Online Education as Perceived by Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

The domain of formal education has now been impacted by digitized technology. The modes and manners of education have been inclined to the virtual world. The online mode of education took a radical surge in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternative resort. Nonetheless, numerous controversies and gruesome voices loomed in the academic realm due to abrupt transitioning beyond ample preparations. Nepali academia adopted virtual mode of education amidst the bewilderment. The government, as well as private agencies, seemed reserved in exploring the lived perceptions of the teachers and students. Against this backdrop, this paper has attempted to delve into the teachers' and the students' experiences; two most vital and immediate stakeholders in the pedagogical process. To address this objective, this study has adopted the phenomenological design under the qualitative research approach. The information was collected from six teachers and nine students who were involved in three distinct campuses. The purposively selected informants were interviewed and three live classes were observed to obtain valid information. The collected data were processed, analyzed, interpreted and presented into three relevant themes viz. views expressed, challenges faced and the limitations detected. The results show that the recently executed online mode of education, despite being a temporal demand of the new era, consists of numerous facets to be ameliorated. Lack of ICT training to pedagogues, recursive electric power-cut; unavailability, poor bandwidth and instability of the internet; inappropriate curricula, lack of online and offline study resources are the prime issues to be addressed by the stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: Online education, experiences, pandemic, teachers, students

INTRODUCTION

Modern science and technology have induced revolution**s** in every walk of human interest. Almost every domain seems is getting ahead through digitization. As a significant social component, the academic sector has stepped into virtual mode as a substitute to traditionally adopted face-to-face learning approaches. This new modality of education has already attained a noteworthy height through the support of internet-based information and communication technology (ICT) (Impey, 2020). Both formal and informal education can draw significant knowledge and information from the online mode of education (Zhang, 2004). Yet, the access to and opportunities for obtaining online education are not equally available to all the people due to their social, economical and geographical diversities (Shi & Yu, 2016). This illustration indicates that online educational programmes are not equally adaptable and adoptable everywhere as they are directly conditioned by the overall socio-economic capability of a country. Compared to other nations, the United States of America has stood as the centre of academic excellence as a result of heavier economic investments and traditions of research-based higher education for long (Vioreanu, 2017). Regardless of facing several turmoils unevenly in different countries, online education has evolved significantly in the last few decades (Janderic, 2012). The thriving attraction of societies to online mode of education demands much more advancement in this field. Otherwise, the social expectations for optimum quality education could be derogated. Therefore, Cojocariu et al, (2014) recommend infusing technology into the academic culture of all the institutions by incorporating training and refreshment programmes for the teachers and students. This is the best way to lead the academic sector towards a new approach.

Nepal, being a developing country, seems is struggling to accommodate the new trends of education into its mainstream. However, it has been facing difficulty to come over from the face-to-face mode of education, the approach into practice since the Gurukul period (Pangeni, 2016). Even so, the government of Nepal is trying its best to furnish the current global trends of e-learning popularly known as ICT, online media and web technology-based learning (Pangeni, 2016). In general, a range of applications such as web-based learning, computer-based learning, digital collaboration and virtual classroom are comprised of e-learning (Bejjar & Boujelbene, 2014). The currently launched online classes, as an emergency resort to the COVID-19 pandemic across the world, are primarily based on web 2.0 technology (Franklin & Harmelin., 2007) whereas the new version web 3.0 has not concretely been practised yet. Nevertheless, the new 3.0 technology is sure to assume wider prevalence among the academia globally.

As a general responsibility, creating a conducive academic environment must be the ultimate goal of all academic institutions (Bach et al., 2007). Therefore, they need to ensure the appropriate academic environment even by resorting to some suitable alternative approaches when the usual modes are disrupted by some unanticipated catastrophes. The precipitous outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic engulfed the entire world since the beginning of 2020 (Remuzzi & Remuzzi, 2020). In counter-response, the world governments enforced border blockade and domestic lockdown to maintain socio-physical distance among the public (Kachfe et al., 2020). As a result, all schools, colleges and technical institutes were locked-down for an indefinite period.

In the case of Nepal, responding to the abnormal situation bred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the apex body of Tribhuvan University issued a circular to launch online classes. In spite of that, there were numerous impeding factors concerned with technological, managerial and human resources. Basically the hurdles behind implementing online classes due to unavailability and irregular supply of the internet, non-access to devices, geographical remoteness, lack of training and monitoring services

to teachers and students and the like. In the same context, Prithvi Narayan Campus organized a few orientation programmes for the teachers scantily that were not sufficient for meeting their requirements. Following that, the campus administration directed the teachers to launch online classes without assessing the overall feasibilities while the prior mechanisms were only appropriate for traditionally practised face-to-face classes. However, the online classes were run by teachers despite having the number of joining students too low compared with the physical classes.

