues raised by the student participants are all valid... As in OP, there is a lot of room in BP/ BTL where we can collaboratively bring about much improvement. This said, institutional role/ investment will have to be greater while we are trying to upgrade BP/ BTL—from the current makeshift practices to its standard form practiced in the West.

Discussion

This study of OP and BP/ BTL, with AR embedded within, revealed a number of factors that either facilitated or obstructed favorable/ desirable teaching-learning and associated pedagogical practices during the pandemic and after and simultaneously helped see the influences of different pedagogies on OP and BP/ BTL and vice versa. Majority of the students and participants increasingly favored OP as its practices gradually improved. This also had its effects over their preference for BP/ BTL later. Comparatively, BP/ BTL became a more desirable shift for them, as for teachers. And, as is evident in the ‘findings’ section, this preference for both OP and BP/ BTL grew, first because of their relevance in language teaching-learning in times of crisis and modern education, and second, because of teachers’ and students’ critical initiatives and pedagogic improvements—which were also backed up by the ongoing social/ educational discourses and activism at the local level. This shows that teachers’ and students’ agencies, especially during difficult times and in the face of institutional lingering or rigidities, can play an instrumental role in bringing about

pedagogic improvements. More importantly, what stand out are the empathetic and critical negotiations between teachers and students, for they gradually helped improve teaching-learning and assessments.

Evidently, the institutional system was slow to change, both in OP and BP/ BTL; and this was so even after sharing with school authorities our experiences of teaching-learning during the pandemic and after and the unfolding findings from the present research. Its infrastructural state (particularly lack of online library, lack of ample subscriptions to academic (re-)sources online, and lack of access to software like *Turnitin*) did not change much. So was its makeshift/ ritualistic attitude toward issues of multimedia training for teachers and students and pedagogic needs such as curricula revision. All of these resonated with the broader local scenario of institutional lingering and/ or unwillingness to develop suitable capacities, resources, and contents (Aryal et al., 2016; Laudari & Maher, 2019; Shrestha et al., 2021). And this was not something that had to do only with the pandemic or post-pandemic times. Historically also, teaching-learning, including ELT, in Nepal is burdened with “low quality teaching environments, large classroom sizes, lack of adequate infrastructure and inadequately trained professionals,” alongside lack of “proper research, documentation, funding and appropriate directions” (Aryal et al., 2016, p. 141), and this more or less applies even to KUSL scenario. This confirms that educational institutions are comparatively “sturdy, stable and fairly rigid” when it comes to substantial educational change (Jónasson, 2016, p. 2). However, this is quite understandable when it comes to most of the state-run campuses in the country that are themselves in need of more funding, unlike those that are autonomously and profitably managed.

In addition, there were four other major barriers, namely, state or province-level power supply (later resolved), quality of internet, teachers' and students' makeshift/ritualistic attitudes and pedagogic practices (often influenced by institutional system or teachers and students themselves), and lack of ample ICT skills in teachers and students. However, because we the teachers and the students took cyclically reflective, empathetic, flexible, and critical initiatives to break the monotony and difficulties created by some of these barriers, we were able to bring about desirable pedagogic changes in certain spaces of teaching-learning and assessments. For example, we the teachers, after listening to our students' difficulties and pedagogic concerns, became increasingly flexible in/about teaching contents and methods and assessment modalities. We unofficially introduced some new contents, shifted to more engaging (particularly descriptive and collaborative) ways of teaching-learning while making efforts to increase both individual and group participations, and practiced varieties of assessments that were compatible with online and blended modes. But from institutional and discursal

perspectives

(Dawadi, 2019; Dawadi et al., 2020), some of these changes did not come without certain compromises concerning conventional concepts of quality, such as rigid time-frame assessments. However, as we switched to BP/ BTL, the school reverted to conventionally rigid end-semester exams that carry 50 percent

weightage, which, despite our agentic voices, remained/ remains officially effective and mars the spirit of blended teaching-learning and assessments.

Moreover, we (teachers and students), in this flexibility, comparatively practiced more autonomy on the one hand, and, on the other, strongly realized that collective learning (or scaffolding), alongside personal learning, is also important and is more useful in times of educational crises. Collective learning was, in fact, one of the most dominant modes of learning during and after the pandemic, for we (teachers and students) often relied on peers or one another, particularly for ICT related help and/ or resources unavailable to us. Similarly, we realized that institutional scaffolding is all the more imperative to boost the spirit of change at different levels in educational settings in crisis situations, which, as noted above, disconcertingly lacked in several areas. The institution was either unprepared or partially prepared or unwilling to fully support the pedagogic shifts and their contextually inherent needs. This interrelated trio of scaffolding can be visualized as follows:

