

COVID 19 in the Life of Hard of Hearing Students

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Abstract

The sudden and massive changes in the education system during COVID-19 and the introduction of online education have negatively affected hard-of-hearing students' access to quality education. The pandemic situation worsened learning achievement and posed challenges to the students with hearing disabilities. With this consideration, a study was carried out to understand the students' experience of taking online classes especially where they not only suffered from the fluctuation of the internet but also from their ringing ears caused by their tinnitus. The study applied the case study method with hard-of-hearing students to investigate the reasons influencing education during online classes during COVID-19. The collected data were thematized, analyzed and interpreted. The study findings demonstrated that the education system failed to consider the difficulties that students with hearing loss encountered in their learning leaving many teachers unaware of the issues that hard-of-hearing students face during online classes. The study concludes that online learning was not useful for the students with hard of hearing.

Keywords: COVID-19, hard-of-hearing, online class, learning, problem

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Introduction

Rafidi (2020) argued that many differently abled children were physically and emotionally impacted due to pandemic, and their interactions may have been hampered. COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected equity in education among students with disabilities. Lack of equity is apparent in extra obstacles faced by children with disabilities because of limited approach to technology and the internet for children for underprivileged group of children (Fishbane & Tomer, 2020). Thus, when the pandemic forced all schools to close immediately and the children were forced to learn at home, they experienced disruptions. Many students did not learn in the worst-case scenario. It is challenging for teachers to accumulate the resources required to engage in online learning, and many students lack internet access and the necessary technology (Lie, 2020). The communication method increases students' sense of social involvement; it is also practical and facilitates a variety of communication modes, such as audio, video, words, presentations, and shared whiteboards, allowing for real-time online teaching and learning activities (Kear et al., 2012).

Due to the closure of the school, mostly differently abled students were deprived of online classes because of access to the internet and devices for taking online classes (*Learners with Disabilities and COVID-19 School Closures*, 2021). The COVID-19 throws up structural challenges that have a negligible impact on education systems. The rapid spread of the pandemic has pressured education institutions to put on hold their planned education activities and stress them to move on towards online education alternatives.

Learners require specialized social support throughout the transfer to a new educational environment to increase their focus and motivation for online learning during this critical crisis. The government of Nepal has implemented a learn-from-home mode since March 24, 2020, which was the first lockdown, and all schools have been forced to transition to online learning because of the general COVID19 epidemic situation. However, there was not much preparation in terms of internet connection, teacher capacity, or student-parent preparedness. Simultaneously a second lockdown was started on January 23, 2021 (Fachriansyah, 2020).

The only reason the world chose to shut down educational institutions was to maintain social isolation and halt its spread. Some nations moved over right away to online education since they were already set up for it. Over the past two decades, in some countries, the online class has been in practice. According to Louwrens and Hartnett (2015), practical focus on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement is essential for motivating students in virtual learning.

Even though the United Nations (2020) promised to leave no one behind in their differently abled rights for inclusion during COVID-19, it acknowledged that those who are differently abled are among those who would be most adversely affected by the social, economic, and health effects of the crisis. At the same time, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) opined that regarding how deaf people are more vulnerable during crises because they are disenfranchised communities. Treating deaf people equally and providing them with access to all daily life activities, including education and public services, is an important goal that promotes inclusivity and ensures their rights are respected during covid-19. To facilitate distance learning, various technological systems, services, and applications, such as virtual classrooms, can be used. Teachers can deliver sequential lectures, meeting students in different locations at a predetermined time. Such tool is integrated into many learning management systems during the pandemic (Alqraini & Alasim, 2021).

School Education in Nepal During COVID 19

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the teaching patterns from face-to-face module to online which was a great challenge for physically and mentally disabled children. Disabled children are the most affected during COVID 19. Hard of hearing is the third most common disability, only after physical and visual disability (Maharjan, 2020) in Nepal. Subedi et al. (2020) stated that, due to COVID-19, people worldwide had to adjust to distance learning. The pandemic forced the closure of traditional classrooms for over 300 million students, who were able to learn from their own homes (Rafidi, 2020).

