Moving Training to Online Platform: A Case of Nepal Administrative Staff College during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

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Abstract

This study examines the transition to online training at the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a mixed-methods case study approach, the research collected quantitative data through questionnaires from 90 training participants and qualitative insights from 15 follow-up interviews. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics for quantitative responses and thematic analysis for qualitative feedback. Findings reveal that while online platforms successfully reached 5,295 participants and enhanced digital literacy, significant challenges emerged including internet instability and reduced interpersonal interaction. The study concludes that online training serves as a crucial alternative during crises but cannot fully replace traditional methods. It recommends NASC develop a blended learning model that strategically combines both approaches to create a more resilient and effective training system for Nepal's public sector.

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic, Digital Technologies, Online Work/Training, NASC*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruption to almost every sector of society, and education and training institutions were among the most affected. The sudden lockdowns and restrictions on physical gatherings made it impossible to continue face-to-face training activities, compelling organizations around the world to adopt online alternatives. Globally, this transition to online learning during the pandemic was characterized by both opportunities and challenges. Dhawan (2020) stated that the pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of educational and training systems, compelling institutions to innovate and adapt quickly. Similarly, Adedoyin

and Soykan (2020) observed that although online education facilitated access and continuity, it also exposed inequalities in technological resources and digital literacy.

In the context of developing countries like Nepal, the situation was more complex. Limited internet infrastructure, inconsistent power supply, and varying levels of digital competence among participants created barriers to effective online learning. Nonetheless, the crisis became a catalyst for change, prompting institutions like NASC to explore new modalities of training delivery through digital platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Google Classroom.

The problem faced by NASC during the pandemic was not merely technological but also institutional. As a public training body, it had to maintain the quality, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of its programs while adapting to a new mode of delivery. The central challenge lay in ensuring that online training achieved the same learning outcomes as face-to-face sessions, despite the lack of physical interaction and experiential learning components. Trainers also had to adapt their pedagogical approaches to virtual environments, while participants had to familiarize themselves with online tools and self-directed learning methods. Moreover, ensuring equitable participation of officials from remote areas posed additional difficulties, as access to stable internet connectivity varied widely across regions (Koirala et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges, NASC developed and implemented a series of online training programs designed to replicate the structure and objectives of its conventional training. The institution introduced digital learning management systems, conducted online orientations, and provided technical support to trainers and trainees. These efforts not only sustained the learning process during the crisis but also contributed to building digital competence among civil servants. According to Khatri et al. (2023), such initiatives marked a transformative phase in Nepal's public sector training system, setting the foundation for blended and hybrid learning models in the post-pandemic era. The experience also demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of NASC as an institution committed to maintaining professional development even in adverse circumstances.

The main objective of this study is to examine how NASC successfully transitioned its training programs to an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic and how participants perceived and experienced this new learning environment. Specifically, the study aims to identify the factors that facilitated or hindered the effectiveness of online training, assess participants' satisfaction and readiness, and explore the institutional strategies that supported this transformation. By analyzing these dimensions, the study provides insight into the broader question of how digital learning can be effectively institutionalized in public sector training in Nepal.

The significance of this study lies in its practical and academic contributions. On a practical level, it offers lessons for educators and training institutions seeking to design resilient and inclusive training systems in the face of crises. The experience of NASC illustrates that with proper planning, leadership, and digital infrastructure, online training can serve as a viable and effective alternative to traditional training. On an academic level, the study adds to the growing body of literature on digital education in developing countries, where contextual factors such as infrastructure, institutional culture, and digital literacy play a crucial role. It

also extends understanding of how public institutions can leverage technology for sustainable capacity building beyond the pandemic context (Ali, 2020; Greenhow et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of institutional readiness and leadership commitment in the successful implementation of online learning. As noted by König et al. (2020), the effectiveness of digital training depends not only on technology but also on the ability of institutions to create supportive environments that encourage participation and engagement. NASC's experience highlights how organizational innovation, combined with the dedication of trainers and trainees, can transform a crisis into an opportunity for digital advancement.

Literature review

Background of COVID-19

The world was at its ongoing pace of economic, social, and political development with a new upcoming year 2020 just few days ahead. In 31 December 2019 Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China reported cluster cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei province. In two weeks' period of reporting, inspection, and study the researchers identified a novel coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020, and later declared pandemic in 11 March 2020 (Timeline of WHO's Response to COVID-19, 2021). Table 1 shows the timeline incidents and actions performed by WHO.

Table 1: ***WHO response to COVID-19***

Date	Key activities and events
31-12-2019	The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported a cluster of pneumonia case. A novel coronavirus was later identified as the cause.
04-01-2020	The WHO announces one social media that there is a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, with no deaths reported.
05-01-2020	The WHO published its first disease outbreak news report on the new virus. This report included a risk assessment, advice, and information from China regarding the situation in Wuhan.
10-01-2020	The WHO issues comprehensive technical guidance to all countries on detecting, testing, and managing potential cases. The organization also published infection prevention and control for health workers, based on known modes of transmission for similar respiratory virus.
12-01-2020	China publicly shared the genetic sequence of the COVID-19 virus.
13-01-2020	Health officials confirmed a case of COVID-19 in Thailand, representing the first officially recorded case outside of China.
22-01-2020	WHO mission to China concluded that there was evidence of human-to-human transmission occurring in Wuhan.
20-01-2020	The WHO Director-General declared the outbreak a Public Health emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) following advice from the Emergency Committee. This declaration was made when 7,718 cases were confirmed globally, with 82 cases outside of China. The global risk was assessed as high.
22-01-2020	The WHO mission to China states there is now clear evidence of human-to-human transmission in Wuhan.
28-01-2020	The head of WHO travels to Beijing to meet with Chinese leaders, learn about their response, and offer assistance. They agree to send an international team of experts to China.

