

An Appraisal of One-Year Online B.ED. Program in Nepal: A Case of Nepal Open University

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a one-year B.Ed. program given via online mode at Nepal Open University (NOU). This study focused on thoroughly evaluating a one-year B.Ed. in the English specialization program through Stufflebeam's CIPP evaluation model. The program was examined and evaluated from the perspectives of the facilitators and the student teachers who had experienced it via online modality. They were two lecturers who taught the English specializing course in a one-year B.Ed. Program at Nepal Open University and two students who studied and completed this program at the same university in 2022. The data were collected through the semi-structured interview based on the CIPP evaluation checklist and analyzed thematically. There was a low enrollment of the students in the beginning phase however, it attracted many students later. The

teacher students and course facilitators agreed the program was a bridge between a non-teacher education program and a teacher education program. However, some contradictory views between teacher- students, and facilitators were also explored. The facilitators expressed that one- year time was not enough for the course whereas the students were happy with the time specified for the course.

Keywords: CIPP model, One-Year B.Ed., English specialization, Teacher Education, Open and Distance learning

Introduction

The term 'appraisal' refers to a formal assessment or evaluation of something. Aziz et al. (2018) state, "Evaluation denotes the monitoring of progress towards desired goals and objectives" (p. 189). The appraisal or evaluation of the program from time to time helps in

quality control, monitoring of quality, quality assurance, and quality development (Aziz & et al., 2018). Therefore, it becomes a dire need to evaluate the program to discover the strengths and weaknesses of it. Among various approaches to evaluate the program, CIPP is a perfect model presented by Stufflebeam in 1983. Evaluation is something for appraising and featuring some quality of an educational process that includes four elements namely C- Context, I- Input, P-Process, and P- Product. Context refers to the aims, objectives, background, and history of the program while inputs refer to the materials, time, and human and physical resources required for the effective functioning of the program. The process covers all aspects of teaching and learning, whereas the product emphasizes the effectiveness of instruction and learning as well as its potential to serve society (Stufflebeam, 2003). The CIPP receives great significance as it provides a holistic view evaluating context, input, process and output from different points and perspectives.

Kurnia et al. (2017) also denoted the significance of this model in their quantitative study 'Developing Evaluation Instrument based on CIPP Models on the Implementation of Portfolio Assessment'. The findings of their study demonstrate that the implementation of portfolio assessment instruments is best evaluated through the evaluative tools under the CIPP model. The Aikens' V coefficient was in the range of 0.86 and 1, indicating that it is trustworthy and may be utilized in a limited study and operational field trial, including expert opinions, practitioners, and colleagues. It means it can provide an overview of results and useful information for consideration in making a responsible decision as Stufflebeam proposes.

Distance Education

Distance education means "a form of education in which learner and instructor are separate during the majority of instruction" (Johnson, 2003, p. 1). With the advancement of science and technology in the 21st century, digital and pedagogical tools have been integrated into the field of education resulting in the popularity of open and distance education. Digital connective technologies have aroused an interest in open and distance learning opportunities through Open Education Resources(OER) and Massive Online Open Courses(MOOCs) to provide learning access to a wider audience (Saykili, 2018). When going back to history and tradition, the idea of distance education evolving over generations offers a useful framework.

Nipper was the first person to adopt a generational model in 1989 and he proposed three generations of remote education; linking production, distribution, and computer conferencing. These three generations were afterward referred to as correspondence, broadcast, and computer-mediated. According to Anderson and Simpson (2012), the goal of first-generation distance learning was to broaden the reach of education to include those who had little or no access to educational institutions and resources. Broadcast technologies like radio and television were the primary drivers in the second generation of distance learning. The amount of interaction between the teacher and the student was maintained to a minimum even though these broadcast technologies provided new avenues for interaction opportunities (Anderson & Simpson, 2012).

The Open University in the United Kingdom, Anadolu University in Turkey, and Indira Gandhi National Open University in India emerged enrolling large numbers of students in this phase (Anderson and Simpson, 2012). Similarly, Anderson & Simpson (2012) affirmed

asynchronous and synchronous computer-mediated communication, audio/video conferencing, and other two-way communication alternatives were the driving forces behind the third generation of remote education. The relevance of interaction in distance education courses in the third generation was recognized as a result of greater opportunities for engagement.

These days with the speed of ICT, distance education is popularly delivered using different channels and modes throughout the world. A web search in the International Distance Learning finder showed that more than 13000 language courses were registered out of a total of 55000 courses from 133 countries (White,2003).

