

Impact of COVID-19 on Education sector in Nepal

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Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 brought about a seismic shift in the lives of people worldwide, and students were no exception. The impact of covid-19 has significantly disrupted every aspect of human life. Educational institutions around the globe faced significant disruptions, altering the way students learn, interact, and experience their academic journey. Remote learning, social distancing, and various restrictions became the new norm, posing numerous challenges and implications for students of all ages. The pandemic enforced worldwide lockdowns, creating significant negative effects on students' academic and social lives. Around 9 million students in Nepal were estimated to be suffered due to the closure of academic sector. Due to the unfavorable situation, academic institutions were compelled to adopt alternative methods of teaching and learning. The education sector has been fighting to survive the crisis with a different approach to wash away the threat of pandemic. This paper highlights some measures taken by government of Nepal to provide seamless education. Both positive and negative impact of COVID-19 on education are discussed and some fruitful suggestions are also pointed out to carry out educational activities.

Keywords: COVID-19, Education Sector, Online Learning, Remote Learning, Nepal, Pandemic Impact.

Introduction

The year 2020 started with the terror of the COVID-19 and witnessed the indelible imprints of the pandemic on the global community (WHO, 2020). The global health emergency due to COVID-19 was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO). Subsequently, it was declared a pandemic after more than 118,000 infected population by COVID-19 from 114 countries with 4,291 deaths up to 11th March 2020. Globally, up to 6th August 2021, there had been over 200 million confirmed cases, including the deaths of over 42 million (WHO, 2021). WHO recommended the countries across the world to take precautionary measures to break the transmission chain of the coronavirus (Barkur and Vibha Kamath, 2020).

Due to the unfavorable situation academic institutions were enforced to initiate an alternative way to continue the educational classes. Thus, all the teachers were directed to teach through e-learning techniques, mainly online classes. There is no one-size-fits-all pedagogy for online learning. There are variety of subjects with varying needs. Different subjects and age groups require different approaches to online learning (Doucet et al,

2020). Online learning also allows physically challenged students with more freedom to participate in learning in the virtual environment, requiring limited movement (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). The shift to remote learning, led to challenges in adapting to online platforms and potential learning gaps. But slowly the continuation of classes via online has played a significant role for the academic learning or assistance to universities students during the critical situation.

Distance learning is a solution to continuing the education system, but it is difficult in developing countries because many parents have not themselves been to school and there is a lack of the necessary Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructures, computers, radio, and television to provide distance learning. Access to computers and access to the internet is basic to successful distance teaching. This is not guaranteed for all students in developing countries (Zhang, 2020). Also, staff and teachers should be familiar with online teaching platforms. Teachers struggle with difficulties in technology and lack of infrastructure availability. Some private schools may not pay their staff's salary and some schools may pay half salary. COVID-19 affects poor families since many students don't have access to the equipment at home. The physical school closure and the implementation of distance education lead the student to spend less time learning, stress, and lack of learning motivation (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

In developing countries like Nepal the negative experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic were often magnified due to various pre-existing challenges and limited resources like limited access to technology and internet for remote learning, disruptions in in-person education, widening educational inequalities, economic hardships affecting affordability and potential dropouts, health and hygiene concerns, especially in areas with limited healthcare access etc. But it is also possible that some students' careers might benefit from the interruptions. For example, in Norway, it has been decided that all 10th grade students will be awarded a high-school degree. A study carried out in France shows that the 1968 abandoning of the normal examination procedures in France, following the student riots, led to positive long-term labour market consequences for the affected cohort (Maurin & McNally, 2008).

The second wave began in April 2021 and peaked in May when the average number of cases per day reached 9317 and deaths peaked at approximately 246 a day in Kathmandu valley and other parts of Nepal. The existing government facilities were not able to handle the volume of sick patients and hospitals continued to experience widespread shortage of oxygen and other logistics supply. The second wave of COVID-19 has also created many challenges and opportunities for the educational institution to strengthen their technological knowledge and infrastructure depending on the resources, both materials and human, available to them. For students, the second wave brought continued challenges in accessing education. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds struggled to keep up with online classes, and the quality of education suffered. Furthermore, the prolonged closure of educational institutions impacted students' mental well-being, as they faced isolation and uncertainty about their

academic progress and future prospects.