Date	Key activities and events
30-01-2020	WHO reconvenes the emergency committee and declares the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). At this time, there are 7,818 confirmed cases, mostly in China, with 81 cases in 18 other countries.
03-02-2020	WHO releases a global preparedness and response plan to help countries with weaker health systems.
11-12 -02-2020	WHO holds a global research and innovation forum on COVID-19 with over 400 experts.
16-20 -02-2020	A joint WHO-China mission, with international experts, travels to Beijing, Wuhan, and other cities to study the situation and response.
11-03-2020	Due to the alarming levels of spread and severity, and concerned by the lack of action in many countries, the WHO characterized the COVID-1 outbreak as a pandemic.
13-03-2020	WHO launches the COVID-19 solidarity response fund to raise money from individuals and organizations.
18-03-2020	The WHO and partners launched the Solidarity Trial, a major international effort to conduct clinical trials that aims to generate robust data from around the world to find the most effective treatments for COVID-19.

Source: WHO Timeline - COVID-19, 2020

The symptoms of COVID-19 varied largely, from none to life threatening illness. The transmission of the disease occurred mainly when an infected person is in close contact with another person. People remained contagious for 20 days, and could be carrier of the disease without showing any symptoms. The recommended preventive measures were social distancing, wearing facemasks in public, hand washing with soap and use of sanitizers, covering one's mouth while coughing and sneezing, disinfecting surfaces, proper ventilation and air filtering, and monitoring and self-isolation for people exposed or symptomatic (Symptoms of Coronavirus | CDC, 2021). Social distancing, wearing masks, and regular use of sanitizer became the norm after the spread of COVID-19 throughout the world. The spread of COVID-19 affected the economy of almost all the countries of the world in a negative way. The educational and training institutions remain closed and the institutions had to take learning to the students' home through online platforms (Starkey et al., 2021). The analysis of Asian Development Bank (ADB) showed that COVID-19 pandemic affected almost every sector of Nepalese economy, shaving up to 0.13 percent off the gross domestic product and rendering up to 15,880 people jobless. It has been evident in many sectors like tourism and hospitality, trade and production, supply and health, and education and entertainment (COVID-19 and Its Effect on Nepal, 2020). The pandemic affected the poor and more vulnerable communities within many countries due to the rise in inequality. Many individuals around the world lost their jobs and there was rapid rise in homelessness and hunger. There was an urgent need to excel and share technological advancement, and collaborate with each other in the world to fight against the effect of pandemic (Goldin & Muggah, 2020). COVID-19 brought everything to halt, when the world was moving at its own pace with full of day-to-day activities. Industries and organizations had to slow down their productions and business activities. There was stillness in every sector. Use of technology allowed people to communicate and work remotely maintaining the social distancing and the danger of virus transmission.

Pre and post COVID-19 situations in Nepal

Nepal is a low-income country where lack of proper and adequate health system is still a problem and the rapid increase in the number of new cases and death raised alarm to the government for imposing shut down in every sector including the crowded education institutions (Panthee et al., 2020). The educational institutions were not ready to take the teaching learning practices in online platform. It was a cultural shift to administer pedagogical instruments through online not only to the school going kids but to the adults attending colleges and universities, and professionals. The lockdown created an eerie situation restricting people from movement. The government halted all the transportation system to stop the spread of virus. We observed inhuman situations in Nepal, people walked to their homes along with their families for days due to the lack in coordination between the local level and provincial government (Prasai, 2020). The daily wages labors had to eat at roadsides with the support of various social organizations and people supporting the campaign. People faced psychological terror of COVID-19, the house owners tried to force the health workers and frontline workers out of the rent (Shrestha & Kunwar, 2019). The market price went high and there was rampant black marketing that affected the people. Everything seemed fine a day before the lockdown but from the day of lockdown people started doubting everything. The number of suicide rate increased seeking attention for the mental wellbeing of the people as the enclosed environment, uncertainty situation, and lack of economic activity created a lot of mental stress (Fegert et al., 2020). During the lockdown, people panicked and government was just a bystander to watch the suffering. The lockdown affected the social life of the people and surged the demand of online activity. As the length of the lockdown started to increase people started to shift the physical activities in the online platforms. They started to search for alternative way of utilizing the online platform to perform their tasks and for entertainment.

The most affected was education so most of the educational institutes initiated the online teaching methodologies. Therefore, majority of the educational institutions of city areas in Nepal started the online education system, despite their weak preparation and understanding. In a few weeks of time all the students and teachers were using the online platforms like Google Meet and Zoom for synchronous teaching and learning. Organizations started using Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or other available online platforms to perform their back-office activities. Even though the government permitted work from home modality, most of the official procedures of Nepal is still paper based due to which there is demand of physical presence of service seeker and provider. The GoN have to address this issue so that people can demand and receive through the online platform. This demands a whole of a nation approach in the area of technology implementation in the organizational business process.