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) states in clause (31) that people with differently abled and financially disadvantaged people also possess the right to get free education by the law. The law has recognized that individuals with disabilities, including visual impairments, and visual impairments and hearing issues or speaking problems, should have equal access to education. In the constitution, the deaf and hard of hearing have been kept in a single basket, but it must be understood first that the requirements for both are totally different in the educational platform. The hard of hearing doesn't need sign language like the deaf do. Thus, there is a dilemma in understanding the requirements of the hard of hearing; because of this, they are lost in the group of differently abled students while getting an education. The Ministry of Education developed guidelines to run remote teaching and learning activities, but it has not dealt with children with disabilities (Huang et al., 2020).

The Government of Nepal has taken extreme measures to handle the fatal Covid-19 pandemic, and the population have been praised to stay at home and practicing social distancing (Gurung & Gahatraj,

2020). The isolation and stereotyping that differently abled people face daily are visible to all or any except the system because it explains the people's lack of self-reflection and, thus, the country's so-called system. According to WHO's projections, if appropriate measures are not taken to address the needs of the 630 million people with disabling hearing loss by 2030, that number is expected to increase to over 900 million by 2050. These figures highlight the importance of implementing strategies to improve access to healthcare, assistive technologies, and communication services for individuals with hearing loss (Davis & Hoffman, 2019).

Methodology

Five hearing-impaired female participants participated in a case study to examine how the COVID-19 virus has affected their ability to learn. The case study enables us to understand and explain a particular problem better than experimental or survey designs. Thus, case study was an appropriate approach to understand and explain the physical problem of hard-to-hearing students in online classes due to COVID-19 pandemic (Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2022). Moreover, with the case study we were able to explore how and why to look at the problems that occur in a natural setting without modification. using a variety of data sources (Gomm et al., 2009). In the case study process, the participants' experience was collected through an interview in their natural setting. Open-ended questions were the tools for the interview. It is important to obtain informed consent from all participants involved in a study, especially when minors are included. Since there were two participants below 18 years of age, it was appropriate to obtain consent from both the minors themselves and their parents or legal guardians. Thus, these formalities have been adopted during the study.

Participants and Data Collection

All the research participants were females with hearing impairment problems. The participants had ages ranging from 13 to 23 years old and were enrolled in an online class. some of them were below 18 years. The content and process were the matter of sensitivity, so the researcher engaged in data collection was an empathic listener to let them express their opinions deeply (Yin, 2011). The participants' characteristics and context were also observed that provided me with insights at the period when the phenomena had occurred (Bhattarai, 2013).

The in-depth interview has been adopted. A large amount of information can be gathered about the behavior, attitude, and perception of the respondents using in-depth interviews, a qualitative data-collecting

technique. Its adaptable, interactive, profound, and generative qualities helped the scholar develop a stronger bond with the participant (Muktan & Bhattarai, 2023). Most questions are open-ended and can be tailored to the specific circumstance. The interviewer has the chance to get to know the person and build a rapport, which helps the participant feel at ease. They can then provide candid comments while also observing their facial expressions and body language.

The goal of the in-depth interview technique was to draw out a clear picture of the participant's viewpoint on the study issue of hard of hearing. The interviews were conducted as the interviewees were the experts and the interviewer as the learner (Vallery, 2011). The hard-of-hearing girl students were the candidates for the interview, which takes place in an organization that works for hard-of-hearing girl empowerment. The variety of information, like the experience related to getting quality education during the pandemic, was analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data from the interview and observation were transcribed; they were coded, categorized, and generated the cases. With respect to the participants' anonymity and sentiment, we used their pseudo name, and their parents' consent were taken before their interview and observation (Khadka & Bhattarai, 2021). After transcribing, we got them confirmed by the concerned participants and their interview was taken at a convenient time and place. The participants' shared experiences were thematized and discussed through literature and theory to generate meaning.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, I maintained all rules tied to it during the study. Ethical considerations are related to duty rights, harm, and benefit. Participants' self-esteem was investigated intensively and respectfully while receiving the answers. Sharing information has been studied for non-malefic purposes in this context. Since it was difficult to track the words if there was noise or external sound in the surroundings, I chose a quiet space to interact with the participants easily. Apart from that, I had to communicate with each of my participants individually because it was more comfortable for them to discuss their opinions and the challenges they have had in their lives.