Open and Distance Education in Nepal

Distance learning in Nepal officially began when the College of Education in Nepal initiated the Radio Education Program in 1957 for teacher training and promoting adult education. Radio Nepal, FM radios, and television played a significant part in offering remote learning (Awasthi,2003; Pradhan,2012). The study carried out by Pangen (2016) concluded outlining OLD's bright prospects in Nepal as a viable alternative to the country's established educational system. In addition, he suggests current universities must adopt acculturation of online learning by respecting the needs of the new generation of learners in the age of Internet culture. Similarly, In the context of Nepal, Bainbridge (2013 as cited in Shrestha et al., 2022) also concluded that features and success rates of Nepali participants in a series of online courses create a pedagogical model for an open university in Nepal. Shrestha et.al (2022) confirmed, "her comprehensive research was the first of its kind to propose a pedagogical model that could potentially serve as a construct for open university initiatives in developing countries" (p.87).

Some of the universities in Nepal along with the NOU have been offering higher education in distance mode around the nation. The two-year and one-year M. Ed. and B. Ed. programs have been offered by Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu University, and Purbanchal University in Nepal. The Nepali government has been operating 84 learning centers for Open Distance Learning (ODL) at the school level across the nation (Ghimire, 2013). However, the study carried out by Gurung (2021) affirmed that due to the stereotyped culture, social conventions, and individual as well as institutional unpreparedness, the entire paradigm shift from traditional to online method has presented numerous difficulties to Nepali learners. Her study has highlighted the discrepancy between contemporary practices and Nepal's traditional society, which is not yet prepared to fully adopt the alternative form of education. ODL calls for greater preparation, increased funding, training, learner-centered curriculum design, and other things. Like Gurung (2021) Dhakal and Bhandari (2019) in their desktop review also suggested some practical ideas for the effectiveness of ODL.

Universities need to have a regular schedule for online preparation and development.

This should also ensure that the professional development opportunities for online educators are adequate. Therefore, online teacher development programs are to be made a regular professional activity in each online program offering university (p.34).

There are many opportunities recognized in open and distance education. The students, especially the employees can carry academic careers from any location in the nation as Thapa (2021) concluded in his study. His study backed the necessity for academic institutions in Nepal

to move from conventional settings to non-traditional settings to satisfy the demands of a competitive and high-quality education on a global scale.

Role of Nepal Open University in Distance Education

Nepal Open University was established by an act of parliament in 2073 B.S. (2016) by the government of Nepal to increase access to higher education for populations that are underserved by traditional higher education. The Faculty of Science, Health, and Technology, Faculty of Social Science and Education, and Faculty of Management and Law are the three basic divisions under which, it now offers some programs; the Bachelor, Master, and Master of Philosophy degrees Nepal Open University (NOU, 2016). University instructors conduct courses using a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and distance learners connect with their instructors primarily through Skype and Microsoft Teams during their free time, such as after work, on holidays, and the weekends. There is a regular time and class routine/ no flexibility except for some additional lectures. Emails, MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment), and other social networking applications are used by tutors and students to interact (NOU, 2016).

One of the primary teacher training programs that leads to acquiring a teaching license is the one-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) for people who have already completed a bachelor's degree in non-teacher education programs. Undergraduate students studying for a bachelor's degree in education are required to acquire pedagogical knowledge and abilities as well as subject-specific information to be able to fulfill the worldwide standard certification.

One Year B.ED. Program in English Specialization

Awasthi (2003) stated, “To prepare quality English teachers, language improvement courses should be included in the teacher training curricula, and these courses should precede the training of English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy” (p. 27). He further argued that English language instructors were not trained before the integration of the National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971, which marked the beginning of ELT in Nepali education. It got started only after IOE of TU launched the B.Ed. degree in English instruction in 1971 (Awasthi, 2003). The one-year B.Ed. program at NOU was launched in 2018 AD, aiming at preparing trained teachers for teaching English at basic (6-8) and secondary levels (9-12) of school education in Nepal. One year B.Ed. According to the One-year Bachelor of Education Guidelines, (NOU 2016), the English specialization program intends to acquaint the students with the fundamental knowledge of English education, innovation in teaching, school and society, education and social policy, and education and philosophy.