Though the government was trying its best to tackle the second wave of COVID, the steps taken from political and national level were not sufficient due to which the virus was spreading rapidly alarming the national health emergency (Kamat, R. K., 2021). Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC), a national level autonomous training institution estab-

lished in 1982 to carter the need of training to the government and public institution officials (NASC, 2021), provides the trainings to the employees from the public institutions. On 20 March 2020, NASC halted the physical mode training as a precaution to safety measures of COVID-19. The government announced the complete lockdown from 24 March 2020, which kept on extending until 16 September 2020. In between the NASC management decided to shift in the online platform to communicate and work from remote. The technical unit of NASC, Centre for Knowledge Management and IT (CKMIT) supported in selecting suitable online platform and training other employees to use the system for online training purpose. Afterwards 78 days later, NASC resumed the previously halted programs in online modality from 8 June 2020, by training the participants and resource persons in using the system.

Social distancing and online learning

Social distancing is maintenance of necessary physical distance between people from different households in order to prevent the dissemination of disease (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Social Distancing, 2020). It is maintained by keeping at least 6 feet away from each other, avoiding gathering in groups, staying out of crowded places, following the directions of local authorities, using delivery services, and connecting virtually with loved ones (How to Social Distance During COVID-19, 2020). After the COVID-19, pandemic social distancing became a new normal. The authorities prohibited gathering issuing notices. This affected almost all the industrial and organizational activities where people need to be physically present to perform a task. Panic struck in the people and they personally started avoiding meeting each other to break the chain of contamination. People started using the online platforms to communicate with each other. The private and public organizations started using the available platforms like Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, CISCO Webx, and others as video conferencing tools to maintain social distancing and work remotely. The online interaction with family members, friends, teachers, doctors, and counselors provided a sigh of relief and better mental mood during social distancing. One of the challenges of COVID-19 was to pacify the mental state of all the people brought due to the social distancing factor (Fegert et al., 2020). The challenge faced by most of the organizations during the pandemic situation was to start the halted business addressing the complexity caused by the pandemic situation (Mukhtar et al., 2020; Whitelaw et al., 2020).

Online learning is the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to develop materials for educational purposes, instructional delivery and management of the program (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). There are mainly two types of online learning synchronous and asynchronous, but the efficiency and effectiveness of online learning depend on the comprehensive understanding of the organization in the benefits and limitations of the method. Online learning is not a new idea; in 1980s, there was the start of online university degree programs, during 1990 to 2000 there was moderate maturation in the system and after 2010, there is abundant online learning and training platforms (Todorova & Bjorn-Andersen, 2011). People view the online learning as a good alternative to have but not a serious

model of replacement for traditional teaching learning method. The global practice of social distancing to break the chain of COVID-19 severely affected the traditional teaching learning practice. But the availability of technology and online platforms quickly transferred the teaching learning into the online platforms increasing the distance learning mode (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). In online learning the learners can interact, collaborate, and take ownership of their learning at their own pace and time (Ali, 2020). The online learning environment will become learner controlled and the role of educator becomes more of a facilitator as ICT immersed learning leads to self-directed learning (Geng et al., 2019). The practices of online learning is necessary not only in pandemic situations but at normal situations too, for which preparations has to be done in terms of ICT infrastructures, teachers and students readiness, availability of online learning platforms, and sufficient policy support for execution (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Ali, 2020; Todorova & Bjorn-Andersen, 2011).

Challenges and difficulties in COVID-19

The challenge rose by COVID-19 was to perform task remotely for which most of the organizations were not ready besides the IT companies that was practicing the same beforehand too. In the context of various countries to address the challenge, there were difficulties like availability of internet, electricity, purchasing power of the people, and availability of electronic devices (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Gberevbie, 2018). Above all the attitude of the people towards using the technology stood as a major challenge. Due to the crisis, the physical face-to-face classroom activities appeared in the online platforms. The universities, vocational colleges and public training institutions moved the formal trainings in the online platforms. The isolation due to practice of social distancing during the COVID-19 effected on the mental health of child and adolescents, issues like anxiety, lack of peer contact, and reduced opportunities for stress regulations were the major concerns (Fegert et al., 2020). The people working from home had to cope up with a new daily life routine with family members around and the constant threat of infection and news of death.

Training is a planned effort made by an organization to facilitate learning of job-related competencies, knowledge, skills and behavior by employees which helps for the growth and development of an organization as well as an employee. It helps to maintain and refresh existing work-related skills and acquire new ones in demand. NASC faced the challenges of reorienting the organizational business process and executing its trainings to the public officials during the time of pandemic. It was difficult to come out of the lockdown state and reset a new organizational business process in the new normal situation. NASC shifted its trainings to online mode in order to address the new normal situation after pandemic. The online training has its own benefits and limitations. The shifting of training into online platforms reduced the context and contact that is necessary to understand the training as a whole. This reduced the opportunity to build rapport and relationships. The lack of face-to-face interaction or limited amount of interaction discouraged learning from peers. There is lack of depth in learning through face-to-face interaction and challenging the ideas, which