With the availability of a sea of platforms and online educational tools, the users-both educators and learners-face frequent hiccups while using it or referring to these tools. Some of the challenges with e-learning identified and highlighted by many researchers are accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning and educational policy (Murgatrottd, 2020).

Despite these challenges, the crisis demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of Nepalese students. Some students creatively found ways to continue learning through community support and self-driven initiatives. The crisis also highlights the importance of research and innovation, offering students chances to contribute to healthcare and technological advancements. Moreover, the sense of community and social impact encouraged students to engage in volunteer work and support those in need. The increased reliance on remote work and online services opens doors for students to explore new job opportunities and entrepreneurship ventures. Additionally, educational institutions and organizations worked to provide mental health support and resources to help students cope with the pandemic's emotional toll.

Methodology

This article presented the impact of COVID-19 on Nepalese education system based on the published documents, reports and news commentaries. This study is based on secondary data. Data and information are collected from Google Scholar, Science Direct, published reports and various reports prepared by national and international agencies on COVID-19 pandemic. Information is collected from various authentic websites and journals relating to impact of COVID-19 on educational system.

Limitations

Although this study provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector in Nepal, it has certain limitations. The study relies entirely on secondary sources, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of students, teachers, and educational institutions across different geographical and socio-economic contexts in Nepal. Since the pandemic situation evolved rapidly, some information and policies discussed in the study may have changed over time. Furthermore, the absence of field-based research and quantitative analysis limits the ability to generalize the findings at a national level. Future studies incorporating primary data collection and comparative regional analysis could provide a deeper understanding of the long-term educational impacts of the pandemic.

Objectives

The present research paper is focused on the following objectives:

1. To identify and examine various measures taken by the Government of Nepal for the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To highlight various positive impacts of COVID-19 on education.

3. To enlist some negative impacts of COVID-19 and to put some effective suggestions for continuing education during the pandemic situation.

Statement of the Problem

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal has led to significant disruptions in the education sector, forcing schools and educational institutions to implement measures such as closures, remote learning, and alternative teaching methods. This unpredictable crisis has posed numerous challenges to students, teachers, parents, and policymakers, creating a need to comprehensively examine the consequences of COVID-19 on education in Nepal. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on the education sector in Nepal, identify the challenges faced by stakeholders, and explore the adaptations and strategies employed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on students' learning outcomes and the overall educational landscape.

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of school closures and the transition to remote learning on students' academic performance in Nepal during the COVID-19 pandemic ?
2. How have teachers adapted their pedagogical approaches and instructional methods to suit remote learning environments, and what are their perceptions of its effectiveness ?
3. What strategies and policies have the Nepalese government and educational institutions employed to ensure the continuity of education during the pandemic?
4. How has the pandemic affected the socio-economic status of students and their families, and what measures have been taken to alleviate financial burdens in accessing education ?
5. What role have parents and communities played in supporting students' learning during the pandemic ?
6. What are the challenges faced by students with disabilities in accessing education during the pandemic?
7. What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of the education sector in Nepal during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can these insights inform future preparedness strategies for potential future crises ?

Results and Discussion

The Government of Nepal introduced several measures to minimize the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the education sector. These initiatives primarily focused on ensuring continuity of learning, supporting teachers and students, promoting digital education, and maintaining the safety and well-being of learners during the health crisis. As schools and educational institutions remained closed during lockdown periods to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the government encouraged the continuation of education through online learning systems and virtual classes. Many schools gradually shifted toward digital platforms to maintain academic activities despite

physical restrictions.

To support remote learning, the government encouraged and facilitated the development of digital learning platforms and educational resources. Various initiatives were introduced to help students continue their studies from home through online classes, television broadcasts, radio programs, and printed learning materials. In areas where internet access was limited, printed worksheets and home-based learning materials were distributed to ensure that students could continue learning activities during school closures. These efforts aimed to reduce the interruption in education and provide alternative learning opportunities for students across different regions of the country.

