

Online Teaching: Better or Worse?

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INTRODUCTION

The continuous COVID-19 pandemic has crippled the educational system all across the world, and education has been one of the major casualties. During the COVID-19 lockdown, nearly all governments around the world temporarily closed educational institutions. Because of the lockdown, institutions were forced to go online without warning or preparation, and as a result, a new medium for online education was proposed, which had been supposedly to be an experimental endeavor. According to the UNICEF-ITU report, this was the largest widespread disruption in education in modern history, affecting 1.6 billion children worldwide [1]. Policymakers all across the world have called for a shift to remote learning to solve the crisis using online platforms.

No option except online teaching

With the sudden shift away from the traditional classroom in many parts of the globe, the effectiveness and adoption of online learning is a key concern. Online education would have been unthinkable two decades ago. But, today substantial broadband access, IT-enabled tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Slido, Moodle and the ubiquitous smartphone has made much difference. Computer-assisted instruction is changing the pedagogical landscape as an increasing number of students are seeking online education. Colleges and universities are now touting the efficiencies of Web-based education and are rapidly implementing online classes to meet student needs worldwide [2]. The term e-learning usually refers to the use of different kind of information and communication technologies (ICT) and electronic devices in

education. Online E-learning is a change from the traditional education or training system to more ICT-based personalized and flexible education systems. E-learning may also be referred to as distance learning, virtual education, digital education, web-based training (WBT), Internet based training (IBT), computer-based training (CBT) or technologically enhanced learning depending on the emphasis of the delivery method or the components. The delivered learning materials may be in the form of text, images, animations video tutorials or even a computer programme. The growth of e-learning is more of a dynamic process as it is affected by many factors such as the subject matters, the knowledge level of the audience and the environment around the audience [3]. Depending on the use of the source or the delivery medium, e-learning can be of different kinds such as Purely online, Blended learning, Synchronous, asynchronous, instructor-led group, self-study, web based, computer based and video/audio tape by accessing multimedia files through YouTube or any other video/audio sharing websites [4].

A large group of professionals spent a lot of time on social media sites like Facebook, Whatsapp, Viber, WeChat, and other similar sites, but there was less involvement in an online space for teaching and learning activities. Teachers make up the largest professional group involved in human development [5]. It differs from other occupations in that it has a wide range of dimensions [6]. Online education was new during lockdown for learners as well as teachers. The teachers had to learn first the online medium and then understand how to use it

effectively in class. For most teachers, juggling various controls and confusions, chat windows, allowing people to enter the classroom electronically, watching online videos, switching between multiple windows, or drawing on a separate digital pad or on-screen can become overwhelming. However, there was no other option except to go online. Because online classes were so popular, it appears that brick-and-mortar classes may be discontinued. Most of the teachers bought laptops and had internet connections and grew familiar with advance technology of online era during Covid-19 lockdown. Unlike offline sessions, teachers tuned through online learning platforms for greater interaction and feedback with students. But, due to a lack of diversity, this has resulted in an unbalanced landscape.

Student's comfort zone

With the pandemic still looming, access to online education maintained the flow and allow individuals to study in a safe environment. Unlike traditional college courses, online teaching allowed students to save money on transportation, rent, hostel fees, and study materials. It is also more flexible; rather than attending rigid 9-5 offline classes, students can record and view lectures whenever they choose, guaranteeing that they never miss a class. Students appear to find online teaching to be convenient, with up-to-date learning resources, a flexible learning style, a global learning society, scalable e-learning systems, a greater degree of student independence, and better retention being some of the primary benefits which allowed them to experience customised learning. They were benefited from a comfortable home atmosphere as they transitioned to an online presence, taking advantage of the flexibility of the online world. However, students have found it difficult to schedule one-hour or 45-minute courses and expect to listen to lectures throughout the day. Also, students' inadequate attendance has been observed on a regular basis. Aside from e-teaching and e-learning, the most important challenge facing

academic institutions was assessing students' progress through various modes of assessment and examination. Different levels of examinations were cancelled as a result of the pandemic's effects, and students were promoted with excellent grades to the next grade without having to take exams based only on the completion of assignments and course work.

Pros and Cons

Online learning has the benefit of allowing instructors to focus on individual interactions with students. During the design and development of an online course, subject matter experts consider the implications of learning goals objectives, assessment, instructional materials, activities, and interactions. The online space allows for the inclusion of innovative technologies like video conferencing, animation and storyboarding, blogs and social media, games and global perspectives. Academic and student support services can be integrated right into the design of the online course. Student success and career services, library aid and research, technology help, and community events are now only a click away, giving instructors limitless options for diverse and enriching learning activities. Several studies have analyzed and revealed several potential benefits to online learning [7-11].