Table 1: Program Structure

One-year Bachelor of Education in English Specialization			
First Semester Courses	Credit hours	Second Semester Courses	Credit hours
Philosophical and Historical Perspective on	3	Researching in School and Community	3

Education			
Sociological Perspectives on Education	3	Methods and Materials	3
Curriculum and Assessment	3	Basics in Language and Linguistics	3
Theories of Learning and Instructional Design	3	Work-Based Study and Practice	6
ICT in Education	3		
Total	15		15

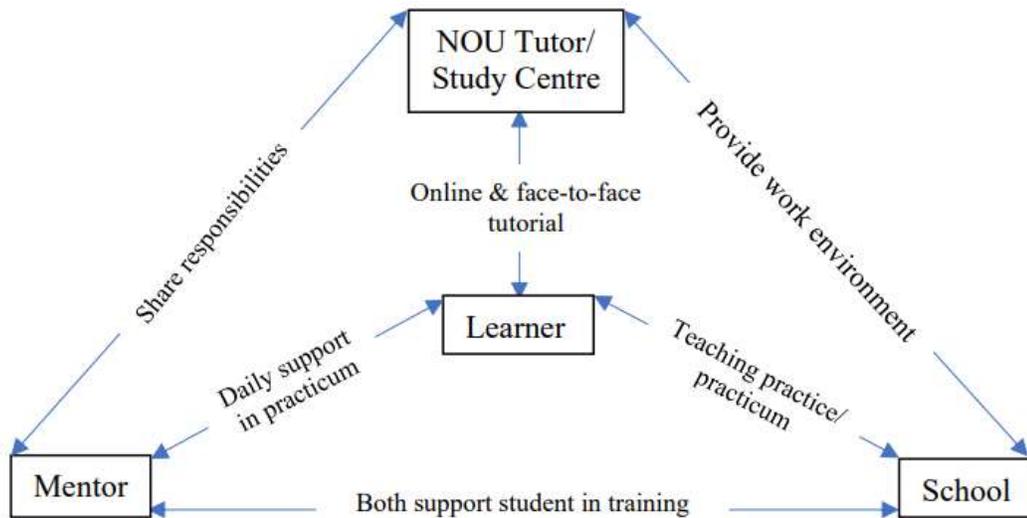


Figure 1: Course Delivery and Practicum
 Source: One-year Bachelor of Education Guidelines, (NOU 2016)

Table 2: Grading System

Component one	Component two
Paper 1 3 hours Written test external assessment 60% Written assignments including case studies, and case analysis, are evaluated.	Component 2 Coursework 40% Learners' assignments, presentations, participation and attendance, and e-portfolio are evaluated for internal assessment.

Viva/voce is conducted online separating 18 percent out of 60 percent of the external examination	Course tutor professor is responsible for internal assessment. Individual students are recorded in LMS (MOODLE)
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Source: One-year Bachelor of Education Guidelines, (NOU 2016)

Methods and Procedures

This study collected data from both the facilitators and teacher students who had experiences with the phenomena. Interview guidelines were the major tools for data collection. We used semi-structured interviews to collect the data on the topic following the CIPP model checklist by Stufflebeam (2003). The limitation of this study was the selection process of the research participants and using the CIPP model through interviews. Two B.Ed. graduates (one male and one female) and two male teachers were the research participants who were purposively selected for the study through convenient sources of the NOU. We interviewed the participants using the interview guidelines and recorded them on our mobile phones. We examined the given context, input, process, and product of the program of the NOU system. We coded the data transcriptions, thematized, and concluded relating to the review of previous studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The pseudonyms of the participants were used to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Similarly, we sent transcription back to the participants for member checking to maintain the confirmability and reliability of our study.

Results and Discussion

The discussion has included context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation, and product evaluation from the students' perspective and facilitators' perspective. The facilitators represented the teaching personnel and the students were graduates of the program.

Context Evaluation from Facilitators' Perspective

Facilitator Surya who has been teaching English courses viewed the program as a bridge between non-teacher education programs to teacher education programs which led to obtaining a teacher license to be a teacher in community schools. Facilitator Kamal viewed the English curriculum as providing fundamental theoretical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge to apply in the teaching field. Human resources from different streams and fields with mixed experiences can be included and welcomed in the teaching profession through this program. Surya further added that the curriculum with two specialization subjects is not enough as the whole 4 years B.Ed. program, but it covers methodological skills and pedagogical knowledge of the education program.

The program is ideal for teachers without licenses in technical streams of government schools as well as students willing to make a career in the teaching profession. Kamal expresses that online distance education with effective learning practices using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enables students to address and cope with the challenges in the present time. Student-oriented activities and integration of ICT are the soundness of the

program. Students meet their instructors through Microsoft Teams in their flexible time (in the evening), discuss in different forums like Moodle, communicate through emails, and messenger, and contribute to the productivity of education.

Both of the instructors claimed the eligibility of implementing one one-year B.Ed. in NOU positively emphasizing its effort in preparing trained teachers. This course focuses on the practicality of the program, and the theories of the English course are also applicable and connected in the real classroom and real life. The students become aware of research ideas, make presentations, develop ICT knowledge and so on which helps in the overall development of their teaching profession.