is available in person. In addition, it is difficult to read the non-verbal communication in online, which an integral part of dialog, negotiation, is and mediation training (Matovik, 2020). There are technology challenges and barriers in implementing online learning like device issues, internet connectivity, technology cost, and lack of technology skills. There student faced problems like incompatible devices, sharing devices with other family members, unstable internet connection, restricted or unavailable internet connection, data costs, purchasing new devices, new programs or apps, inexperience with ICT skills or lack of ICT skills, and inadequate learning platforms (Rahiem, 2020). Inclusiveness is one of the advantages of online learning where the participants from remote areas, or physically challenged participants can participate. The pre-requisites of basic digital skills, electronic devices, and reliable internet infrastructure can limit the access significantly (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Despite the challenges and limitations, NASC tried to get most out of the online training platform to provide the feeling of physical training through individual interactions, breakout groups, cases studies, and compensating the physical interactions with digital. NASC implemented synchronous training methodology where both the trainees and trainer had to be present online during training. This provides the opportunity of real time virtual interaction with availability of necessary technology infrastructure and readiness.

Digital technology to breaking the barrier of COVID-19

After the COVID-19 pandemic official meetings, communications, socializing, teaching, and learning activities shifted to online platform (Matovik, 2020). Many countries around the globe came up with their own online systems for learning during the crisis so that there will not be any disruption in school education. The telecommunication companies supported government by providing low-cost data. In addition, educational institutions in many countries used the communication platforms like television, radios, YouTube, WeChat, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Viber to stay in communication with the students and impart learning (How Countries Are Using Edtech (Including Online Learning, Radio, Television, Texting) to Support Access to Remote Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020). The field of education and training had to incorporate the development in the area of ICT in the new normal situation by involving the teachers and trainers, so that during the pandemic situation also the activities remains undisturbed (Greenhow et al., 2020; König et al., 2020). The technology is evolving in such a way that the adoption initiatives by individual and educational institutions can make a great difference in running the courses online.

The countries with wider internet access and safer internet servers have better infrastructure on energy and transport. They have stronger governance and human development indicators on health, nutrition, and social protection to cope up with difficult situation like pandemics (Jiang & Ryan, 2020). The authorities can use the digital platforms to provide trustworthy and timely information on COVID-19 maintaining social distance. Online platforms connected millions of students and workers to their schools and offices from home during the lockdown to contain the COVID-19. South Korean government used digital tech-

nologies in contact tracing: Global Positioning System (GPS) data from vehicles and mobile phones, cellphone masts, facial recognition technology, bankcard records, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered big data analytics to understand and manage the spread of the virus (Whitelaw et al., 2020). Mobile payment system was widely used in developing countries of Asia and Africa, which saw the uprising of digital technology to tackle the challenges of economic activity. Digital technology can be accounted for building more resilient societies in pandemic, as people can access the official information, enroll in e-courses, take online jobs, send mobile money, do online shopping, and receive telemedicine services – no matter where they live provided that they have the access of quality internet service (Jiang & Ryan, 2020). The advantages of online learning is it ensures learning, it is manageable, and the students can access teachers and teaching materials, reduces travelling time and resources, eases administrative tasks like recording and attendance, and encourage the students to perform self-learning activities. The limitations include difficulty in teaching practical subjects, imparting only the knowledge component, immediate face-to-face feedback is difficult, and the students could engage in other irrelevant online activates. The online sessions can be better through continuous faculty development, reduction of cognitive component and increment of interactivities during the session. Online learning encourages easily manageable student-centered learning during the period of pandemic too (Mukhtar et al., 2020). During the pandemic, the traditional education system adopted the online learning modality; many educational technology companies started their services to cater the need of the educational institution so that the teachers and students gets connected during the lockdown period brining resilience in education system during pandemic (Dhawan, 2020).

The crisis developed by the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for the test of the potential online learning modality in mass. Along with its potential, it has limitations like the prerequisite of adequate digital skills, availability of computer equipment and internet connection to undertake online training, the difficulty of delivering traditional work-based learning online, and the struggle of the teachers used to classroom instructions. With high quality reskilling and upskilling opportunities online training can expand in training adults. The trainings should provide sustainable employment opportunities for job seekers and productivity gains for firms and the economy as a whole. The online training encourages the participants to develop and upgrade their basic digital skills. It requires motivation from personal level to participate in the online training as the statistics show that number of completions of online training is relatively low. There is also need of broadening the range of online course so that the trainee will have plenty of choices on the courses. There has to be a well-established digital infrastructure for equal opportunity of access. The teachers need trainings to understand the benefits and limitations, and use the online tools to impart their content. There has to be effective testing methods for the certification process to ensure quality and trust in the online training systems (The Potential of Online Learning for Adults: Early Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis, 2020).