Main benefits include new markets, economic benefits, international partnerships, and reduced time to market, educational benefits, anonymity, student interaction and satisfaction, growth in faculty learning curve, and "rich" feedback and evaluation. Research has demonstrated that universities staying current with technological innovations results in improved online course development outcomes and satisfaction [12]. As any other systems online teaching also have some drawbacks. Being flexible is not always good as it may cause laziness and thus reduce efficiency. Classes are held in a physical environment in a normal higher education paradigm, usually through case studies, lectures, or group work,

where lecturers explain the topic or theory and students can get their questions answered. But, during online classes it was mislaid.

Moreover, students were frequently passive, resulting in learning loss, fatigue from online learning to mental stress. The rigidity towards online teaching has deteriorated the continuous and creative evaluation of his/her students. At the meantime, medical and paramedical students based on theory courses had no exposure to clinical practice of examining live patients. Full courses had been completed and taught in colleges with YouTube videos, power points and with other IT tools with no eye contact, relying solely on the teacher's and students' voices. Cheating in examinations was a common occurrence.

Several potential limitations are also found in online learning by the students, the instructors and the tenured faculty namely the need for start-up funding, adequate time, organizational preparedness, student readiness, differing stages of team development, crisis management, faculty learning curve, members with limited language skills, technical support, team effort, synchronous- or asynchronous-classroom contexts, costs, accessibility to course materials, delayed feedback, and evaluation and assessment [8]. Higher order thinking is often lacking in online learning, and this may be because instructors attempt to transfer traditional classroom practices to online courses [13]. In some cases face-to-face study materials might be more effective than online learning as online teaching lacks two-way communication. Furthermore, the online teaching method is not supposed to be always favorable as there is no personal contact and class room discussion.

New experience for teachers

The pandemic induced conditions posed several challenges which largely remained unnoticed. No one has noticed the unexpected load and burden of responsibilities placed on teachers with unrealistic expectations of duty, lengthy zoom meetings, poor internet, technical faults in apps and student

insincerity. Teachers have frequently encountered embarrassing situations and expressed worry about a lack of decorum, undisciplined activities such as sending them live messages in chatrooms, keeping students in control was becoming tough for them, pulling various pranks on the teachers during online sessions, chatting with their friends, and playing games.

In another instance, female teachers appeared concerned to use Zoom to conduct classes because students share the Zoom link with outsiders who join classes and make hurl inappropriate remarks on the teacher. Teachers were compelled to forcefully repeat the online tutorials, but were not paid in a responsible way. Often, salaries attending online classes were paid with monopoly of organizations. Meanwhile, during the lockdown, teachers affiliated with private groups at medical, paramedical, higher secondary, and pre-schools lost their jobs with no reasons without any explanations. Teaching professionals frequently encountered an added psychological stress as a result of online teaching implications, as well as lockdown.

Moreover, previous studies have found that working from home using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can create feelings of tension, anxiety, exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction [14], and in times of a pandemic these were the only tools that were available to teachers. Teachers also experienced feelings of discomfort when dealing with technology-enriched classrooms and related issues [15]. It was time to prove themselves, with questions such as whether they are qualified to teach online, how to meet discipline-related demands, what kind of training they would require, how to be successful online instructors, how to assess and evaluate learning outcomes, and how to deal with stress and feelings of frustration while transitioning to online learning environments [15,16]. Educational institutions, online learning organizations and authorities, and online learning theorists should identify and highlight the roles,

qualities, abilities, and skills that are required to be a competent and successful online instructor. Online faculty members need a framework and guideline that support them, improve their skills, and help to design adequate training programs [17].

CONCLUSIONS

Despite all of the recent publications praising online teaching, researchers continue to doubt its effectiveness. Unplanned and rapid move to online learning with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation resulted in poor digital learning outcomes. The effectiveness of online teaching is still being studied. Cost-benefit analysis, student experience, and student achievement are now being extensively scrutinized when assessing whether online education is an acceptable substitute for classroom teaching. With institutions closed for a lengthy period of time, the reality of online education became a reality. The teachers who were proficient at planning and teaching in the traditional classroom, planning for an online setting

required some re-learning before enduring e-learning.

Most of the old teachers refused to continue online teaching as it was just like taking the bull by its horns. However, young generation being familiar with technology were interested enough to continue online teaching. The online teaching and learning has been turned into online become a new experiences and practices for many teachers as well as learners during COVID-19. At the same time, the universities should take appropriate strategies to make the policy, classroom, curricula, teachers and students blended learning friendly so that the balance between online education and face to face mode of teaching and learning.

In Nepal, education system was never very efficient even in the best of times. In education, change comes with questions. These online teaching tools are serving to compensate the traditional class room teaching, but, it is important to realize that this is a new medium in which we are still in the early phases in Nepal.

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