Context Evaluation from Students' Perspective

The course of one-year B.Ed. is related to that of the four-year B. Ed program. One of the student participants, Lilaram, had passed a one-year B.Ed. specializing in English. He said he had passed his BA in Sociology English but joined the one-year B.Ed. program in full scholarship provided by the Center for Education and Human Research Development (CEHRD). According to the teacher students and the facilitators, there is the provision of full scholarships to the teachers in community schools to study the one-year B.Ed. program. When a person completes the one-year B.Ed. program, he/ she becomes equivalent to 4 years B.Ed. program. According to Lilaram, apart from getting certified for a teacher license, the full scholarship is a great motivating factor to join the program. Anyone who has completed a Bachelor's degree from other disciplines than education and wishes to be a teacher can benefit from this online program. The course is aligned with many perspectives of education like curriculum and assessment, linguistics, methods, and materials, and the use of ICT in education. These areas are relevant to learning the content, pedagogical and technological knowledge, and skills.

Similarly, the next female participant, Anita also opined the same as Lilaram. She had completed her bachelor's Degree in Sociology and English and master's Degree in Journalism but later she joined this course as she wished to take the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) exam. The program offered a separate course for Research, which helped her to get theoretical and practical ideas to carry out research in School and Community. Lilaram and Anita agreed that the objectives of the course were suitable to meet their needs as they supported them in learning different skills like presentation, collaboration, and cooperation along with the pedagogical skills, techniques, and case study. Both participants agreed that the courses were aligned with the objectives of the program. The course is appropriately designed for the professional development of the pre-service or in-service teacher.

Input Evaluation from the Facilitators' Perspective

Both facilitators Kamal and Surya were optimistic and confident about the practices of the program. They were cheerful with the beginning of NOU programs with the interests of many students from the corners of Nepal. Both of them openly highlighted the aspects that need improvement for better outcomes from the program. Kamal valued the program as a very important plan in the context of Nepal, and the goals and objectives are suitable according to

the student's level. However, he mentioned the need for proper research and preparation before launching any program. Kamal further mentioned that the curriculum is good and appropriate for the level but not enough to give complete pedagogical and theoretical knowledge to the students through the limited course. Surya expressed that training should be mandatorily provided to the newly appointed teachers.

To the query on sustainability and plans of the program Surya representing the administration assured of the ongoing internal meetings and discussions would work for the improvements of the program. He further mentioned the plans to add more students to the program in the future. He is quite optimistic that this program will run for a longer time as it has a high scope to welcome students and teachers into the teaching profession. The collaboration with CEHRD helps students to join the program without other options.

Input Evaluation from Students' Perspective

Both the participants Lilaram and Anita agreed that the three credit hours for each in a week was sufficient to learn the content, pedagogy, and technology. The teaching practice for 15 days was also suitable to practice their theory in class. They sufficiently had access to reading materials and references on Moodle and email. Similarly, they received the internal observer from the respective school where they did their teaching practice. The assessment process was good. The course facilitators were supportive and the classroom environment was collaborative, too. Both of them suggested that the course would be much better if the result and certification process were completed within a specified time.

Process Evaluation from the Facilitators' Perspective

Surya said that NOU runs its programs through Distance Online Learning Mode. They try to reach students to their place with their experiences. Making presentations, discussions, interaction, peer and group discussions, setting goals to make students active, an inclusive environment and a learning community are some of the features of the classes. The classes run for three hours from 6 to 9 in the evening, out of which half of the time is allocated for the teachers' delivery, and the remaining time is for discussion and other class work. Students have to make presentations on the given topics and contribute to the class discussion. For asynchronous learning, MOODLE is used in which the students can access post-class discussion and reading materials. The responsibility of the course is taken individually or collaboratively. The newly appointed teachers are given training on basic ICT skills, ways of conducting MOODLE, teams, meeting conduction, resources management, and so on. The teacher can do almost anything on their own. Technical part and foundational management is done by the university; subject-specific resources are managed by the specific facilitator.

Kamal argued that although there are good opportunities for scholarships, students have not increased in English Specialization courses due to the COVID-19 circumstances. Additionally, the course is newly incorporated into the program and people are not well informed about it. Answering the question "Is there any provision for extracurricular activities?" Both of the teachers replied that there are no specific extracurricular activities

except contact sessions. Rather, they believe that other programs including conferences, seminars, and workshops should be practiced more to explore the potentialities of the students.