The pandemic also highlighted the need for teacher training and capacity building in digital education. As many teachers had limited experience with online teaching methods before the pandemic, the government and educational institutions organized training programs and workshops to improve teachers' technological skills and enhance their ability to conduct virtual classes effectively. Teachers were encouraged to adapt to digital teaching methods, prepare electronic learning materials, and use online communication platforms to maintain interaction with students during remote learning periods.

In addition to educational continuity, the government also emphasized health and safety measures within the education sector. Various safety guidelines and protocols were introduced for schools and educational institutions, including social distancing measures, handwashing practices, sanitation procedures, and the use of face masks to reduce the risk of infection. Recognizing the psychological impact of the pandemic on students and teachers, the government also promoted mental health awareness and encouraged schools to provide emotional support and counseling services to help students cope with stress, anxiety, and other challenges caused by the pandemic situation.

The government further introduced examination reforms and financial support measures to address academic disruptions during the pandemic. Alternative evaluation methods and flexible academic policies were implemented after examinations and academic schedules were heavily affected by lockdown restrictions. In some cases, internal assessments and modified evaluation systems were used to continue academic progression. Efforts were also made to support disadvantaged students and educational institutions affected by the economic impact of the pandemic, ensuring that learning opportunities could continue despite the national crisis.

Positive impact of COVID-19 on education

The COVID-19 pandemic, despite creating numerous challenges in the education sector, also brought several positive changes and opportunities for educational development in Nepal and around the world. One of the major positive impacts of the pandemic was the rapid growth and adoption of digital learning systems. Educational institutions that had previously relied mainly on traditional classroom teaching were compelled to introduce online classes, virtual meetings, and digital learning platforms

to continue academic activities. This transition accelerated the integration of technology into education and encouraged both teachers and students to become familiar with digital tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and online learning management systems.

The pandemic also contributed to the development of digital literacy among teachers, students, and parents. Many teachers who had limited experience with technology before the pandemic learned how to conduct online classes, prepare digital presentations, share electronic learning materials, and communicate virtually with students. Similarly, students improved their technological skills by using online platforms for attending classes, completing assignments, conducting research, and participating in virtual discussions. Parents also became more involved in monitoring and supporting their children's learning activities from home, creating stronger communication between schools and families.

Another positive impact of the pandemic was the increased flexibility in teaching and learning methods. Online education provided opportunities for students to learn from home and access recorded lectures, digital notes, and educational resources at their convenience. This flexibility encouraged self-learning and independent study habits among students. Educational institutions also explored alternative teaching approaches such as blended learning, virtual classrooms, and multimedia-based instruction, which may continue to benefit the education system even after the pandemic. In some cases, students who were previously unable to attend physical classes regularly were able to continue their studies through online platforms.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of technological investment and educational reform in Nepal. The challenges faced during school closures encouraged the government, educational institutions, and policymakers to focus more seriously on improving digital infrastructure, internet accessibility, and technological preparedness in the education sector. Various schools and universities started investing in online learning systems, teacher training programs, and digital educational materials to strengthen their ability to manage future crises. The pandemic therefore acted as a catalyst for modernization and innovation within the education system.

In addition, the pandemic encouraged greater collaboration and resource sharing among educational institutions, teachers, and students. Many organizations, universities, and international institutions provided free online courses, webinars, training sessions, and digital educational resources during the pandemic period. Students and teachers gained access to global educational content that was previously less accessible. This increased exposure to online learning resources expanded opportunities for skill development, professional growth, and international academic collaboration.

The pandemic also increased awareness regarding health, hygiene, and mental well-being within educational institutions. Schools and colleges became more conscious of the importance of sanitation, personal hygiene, emotional support, and student well-being. Educational institutions began introducing health safety measures, counseling support,

and awareness programs to promote both physical and mental health among students and staff. These practices contributed to creating a more health-conscious educational environment.

Overall, although the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the education sector, it also created opportunities for technological advancement, educational innovation, and institutional improvement. The experience gained during the pandemic demonstrated the importance of flexibility, digital preparedness, and modern teaching approaches in ensuring the continuity of education during times of crisis. These positive developments may contribute to the long-term transformation and modernization of Nepal's education system in the future.