Whole world started using technology to stay virtually connected with the use of various internet and mobile technology. IT based organizations developed and provided services to bridge the gap of communication. There was rise of home delivery services where technology provided a common platform for the service seekers and providers to communicate. E-Commerce, online banking, and mobile banking activities increased and people started receiving services by staying at home. Many organizations started "Work from Home" where the employees had access to digital systems and online video conferencing tools to stay connected with the teams staying at various geographical locations to work in team. People and organizations started to use the available video conferencing platforms to stay connected and work in team. The online learning and training were also possible due to the availability of such platforms. The educational institutions started to use the platforms like Microsoft Team, Google Meet, ZOOM, and CISCO Webx to teach in the synchronous mode. NASC explored the potential of using the available digital tools to execute the remaining training programs. Use of technology for training was the only way to achieve the social distancing during the pandemic so that the officials can participate in the training program by staying at homes. The IT companies had products for video conferencing, which they tested and upgraded during the pandemic. The better performance of the systems and free availability of such systems encouraged the organization in developing countries to adopt the technology. Technology has helped to break the barrier of lockdown during the pandemic situation by bringing the teachers and students in an online platform but for this necessary resource, staff readiness, confidence, accessibility and motivation are necessary factors (Ali, 2020). Due to the state of lockdown, the demand of the online video conferencing and chat platform skyrocketed, and the constantly emerging technologies like Facetime, WeChat, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, Slack, and Google Meet served the purpose (Arshad, 2020). The COVID-19 incident highlighted the importance of online learning but the readiness at the operation level seemed weak in case of Nepal, this learning can be fruitful in making future decisions for developing online learning platforms where the Gen Z is already indulged into (Diyal & Pandey, 2024; Gharti, 2023).

Taking training to online platform at NASC

Trainings provided by NASC has both the personal and organizational values and benefits. As the government-imposed lockdown, all the activities came to halt, NASC stopped the ongoing training programs and the future of the upcoming trainings were uncertain. Problem always comes with opportunities, so the pandemic was an opportunity to execute the training programs through the online platforms. GoN announced "Digital Nepal Framework" in 2019 with an objective to take all the government activities into digital platform to create a knowledge-based society (MoCIT, 2019). In the same framework, GoN has envisioned to develop an online training platform to increase the access of the training programs. It was time for NASC to reorient its business process with the technological interventions. There was an unknown situation and this was drawing everyone towards a different mental state. To stand up in the

new normal situation and perform the organizational activities NASC decided to perform the training using the online platform. NASC underwent various stages before starting the online training programs. First of all, the need of mindset and support from the leadership was required, as the implementation of online training would change the traditional training method. Leadership also needs to be reflective and embrace the online-learning technologies before any other disaster strikes (Todorova & Bjorn-Andersen, 2011). Despite the availability of technologies to support online learning and recurrence of disasters, leaderships never became serious in moving towards the online learning, which could have replaced the traditional need of face-to-face learning and a lot of innovation and development had been achieved till now (Dhawan, 2020). Once the leadership was convinced with the necessity of online training the second task was to choose from the existing online platform suitable to the nature of NASC's training. Then the training coordinators and management remodeled existing courses for the online modality maintaining the integrity of the course. Then NASC provided technical trainings to the trainers, coordinators, and trainees on using the system. After all these stages and trainings, the actual online training started at NASC.

The process of adaptation started with the use of online platforms among the management teams to perform the regular weekly meetings. After the management felt easy to use the system, they decided to take the training on the online platform. In physical training, trainers use different training tools and activities to keep the people engaged. This was a challenge for the trainers where they have to refine their training is such a way that they will not bore and impart the necessary knowledge and skills too. The technical team of NASC started exploring the existing online platforms and selected Google Meet and Google Classroom for long training programs and Zoom for short training programs. Google Meet and Zoom are video conferencing platforms where the trainers and trainees can communicate with each other using the meeting id created by the meeting manager. The Google classroom is an asynchronous digital platform where the trainer and trainee can communicate each other through messages, provide home assignments, share necessary files, and start a discussion forum. NASC also used the existing online document management system (DMS) (www.dms.nasc.org.np) to share the necessary presentation slides and extra materials with the participants. The DMS requires a username and password to access the uploaded files.

NASC conducted 51 training programs using the online platforms during the fiscal year 2020/21 and 2021/22 to 5295 participants (NASC, 2021, 2022). CKMIT provided the trainings to the training coordinators, trainers and trainees on using the system. The orientation program helped them to understand the benefits and drawbacks of the online platforms. The training coordinators understood how to manage an online training using the available resources. The trainers practiced on maximum utilization of the online platform for delivering the training program maintaining sufficient virtual interaction with the participants. The trainees practiced on joining the online training sessions, interacting virtually with the trainers using chat or voice. They practiced to use the Google classroom platform to create discussion forum, upload in the assigned assignments, and interact with coordinators and

trainers. The technical team also provided the backend support on running the training program for few days after the start of the training programs. After that only during the time of emergency, the technical team provided the support. Once they received the training on utilizing the system and executed the training program, they were all confident and comfortable with the system.

Once NASC started delivering training through the online modality, other public training agencies also shifted their training programs to the online platform. The shifting did not require huge investment. At first as everyone was, working from home laptop and high-speed internet was enough to execute the online training programs. Once NASC lifted the work from home and the coordinators started to come to office, CKMIT set up training rooms using desktop systems and projectors. The speaker could view the participants in the front projection screen and the slide. The coordinator could stay in the training studio or in room to monitor and facilitate the training program. With the increase in the number of training programs, the bandwidth demand of the internet increased. Just before the spread of COVID-19 in December 2019, NASC or other training institutions in Nepal never thought of using online platforms for virtual training program despite the availability of technology. Just in a few months period after the pandemic every organization was looking for an alternative way to conduct day-to-day activities. Technology provided the solution. With the access of internet and availability of mobile devices, one could join an online learning platform. NASC was ready to explore the options and adopt the technological interventions in conducting the training program through online platforms. The desperate situation created by the pandemic forced the leadership of NASC to think about the alternate ways to keep going on the business. Change is difficult to implement both in the implementer and receiver side, but sometimes the situation is as such, there is no other way than to change. There could be situation where you change to survive or you perish. NASC decided to change and adopt technology in its business process so that it can carry forward the day-to-day activities and justify its existence. This has provided a new dimension to the trainings of NASC and has provided confidence to the management that in any case we could take the alternate route to perform the organizations' task. It is the era of technology and every organization has to incorporate technology in their business process so that the business will be automated, digitized, reengineered and innovated. The technological intervention in the existing business process will help to take the business and existence of the organization into next level. An online survey was conducted with the participants of the online training programs to get their feedbacks on the effectiveness of the online training programs.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach to comprehensively investigate the transition to online training at the Nepal Administrative Staff College (NASC) during the COVID-19 pandemic. A case study research design was utilized to conduct an in-depth analysis of this specific phenomenon within its real-world context i.e. NASC.