Only valid and accurate stores have been investigated to derive meaning from them. I've seen myself and my experiences as others while constructing meaning from my experiences. I have not distorted

any situations for the benefit of myself or anyone else. I'll use ethical principles, including voluntary involvement, consent forms, anonymity, secrecy, and no damage while performing my research.

Findings

The hard-of-hearing participants experienced different problems in online classes due to COVID19 pandemic. From the data analysis, two main challenges were identified which are presented as below:

Challenges Lead by e-Learning for Hard of Hearing students

One participant stated that she experienced difficulties during the first week of holding distance learning sessions because she was completely unfamiliar with the Google Meet and Zoom apps. She had to communicate with students on a regular basis, which took time. Due to the disturbing noises at home, she had to message her friend via Viber, which ruined her class time. At the same time, other issues arose when a disruption in network capacity caused the system to shut down, pressure educators as well as the students to reschedule the virtual meeting time. All of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the internet's dependability. The teacher recorded the virtual class session and then saved it to drive it so that it could be viewed at a time that was convenient for both the students and the teachers.

Hard of hearing students are constantly in the background owing to their invisible impairment because there isn't enough emphasis on education for the disabled, especially those who are hard of hearing. It significantly affects how well they are educated. They make up the great majority of people who unintentionally conceal themselves behind hearing people. It happens because of their significant concentration in the educational sectors, where they enlist in the expectation of a bright future.

The difficulties students had during the pandemic are discussed in many publications published in the year 2020. Internet fluctuations, environmental disturbances, a gap of psychological readiness for online learning, and reminding students to come to class sooner are a few of the issues. Online learning can thus be viewed as a collection of multiple issues that have an impact on educational quality rather than a single problem that is to be resolved (as cited in Churi et al, 2021).

Mental Retardation for Hard of Hearing in Online Class

During face-to-face lectures, one respondent noted that she always looked at her teacher's face to determine if she comprehended what was being said. She went on to remark that those cues were lacking in the virtual classroom because her teacher was not always on camera. According to Kear et al. (2012), this

difficulty emerges from the disparities in online and virtual classrooms and face-to-face learning environments. It reveals that visual signals would also assist the teacher and student in communicating in an understandable manner, as some people can understand by liping.

One of the participants explained:

Hearing devices are unable to pick up speech or sounds completely and accurately during online lessons. I always strive to comprehend the topic. At times, presentation slides are not available in online classes too.

Time constraints and the urgency to transition to online learning models may have led to some shortcomings in course delivery and student support. As the first author of this article also situated herself in this scenario, she recalled one incident where her teacher was explaining the theory with the help of fantastic examples when her hearing aid battery died thus, she turned off her video and changed the hearing aid battery, but till then her teacher had already finished that example. Confidently, she asked her teacher again, and he began explaining the theory again, but at the same time, her ear rang politely enough inside her ear to pause her teacher's voice due to tinnitus. Finally, instead of bothering the teacher, she thinks that she'll ask a friend about that theory later.

During research participant interviews, it was discovered that the problems they were experiencing were like each other in a group. While continuing their online classes, many of them address the same issues. They have difficulties when external sound overwhelms the hearing aid capacity. Another issue is the collision of technical errors with the hearing aid speaker and the gadget speaker. The final issue they are dealing with is that they cannot use headphones in case of emergency because it irritates their ears, especially those who have infection problems. These issues make them uninterested in continuing their studies. Consequently, some of them have given up their studies.