Negative impact of covid-19 on education

The education sector was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, creating several negative impacts on students, teachers, and educational institutions in Nepal. The closure of schools and colleges during the pandemic disrupted academic calendars, leading to delays in examinations, admissions, graduation timelines, and publication of results. In Nepal, the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) scheduled for 2020 was cancelled and students were evaluated through internal assessment for the first time in history. Similarly, university examinations and result publications were delayed for several months compared to the usual academic schedule due to lockdown restrictions and administrative difficulties (Dawadi et al., 2020). These disruptions negatively affected students' academic continuity and created uncertainty regarding their education and career progression. The interruption of regular classroom teaching also reduced direct interaction between teachers and students, which affected the overall learning environment.

The sudden transition to remote learning created difficulties for many students in adapting to online education. Limited access to technology, unstable internet connectivity, and lack of proper learning environments contributed to learning loss and widened educational inequalities among students. Students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds faced greater challenges in accessing educational resources and receiving proper guidance from teachers. In many cases, students had to rely on mobile phones with limited internet data for attending classes, while others could not participate regularly due to the unavailability of digital devices. Teachers also faced challenges in conducting effective virtual classes because many educational institutions lacked proper technological preparedness and digital infrastructure.

Another major issue during the pandemic was the decline in the effectiveness and quality of education. Many teachers and students were unfamiliar with online teaching and learning methods, making it difficult to maintain proper academic engagement. Practical learning activities, classroom discussions, and regular assessments were limited during online classes, which reduced students' understanding of course materials. Frequent internet interruptions and technical problems further affected the continuity of

online learning. As a result, many students experienced learning gaps and difficulties in maintaining concentration and motivation during the lockdown period.

Economic hardship caused by the pandemic also had a serious impact on students and their families. Many households experienced unemployment, reduced income, and financial instability during the lockdown, making it difficult to continue supporting educational expenses. Some students were unable to afford internet packages, electronic devices, or school fees necessary for online education. These financial challenges increased the risk of school dropout among students from vulnerable and low-income families. The economic crisis therefore not only affected students' access to education but also widened the gap between privileged and underprivileged groups within society.

The pandemic also created significant psychological and emotional challenges for students. Long periods of isolation, uncertainty about examinations and future careers, reduced social interaction, and academic pressure increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness among students. Many students struggled to maintain their mental well-being while adapting to a completely different learning environment from home. Teachers and parents were similarly affected, as they had to manage additional responsibilities and adjust to new educational methods during a stressful period.

Compared to developed countries such as South Korea, Singapore, and Finland, Nepal faced greater difficulties in implementing effective online education due to limited digital infrastructure and unequal internet accessibility. While technologically advanced countries rapidly transitioned toward fully digital learning systems, Nepal relied on a combination of online classes, television programs, radio broadcasts, and printed learning materials to continue educational activities. Similar to many countries around the world, Nepal also introduced flexible academic policies, teacher training initiatives, and mental health support measures during the pandemic. However, these efforts were not equally effective or accessible for all students, particularly those living in remote and rural areas.

Addressing these negative impacts is crucial to ensure that Nepal's education system can recover and provide equitable learning opportunities for all students. This may involve investing in technological infrastructure, teacher training, mental health support, and targeted interventions to help students bridge learning gaps and cope with the long-term effects of the pandemic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching and diverse impacts on education in Nepal. While there have been some positive outcomes, such as accelerated digital transformation and innovative teaching methods, the negative effects have been substantial. Disruptions in the academic calendar, learning loss, limited access to quality education, and the toll on students' mental health are some of the critical challenges faced by students and educational institutions. It is evident that addressing these negative impacts requires concerted efforts from the government, educational institutions, and

the community. Bridging the digital divide, providing support for teachers in adapting to online instruction, and ensuring equitable access to education are essential steps to improve the education landscape in Nepal.

Additionally, focusing on students' mental well-being, offering catch-up programs, and creating a safe and inclusive learning environment can help mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic. Furthermore, investing in healthcare infrastructure and preparedness can give support to education and enable a more effective response to future challenges. While the pandemic brought unknown disruptions, it also emphasized the importance of collective action, innovation, and adaptability in the education sector. By learning from this experience and implementing necessary reforms, Nepal can build a more resilient and inclusive education system that equips students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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