The research population consisted of public officials who participated in NASC's online training programs during the 2020/21 and 2021/22 fiscal years. The sampling unit was an individual training participant. To determine the appropriate sample size for the study, Slovin's formula was applied, which is commonly used when the population size is known:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the margin of error. Given a population of 5,295 and a desired sample size of 90, the formula was rearranged to calculate the margin of error:

$$90 = \frac{5295}{1 + 5295e^2}$$

Solving this equation yielded:

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{57.8333}{5295}} \approx 0.1045 \approx 10\%$$

Thus, a sample size of 90 corresponds to a 10% margin of error, indicating that the selected sample can represent the population with an expected accuracy of ±10%. A simple random sampling technique was used, where the survey was distributed to all potential participants, resulting in a sample size of 90 respondents for the quantitative component. For the qualitative data, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 15 participants for interviews to gather detailed feedback.

Data were collected from primary sources. Data was gathered using two main instruments: a structured online survey created via Google Forms and semi-structured interviews. The survey collected data on demographics, technical capacity, and participant experiences using Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions.

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarize the participants' responses and experiences. Qualitative data from the open-ended interview responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness and limitations of the online training programs. This integration of quantitative and qualitative data provided a holistic understanding of the research problem.

Results

The online google form was shared with the training participants of the online training programs. Ninety responses were received from the survey questionnaire. Among the respondents 77 are male and 13 are female. 40 respondents are currently working as section officer, 40 as under secretory and 7 as joint secretory.

Table 2: ***Demographic profile of respondents***

Number of responses		**90**
Gender		
	Male	77
	Female	13
Current Job Position		
	Section Officer	43
	Under Secretory	40
	Joint Secretory	7
Age Group		
	30-40	46
	41-50	32
	51-58	12

Note: Survey data 2024

Table 3 shows the responses on eight questions from the participants mostly related on the technical aspects of the online training. The result shows a positive sign for the online training only indicating that the interruptions could be caused by weak infrastructure.

Table 3: ***Responses on statement***

S.N.	**Question**		**Response (%)**	
			Yes	**No**
1	I have good internet connection facility.		95.5	4.5
2	I used mobile data for internet connection.		45.5	54.5
3	I have electronic device for internet browsing.		94.3	5.7
4	I accessed the virtual training through.	Smart phones Laptops Desktop	31.8 93.2 15.9	
5	I attended complete classes.		96.6	3.4
6	The video was clear.		96.6	3.4
7	The audio was audible.		98.9	1.1
8	There was interruption during the session.		67	33

Note: Survey data 2024

The percentage value of the responses shows that most of the participants have a good internet connection facility (95.6%). In terms of internet access, 45.5% of the participants use mobile data for internet connection. Most of the participants (94.3%) have electronic devices for internet browsing, where they use a mix of devices for internet access. Most of the respondents used laptops and smart phones compared to desktop for the access of the virtual training. Majority of participants (96.6%) attended the complete training. The video was clear to majority of the respondent (96.6%). The audio was audible to all the participants

(98.9%). The participants (33%) faced interruptions during the training sessions due to poor internet connections or power failures.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the survey responses obtained in the Likert scale that ranges from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The survey captures the experience of the training participants on using the online platform Google Meet and Google Classroom to participate in the virtual training session. The mode, mean and standard deviation indicates that the participants felt easy to use and adapt to the online systems. This indicates that the government employee are ready to adapt the online training platforms that not only will be useful during the disaster situation but also can be supportive to the remote training while performing their job.

Table 4: ***Responses on statement***

S.N.	Question	Options					Mode	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I found Google meet easy to use.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4.55	0.5
2	I found Google classroom easy to use.	5	4	3	2	1	4	4.39	0.52
3	The Google classroom was interactive like classroom session.	5	4	3	2	1	4	3.89	0.87
4	I could interact with the resource person.	5	4	3	2	1	4	4.18	0.59
5	There was no difficulty in understanding the session.	5	4	3	2	1	4	4.17	0.61
6	The induction training of the virtual class helped me to use the system.	5	4	3	2	1	4	4.31	0.59
7	The coordinators were helpful in using the virtual class.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4.73	0.45
8	I encountered technical problems in joining the virtual class.	5	4	3	2	1	2	2.85	1.05
9	I took support of a technical person in joining the virtual class.	5	4	3	2	1	2	2.84	1.18
10	I felt comfortable with the virtual training classes.	5	4	3	2	1	4	4.29	0.65
11	Now I can attend any virtual training sessions.	5	4	3	2	1	4	4.43	0.56
12	Virtual training will save my time and effort.	5	4	3	2	1	5	4.42	0.60
13	Virtual training can substitute the existing traditional training methodology.	5	4	3	2	1	4	3.64	0.97

Note: Survey data 2024

Interview responses

The participants were interviewed in person to get the feedback on the training program during and after the completion of the training program. The feedback from the interview provides their experience and personal thought on the online training program. Some of the

responses from the participants on how was their experience on the online training program are as following.