Ahmed and Aslam (2022) suggests a strong and positive correlation between tinnitus distress and various factors such as tinnitus-related magnitude, negative cognitions, functional challenges, and somatization symptoms. These findings contribute to our understanding of the complex nature of tinnitus and its impact on individuals' well-being. On the other hand, when tinnitus patterns in different population were examined, it is found that women are more likely to have tinnitus issues that are more severe, which causes anxiety and depression. One of the participants made a hesitant declaration that she had dropped her online class due to her hearing issues because it has become a challenge for her to grasp the teacher's words

in her family environment, as shutting the room door is not the ultimate solution to drown out the external sound. Thus, she prefers to skip class rather than enter the zoom class settings.

Hearing aids, disturbance due to surround sound, which had dominated the class lecture, the requirement for many words or sentences to be repeated, and emotional effects due to tinnitus issues also add massive destruction during online classes which were faced by hard of hearing students, according to the findings. It is crucial to address this issue since students who have hearing loss are invisible in a class of students who can hear normally, and the proportion of hearing loss students is rising. The requirements of this specific group of students should be understood by general education teachers, who should also have a few easy strategies on their minds. On top of that, the government must analyze the different needs of hardof-hearing students so that the actual use of inclusive education will sound genuine.

According to the research conducted in Portugal, the deaf and hard of hearing experience post-task exhaustion at considerably higher rates than the hearing group. Additionally, research showed a link between low scores achieved by the deaf and hard-of-hearing group and post-task fatigue rates, with a difference that was noticeably wider when compared to the hearing group. Along with this the deaf and hard of hearing population may be at a disadvantage in several ways due to increased fatigue rates, creating even more inequities and limitations that influence well-being and engagement chances (Rodrigues, 2022).

Invisible disabilities, such as being hard of hearing, affect students in such a way that they are not only excluded from quality education but also from living a quality life. According to intersectional theory, people are frequently negatively affected by multiple sources of oppression, including their race, class, gender identity, religion, and other identity markers. It explores concerns about capturing multiple positional ties by emphasizing differences between social groups, which aims to clarify various interacting elements that influence human lives and tries to determine how these various systemic conditions, which vary in place, time, and circumstance, collaborate to reproduce conditions of inequality (Moodley & Graham, 2015).

Discussion

Hard-of-hearing students face challenges in educational settings during pandemics while the author of the article explored the perspectives and experiences of hard-of-hearing students based on her own as well as her participants' experiences, which may or may not be identical to those of other hard-of-hearing girls. As Bryant et al. (2020), there are several drawbacks or effects of having a hearing loss that

affect students' educational process. Their vocabulary and reading abilities, for example, can be negatively affected. Visual learning is typically the favored learning mode of students with hearing loss. If the message they get is solely presented verbally, it will be difficult for them to learn successfully. FM systems, for example, can be a useful tool for them throughout the lesson (Chung et al., 2020). Students who seek recorded information must wait a long time to acquire it. This generates a slew of issues for them since their self-esteem and confidence may suffer as a result.

After observing that hearing impaired students rarely achieve quality education online during COVID-19, this study sought to investigate the needs and satisfaction levels of students who are hard of hearing. The essence of this study focuses to examine how well the students were able to understand their classes and how well they were able to prepare for the exam. The mental trauma they felt during the online classes is illustrated in the findings, where they not only suffer from the fluctuation of the internet but also from their ringing ears caused by their tinnitus issues as well. With the growing number of hard-of-hearing students enrolling in online classes, it is critical that general education teachers gain access to online classroom settings. Many teachers are unaware of issues concerning hard-of-hearing students; general education teachers may have little experience dealing with deaf students. For general education teachers to know where to start with a student, it is crucial to first and foremost grasp the traits, advantages, and needs of hard-of-hearing students in the online classroom (Pathak & Gaire, 2019).