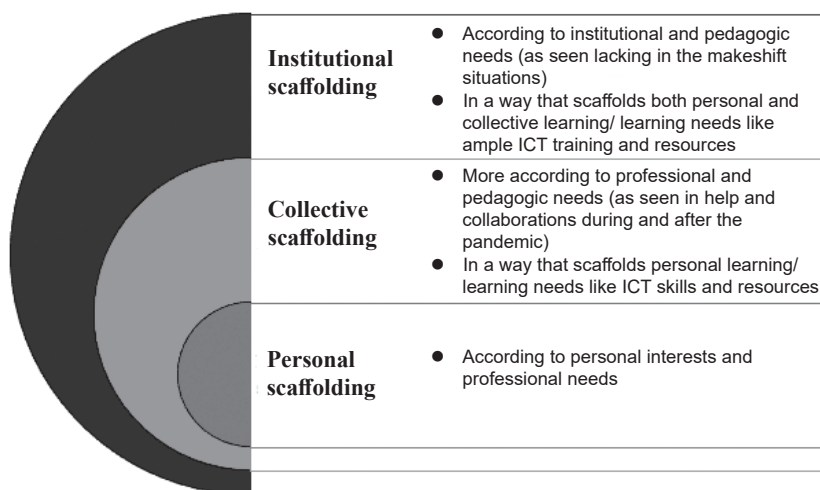


Figure 5: Relationship among personal, collective, and institutional scaffoldings

Clearly, both institutional and in-class ritualistic/ makeshift practices undermined the value of fully embracing the mainstream modes of OP and BP/ BTL, which were not new and therefore comparatively smoother in the West (Muñoz-Najar et al., 2021, p. 4; Winter et al., 2021, p. 242). Even futuristic preparations—for both OP and BP/ BTL—seriously lacked. These issues made majority of the students and participants vocal about the need for renouncing ritualism (reflected in/ from unsuitable contents, delivery, attitude, etc.) and investing in developing ample online resources and multimedia skills (both in teachers and students) and their inclusion in the ESP courses/ curricula that themselves demand(ed) revisions—for them to become suitable in online and blended modes. Going online without being able to exploit certain complex tools and features, such as animation, video editing and graphic designing, in fact, hindered effective delivery of ‘content knowledge’, which mirrored serious needs for scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) in necessary forms of training for teachers and ample orientations for students, particularly from the institution. But despite our critical reflections, agentic voices, and interventions/ negotiations, we were not able to fully meet our pedagogic needs. So, it was natural for the students and participants to caution that the experiential lessons from the emergency education, OP, and BP/ BTL should not go astray but should rather direct what needs to be done or changed—particularly as regards unhelpful educational policies and make-do environments that house/ housed ritualistic practices. Working toward this will simultaneously help redefine and (further) improve the ongoing and future pedagogic principles, dimensions, and practices; and the immediate benefits of which will go to BP/ BTL being practiced, helping it to transform from its ritualistic status quo to a one that is

more parallel to standard blended teaching-learning in advanced countries.

In this interconnected relationship of these makeshift pedagogies and the critical issues involved, we (teachers and students), on the one hand, saw how conventional and/ or innovative pedagogies affect the ongoing practices in the local context and, on the other, collectively realized certain (combined) potentials of these pedagogies while filling the gaps in our (initial) understanding of them. Abruptly adopted as part of PP, OP was seen in different ways, mostly in light of local challenges and benefits. BP/ BTL was also practiced largely as a makeshift. Our learning from the live classes, change-oriented efforts and activism, or the emerging problems and discourses, followed by some flexible/ empathetic measures we embraced, however, helped us tailor their use to some of our immediate needs. This helped us mature also as pedagogical consultants. Below are some transitionally prominent aspects of these pedagogies that directly or indirectly highlight their future potentials to cyclically inspire newer pedagogic refinements/ innovations.

1. Learners and teachers were the primary change agents in OP and BP/ BTL practiced as liminal pedagogic stages. These agents collectively played critical roles and effected some important changes, by questioning or redefining (conventional) pedagogic principles, dimensions, measures, practices, and some ongoing discourses. This foregrounds how essential and instrumental in-class activism is, particularly in times of educational crisis.

2. In the practices of OP, there was less of ‘moral pressure’ and more of

‘issues of flexible adjustments and empathy’; whereas in BP/ BTL, there was/ is more of ‘moral pressure’ to practice innovative ESP teaching-learning and assessments. Whatever ICT skills were developed while practicing OP proved helpful for this. Also, learning in BP/ BTL became more interactive, fun-filled, easing, and engaging.

3. Practicing standard forms of OP and BP/ BTL is possible given that educational institutions do not practice ritualism of any kind, which is not happening as expected.

4. Pedagogic practices are heavily/ perniciously influenced more by local constraints and conventions, as revealed in the conceptual framework and the findings (e.g., reversion to conventional assessment in BP/ BTL, which the students objected to). However, educational crises and crisis pedagogies are liminal in nature and are increasingly receptive to standard methods and practices, such as descriptive teaching-learning, flexible projects/ portfolios, and collaborative assignments practiced in OP and BP/ BTL. In such changes/ transitions, students’ and teachers’ agentic initiatives and activism, among others, evidently play significant roles.