"I am very much happy with the online training program that I could participate and finish the training program despite of being tested COVID positive."

"Unfortunately, I broke my leg during the training program, but I am thankful to NASC that I could complete the training through online resting at home."

"I was hospitalized as I tested positive for COVID, but I joined from hospital using mobile data and completed the training."

"I could perform the official tasks before and after the training program. It is possible only due to the online training modality."

"Not only I have gained knowledge on various topics but I have learnt how to use an online learning platform too."

"The lack of electricity, good internet connectivity, and sometimes physical disturbances hindered the training program otherwise it is good to have online training program."

"People from remote location can also join the program without travelling or leaving the office so that we can provide public service and attend the training as well. "

"We did not have the experience of physical interaction but we learnt about and did the virtual interactions, which is the requirement of the current situation."

"The online training can reduce the cost of the training as well as it will increase the reach of the participants, but NASC needs to make the content and delivery as interactive as possible."

"As we are on the mode of on-the-job training, sometimes we are disturbed by unexpected incidents and responsibilities."

"The group work was done in online mode, so the direct interactions with the people and officials were not possible due to which we were forced to use the information available in websites. This might not have provided us with the actual scenario of local level or community."

"Though online virtual classes are effective and convenient to stay point of views but has a lot more limitations in learning and interacting process, difficult in active participation and focus on individual inter-participant interaction is also limited."

"Online training saves time and money; it should be made available at regular times after COVID too as we can participate the training program from our own offices."

"Online training is good for imparting the theoretical knowledge. Lack of good internet is a drawback."

"The length of online training has to be increased to ensure involvement of every participant and make the training interactive."

The interview responses from the participants' hints that the training delivered in virtual modality was fruitful to them. Despite of various difficulties, they faced like being tested COVID positive or other health issues also they could participate on the training program remotely. They became aware of limitations of virtual training like availability of good internet access, compatible electronic devices, and a peaceful place without distraction. They expect NASC to make the virtual training content more participative.

Table 5 shows the Training Methodology Feedback, where most of the respondents' feel that the online training methodology used were effective to their learning.

Table 5: Training methodology feedback

Training Methodology	Effective	Effective to a large extent	Reasonably Effective	Ineffective
Online Lecture/Discussion	35.7%	50.0%	10.7%	3.6%
Online/Virtual Field work in ELG	46.4%	32.1%	17.9%	3.6%

Note: Survey data 2024

Discussion

The journey of NASC into online training is a powerful testament to how a crisis can accelerate institutional change. Our findings reveal that the transition, while born of necessity, yielded significant and unexpected successes. The training of 5,295 officials demonstrates not just continuity, but a dramatic expansion of reach, a finding that resonates with Dhawan's (2020) observation that the pandemic forced a rapid digital evolution. This shift, however, was far from straightforward and mirrors the complex blend of opportunity and challenge highlighted in the literature (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

The high levels of participant satisfaction with platform usability and the quality of audio/video are encouraging. However, the fact that 67% of participants reported interruptions, often linked to the use of mobile data, brings the literature's warnings into sharp focus. As Koirala et al. (2021) cautioned, the digital divide in Nepal is a tangible barrier. Our results confirm that while participants were willing and able, the underlying infrastructure-the "good internet connection" reported by 95.6%-was often fragile. This underscores Adedoyin and Soykan's (2020) argument that online learning can expose inequalities in technological resources, even among a relatively privileged group of public officials.

Furthermore, the experience with the "Engaging with Local Governance" module perfectly illustrates a key limitation. While the tasks were completed, participants consistently felt a lack of depth compared to physical fieldwork. This echoes the concern that online learning can reduce the opportunity for the rich, peer-to-peer learning and the nuanced understanding of ground realities that are hallmarks of traditional training (Matovik, 2020). The virtual breakout rooms, while functional, could not fully replicate the rapport built through direct interaction.

Ultimately, this study shows that NASC's story is not about online training replacing the physical classroom. Instead, it is about building resilience. The positive feedback and the newfound digital competence of staff create a compelling case for a blended future (Khatri et al., 2021). The pandemic was the push NASC needed to embrace the Digital Nepal Framework in practice, not just in policy. The challenge now, as Greenhow et al. (2020) suggest, is to leverage this hard-won experience. By thoughtfully integrating the strengths of both online and in-person methods, NASC can build a more flexible, inclusive, and robust training system ready for whatever challenges the future may hold.

Conclusion

This research set out to document a story of forced innovation at the Nepal Administrative Staff College. The pandemic was a brutal disruptor, but the response from NASC's leadership, trainers, and participants was a powerful display of resilience. Thrown into the deep end, the institution managed not just to stay afloat but to navigate new waters, training thousands of officials through a screen when meeting in person was impossible.