Despite the fact that difficulties are associated with potential, the pandemic crisis has presented teachers with a number of challenges when it comes to learning in a virtual environment, one can say that there are more possibilities to broaden their educational skill set by implementing various teaching approaches, such as engaging students who are hard of hearing through online learning strategies, incorporating inclusion principles, encouraging more collaboration with fellow educators, and maintaining communication with students as well as with the parents (Smith, 2021). By focusing efforts on areas like efficient technology resources and training, coherent guidance, and support, school administrators can ensure that educators are well-equipped to teach hard-of-hearing children in a pandemic world. This will contribute to creating inclusive learning environments and supporting the educational success and wellbeing of these students (Truman, 2011).

Our culture has shaped how disabled women are perceived as having two disabilities. It has a tremendous impact on the career path of any disabled woman who is forced to reluctantly isolate herself in a room. After drawing a conclusion from my participants' stories, it reveals that exclusion is not an isolated

incident but rather a systemic issue deeply rooted in social structures and power dynamics. Privileged groups, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate discriminatory practices that contribute to the exclusion of marginalized individuals or groups. This ongoing cycle of exclusion reinforces and maintains societal divisions. Hence, sociologists of Intersectionality frequently examine the experiences and perspectives of marginalized and underrepresented groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Our society has given a wide berth to how disabled females are regarded as having a double disability. It has a significant impact on the career path of every disabled female who must hesitantly decide to lock them inside the room.

It figures out how exclusion becomes progressively ingrained within the structure of society as well as in the educational entity. According to intersectionality theory, there is always a difference in levels of suffering within the same context, and this online class exemplifies the struggles which hearing loss students face in obtaining a standard education in the same educational settings while learning with their normal-hearing peers. According to the School Sector Development Plan 2016–2023, “equitable access to counter inequalities suffered by children from disadvantaged groups, children with special needs, and children from rural areas,” and highlights inclusive education as a key area for strategic intervention. They intend to institutionalize “support systems that have included early screening and interventions through closer collaboration between the health and education ministries and a shift away from special and segregated education services” to increase the educational attainment of children with disabilities.

Even though we can see the acts and Regulations have been implemented for women's rights and development who are suffering from disability, the issues of women and children with hearing impairment have not been adequately included in such Acts and Regulations. The government's role must be focused on alternative education plans during the pandemic and the availability of resources for students with disabilities. It is crucial for governments and educational institutions to prioritize inclusive education and ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities, even in a pandemic world. This provides multiple opportunities for educators as well to meet the needs of their students.

By providing training in such areas, local education agencies and teacher preparation programs can better prepare educators to meet the diverse needs of their students and navigate the evolving educational landscape. Professional development opportunities, workshops, and ongoing support can further enhance educators' skills and ensure that they stay up to date with best practices (Smith et al., 2016). However, neither in inclusive education nor specifically during the epidemic did the government take any action for hard-of-hearing kids. Because of this, hard-of-hearing children are always invisible in groups with their

hearing counterparts. These monuments hindered the lives of hard-of-hearing students as well as presented impediments to high-quality education.

Conclusion

The research conducted in April 2000 shows that hearing-impaired students scored lower while comparing to the normal-hearing students in inclusive classroom settings. Thus, here the strategy of inclusive education shows some shortcomings in that it didn't provide an equity platform while educating the hard of hearing students. There exists a huge gap between strategy and policy application for inclusive education, especially for hard-of-hearing students (Kreimeyer et al., 2000). To ensure effective communication and fair participation, educators who use virtual classrooms with hard-of-hearing students should take several precautions like developing visual tools and techniques, providing study materials before class and speaking clearly and slowly during class. Be understanding and patient. Recognize that hearing-impaired students can have trouble understanding the material or paying attention to the conversations. The most important thing is to offer extra time and assistance, as well as allot extra time for hard-of-hearing children. Therefore, whether it is for asking questions, seeking clarification, or participating in class activities, educators need to be patient, empathetic, and willing to provide more support when needed. Then only, they will have equal opportunities to engage in learning activities.

Since there is a significant research gap in understanding the requirements of hard of hearing students for receiving a quality education, whether it is online or in an inclusive classroom, there is a need for more research. Subsequently, most of this study is devoted to bridging the gap between the needs of hard of hearing students and the assistance they have thus far received.

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