5. Experimental pedagogies, under accommodating crisis situations, have more potentials to contextually (re-) generate and/ or utilize important pedagogic concepts, reflective realizations, educational philosophies, and methods. Three examples: Different online facilities in OP proved more effective in transferring knowledge

and skills and added new dimensions to teaching-learning and assessments. Second, the learners’ demands for more flexibility in OP and BP/ BTL nudged us to cyclically redefine conventional notions of pedagogy and evaluation, as did their suggestions for incorporating multimedia skills and interdisciplinary knowledge in the existing curricula/ syllabi. Third, OP and BP/ BTL afforded newer, greater or easier spaces, particularly for learner autonomy, instant collaborations and feedback circles, emotional support, access to online training, and students’ research skills to some extent. Clearly, being able to utilize more of the latest inventions in areas of OP and BP/ BTL will give fresh impetus to ESP teaching-learning in future, further helping to see pedagogic concerns in cyclically/ dynamically newer light.

6. Nevertheless, some critical issues concerning OP and BP/ BTL may still be raised. Among others, lack of technology support (e.g., lack of plagiarism checking tools), large classroom sizes, issues of ‘flexibility’ as a weaker pedagogic measure, and harms of technology overuse posed challenges in our practices. But we learned that sensitively balanced, mutually ethical, and institutionally supported practices can, however, help mitigate these challenges. Teacher-student reflective conversations, which reportedly decreased in BP/ BTL, may also significantly help to ward off ‘academic misconducts’ and improve teaching-learning and assessment practices.

7. Considering all the dynamic relations

involved in these makeshift pedagogies, the previous framework is modified thus:

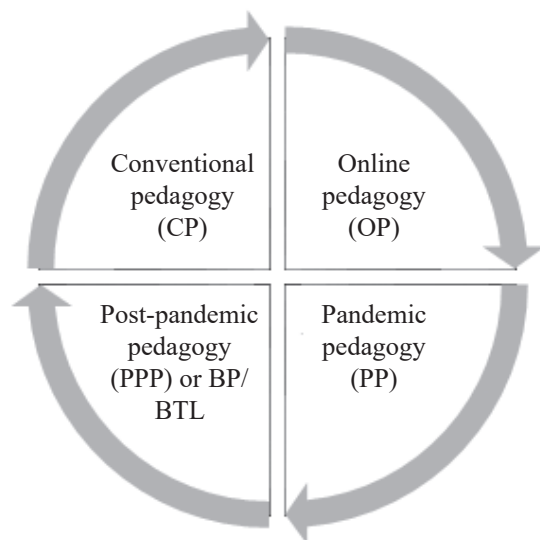


Figure 6: *Cyclic influences on different forms of pedagogies as seen in BP/ BTL in the post-pandemic times*

Implications and Suggestions

Practicing mainstream forms of OP and BP/ BTL in ESP teaching-learning and assessments in Nepali contexts still remains challenging for a number of reasons discussed above. Changes in attitudes and practices through empathic and reflective critical agency only at the level of in-class practitioners will not suffice to genuinely practice these pedagogies; i.e., institutions must step in with futuristic plans and preparations. Most importantly, reliable solutions to technological problems, development of ample online resources (such as online library— a regional one in collective investments?) and training programs on ICT skills, and readiness to implement/ integrate pedagogic learning and research knowledge (e.g., inclusion of multimedia knowledge/

skills in curricula revision), among others, can help augment the usefulness of these pedagogies.

On the part of in-class practitioners, maintaining variety in the uses of teaching-learning methods, delivery, assessments, and types of communication (with students' active participation and two-way communication) is highly important in OP and BP/ BTL. Alongside, it is important to promote learner autonomy, with proper orientation and facilitation, for doing so supports agentic and fruitful learning, which corroborates that OTL, more specifically BP/ BTL, can increase the learning potential of students (Megahed & Ghoneim, 2022, p. 2). But for this, as implicated by majority voice, a number of problematic issues in OP and BP/ BTL needs to be resolved while giving almost equal importance to multimedia skills and content knowledge. Also, cyclic learning and pedagogic research should be part of making these efforts, for they help improve pedagogic practices.

Limitations and Contributions

Not all the findings in this study are generalizable when it comes to broader Nepali context. The reason behind is the hugely and differently affected student populations in Nepal (UNESCO, 2020). However, these findings are more generalizable in the context of tertiary level students coming from middle- and high-income families, for they, with their higher affordability of and accessibility to reliable power supply, internet connection and technological devices, benefitted fairly more from OTL (Chaudhary et al., 2022; Sah, 2021) and BTL. This means a nation-wide, multilayered, heavy scale survey and study would represent the broader Nepali context. Nevertheless, this study contributes to (1)

developing knowledge on OP's and BP/ BTL's local strengths and weaknesses, including cyclic interrelations and influences among new and traditional pedagogies and spaces for improvements, and to (2) how students' and teachers' agencies can play crucial roles in effecting certain level of desired changes or pedagogic transitions.

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