The findings paint a picture of cautious optimism. On one hand, the success is undeniable. The sheer number of participants reached-over five thousand-would have been difficult to achieve under traditional models. Officials from remote areas, those who fell ill, and those balancing work duties found a lifeline in these online programs. They gained more than just the course content; they built a new layer of digital confidence, a skill that will serve them and the public they serve long into the future. This aligns with the global recognition that technology became an essential bridge across the chasm created by social distancing (Dhawan, 2020).

Yet, the experience was also humbling. The feedback from the field exercises in the governance module was particularly telling. While the tasks were completed, the participants knew something was missing. The crackle of a poor internet connection, the silence where a spontaneous question should have been, and the flat image of a community that should have been felt and experienced- these moments reminded everyone that a virtual room, no matter how well-managed, cannot fully capture the magic of human presence. The limitations Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) warned about-the gap between access and true effectiveness-were felt in real time.

Therefore, the true lesson for NASC is not that one mode is superior to the other. The lesson is that preparedness requires both. The physical classroom, with its rich, unscripted interactions, remains irreplaceable for deep, experiential learning. But the online platform is a powerful tool for reach, resilience, and continuity. As we move forward, the goal should not be to choose one over the other, but to weave them together thoughtfully. By building on the digital foundation laid during this crisis, NASC can create a more flexible and robust training system-one that can withstand future shocks and extend the promise of professional development to every corner of Nepal's civil service, no matter the circumstances.

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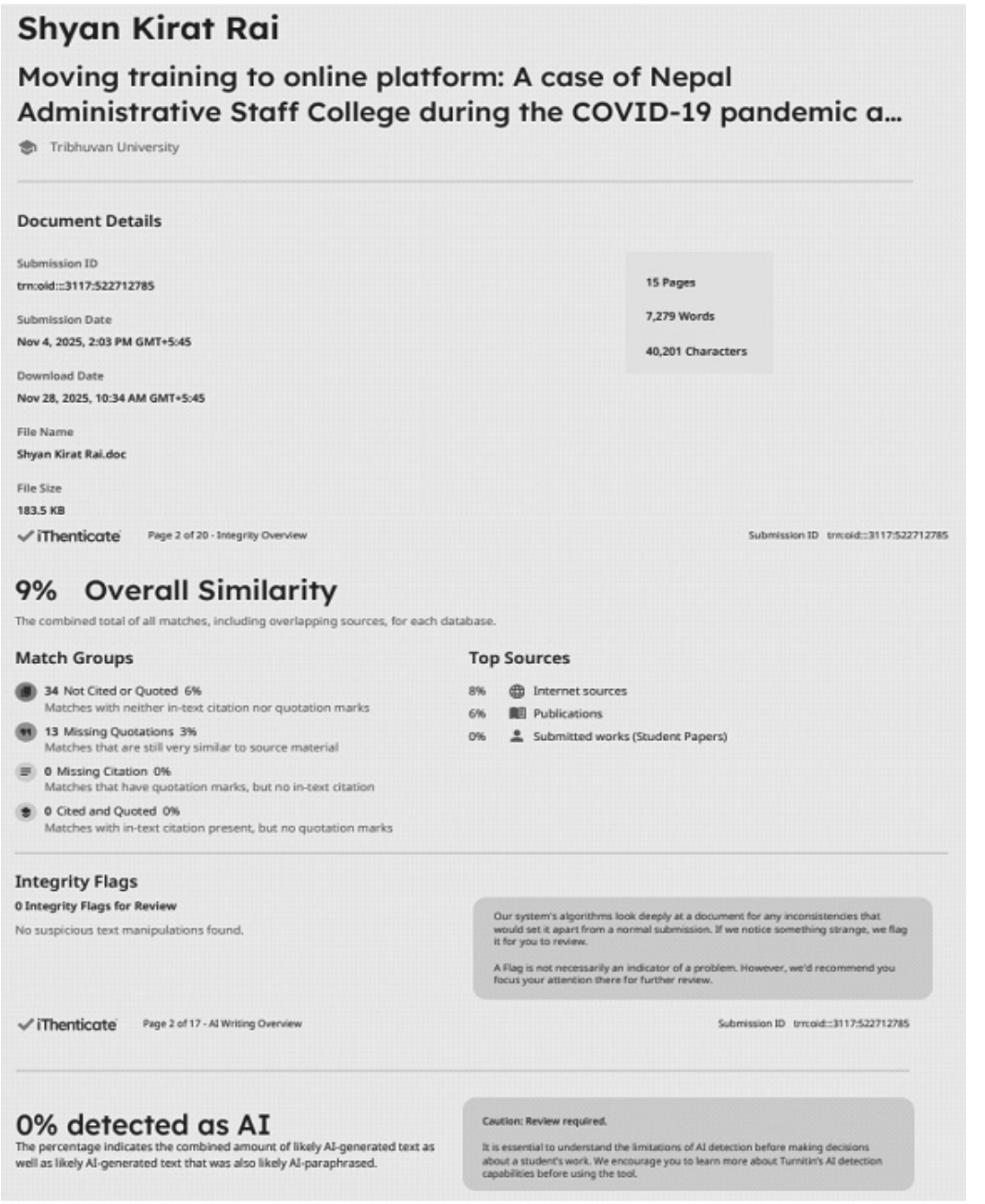
Appendix 1: Plagiarism and AI detection test report



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