Process Evaluation from the Students' Perspective

The participants stated that there were both synchronous and asynchronous classes. Class activities and assignments were graded making the e-portfolios of each student. In synchronous mode, they made a presentation followed by discussions. The sessions were interactive and engaging with friendly facilitation by the instructors. Synchronous tools like videoconferencing, desktop conferencing, and audio graphics facilitate collaboration and group work for successful remote education programs, as Tait and Knight (1996) recommended. Anita explained some asynchronous teaching and learning activities included project work, group work, report writing, article writing, sharing, and commenting on blogs as post-class learning. They had a group of batch mates on social media to have more discussion and communication even after the class. Informal sharing on the course content helped them to be clear about the assignments and assessment process in online mode. Both the participants participated actively in the class activities and were satisfied with the instruction and interaction taken in everyday sessions of three hours in the evening. They expressed their pleasure in their ability to incorporate ICT into their study.

Product Evaluation from Facilitators' Perspectives

Both of the participants agree that the main strength of this program is it welcomes human resources from different fields to the teaching field. There are sufficient scholarship offers from CEHRD for those who are involved in community schools without pedagogical knowledge. The participants of the program are in the teaching profession, and some are planning to appear in the exam of the TSC. Similarly, instructors claimed that the program is successful in many respects. They stated the graduates of this program have developed competence in pedagogical and theoretical knowledge along with confidence in writing, research ideas, ICT knowledge, and presentation skills. The graduates can play an effective role in improving classroom learning after being exposed to the relevant learning environment. In this vein, Dollar et al. (2014) affirmed that welcoming and highly skilled professors, assignments that are both practical and research-oriented, and the ability to put theory into reality are the strengths of the program.

Surya added that the practices through the program make them capable of working constructively in real life. However, there is a dropout problem. Students are found to assume online learning from an open university to be very easy and simple. But the procedures are not as easy as they expect. Students who join with preparation are doing well.

Product Evaluation from Students' Perspective

The product evaluation in the CIPP model focuses on the fulfillment of the course objectives (Stufflebeam, 2003). Lilaram and Anita joined along with other 4 teacher students in the English specialization program. Now the number has increased to 30 for the year 2023.

Both of the participants shared that the result and certification process of this program is delayed. In the study by Shrestha et al. (2022), it was found that there are things that make it hard for people to stay interested in something. They are the late responses by the in-charges and faculties, unwise planning of the activities, and wrong use of tools.

Anita shared it was difficult to verify the activities of the students during the online class because most of the students joined without video on. She further mentioned the drawbacks of online learning because of some technical issues like power cuts and internet connectivity during study hours. Even though the online class was blended with contact sessions, Lilaram shared that they had not benefited from it. In the study by Dencki (2023), it was also explored that some face-to-face sessions regularly along with distance education classes motivate online learners more. He further suggested integrating the physical exam with the viva.

Conclusion

The CIPP model is an effective and holistic approach to assessing the program from every corner and perspective. After analyzing the context, input, process, and product of the program from both teachers' and students' points of view, it was discovered that there are high dropout problems in this program therefore (ICT knowledge and available resources should be checked properly before joining students because it has compelled many students to drop out. In this regard, the study carried out by Tuncer (2017) discovered that half of the students were unable to learn about "learning by distance education" through remote education. Similarly, online students need to learn time management skills as many of them are involved in jobs and cannot complete their assignments on time. The students express their disappointment in this program because of its lengthy process to conduct the exam and publish the result on time. It seems to revise the curriculum based on the market analysis as the autoethnographic study by Poudel (2023) argued for the revamping of the curriculum, "market ascertained most of the curriculum development activities" (p.28). Besides, Internet issues, Lack of resources/ devices (laptop), Overloaded devices, and budgeting are some of the issues of this program.

Both the facilitators and the students opined that the contact sessions should be made as per the schedule (three times per semester) but could not take place due to COVID-19 consequences and the internal management system. Similarly, For the validity and reliability of the assessment examination system should be improved, written examinations including all types of questions (objective/ subjective) should be included. The study carried out by Sharma (2022) also concluded that the key obstacles to successfully integrating the course for professional development in the teaching sector are an effective evaluation system and research-oriented teaching and learning activities. Teaching practice time should be increased to practice theoretical knowledge in the real classroom context. The study carried out by KC and Baral (2023) also concluded that Micro contexts, such as the failure to focus on the rural setting of English language teaching (ELT) and the inability of teachers to depart from stereotyped teaching pedagogy, could not be addressed, which led to some dissatisfaction with the course. Likewise, the dissatisfaction lies when there is discrimination between the teachers of the public and private schools about access to the scholarships provided by the CEHRD. The

program should create an equitable environment in teacher education and professional development for all teachers.

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