The present context of Nepal depicts that the COVID-19 pandemic terror has gradually been fading out. Nevertheless, several new variations of the pandemic might hit societies again just as the two sweeping waves have done recently. Contrary to the perilous ground-reality, Tribhuvan university as well as its affiliated and constituent campuses did not lunch any formal steps for assessing the teachers' and students 'reflective attitudes; except some informal and idiosyncratic views expressed in the social and mass media. It is essential to explore the feelings, sentiments, experiences and expectations of the teachers and design academic programmes to lead them to further advancements, Besides, such programmes launched after in-depth ratification are capable enough to stand as the ideal source of reference for devising and executing similar academic programmes concurrently or in the future. It is mandatory to pay due regards to the acquaintances and sentiments of the teachers and students, the two vital components of formal education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online education as compared to other traditionally adopted modes is generally known as a new approach in formal education. Referring to the historical development of online education, Orkibi and Tuaf (2017) relate it to correspondence teaching as being the early form of distance education. Despite being a milestone to the development of online education, slow delivery of the printed study aids, absence of prompt feedback and lack of immediate interactions between the facilitator and participants were some of the striking drawbacks of traditional distance education. However, the practice of distance education took a new turn in the 1960s after the expansion of different electronic media like radio, TV and recording devices (Gautam, 2021). Although these media could reduce the temporal space, they could not do anything substantial to reduce the physical distance between the teachers and students. Therefore, even then, the dynamics of distance education could not surmount the long reigned defects viz. unidirectional flow of information and absence of instantaneous feedback (Courtney & Wilhoite, 2015). Nevertheless, distance education got a new vigour and vitality only after the discovery of the internet. The entire credit for fostering online education up to its prevailing calibre, full of versatile interactivities, goes to the internet technology (Collins & Halverson, 2010). Synopsizing this entire historical account, Wooley (2015) expounds that the centuries-old distance education programmes enacted through postal service, radio and television faded away in conjunction with the invention and adoption of computer- based internet technology. Hence, online education excludes all the traditionally adopted contrivances such as printed aids, radio, television and audio-video cassettes from its core boundary.

Online education, now, has already attained global acceptance especially in advanced countries. Regarding this, the survey conducted by York (2008) revealed that those individuals who have been engaged in some job, profession and familial tasks promptly opt for online education owing to convenience and affability. Further, it can be a fortuity to pursue academic activities for those who reside in remote areas and are unable to attend the academic programmes physically. Analyzing the issue from a

broader perspective, Seok (2008) states that asynchronicity, synchronicity, streamlined obtaining of information, decentralization and extensiveness are remarkable attributes associated with online education. Above all, the learners can draw an utmost advantage from the asynchronous mode of online education that paves their way to practise and learn all the ascribed materials at their convenience reiteratively. Likewise, the students' feelings of superiority and inferiority complex are inhibited which are likely to be induced because of the discrepancies in age, sex, class, gender, race and religion. In this backdrop, Wang (2006) underscores that online education emphasizes knowledge and skills by inhibiting other mundane non-academic impediments.

Nonetheless, instead of being recently emerging domain, online education is not seen completely free from constraints. Concerning this, McInnerney and Roberts (2004) argue that online education circumscribes the students into desolation, the most confronting issue to be resolved at the time of orchestrating online educational programmes. Some of the academic institutions decelerate online education from their curricula citing the very reason. Confirming the same line of argument, Barr and Tagg (1995) admit that the students of online educational programmes invest a huge chunk of their learning time by delving into cognitive development and critical thinking tasks without being involved in any kind of social interactions with the co-learners and teachers. Such a desolate context of learning not only prohibits them from interactive learning opportunities but also blurs the chances to attain academic excellence (McInnerney & Roberts, 2004). Thus, online education, despite being a new approach to pedagogy, is getting through a keen lens of temporal academic scrutiny.

Among the multitudes of problems to be scrutinized, the issue of mutual mistrust between the immediate stakeholders (i.e. teachers and students) is the most remarkable one. Whenever there are gaps of understanding and co-ordination between teachers and students, there fosters the environment of segregation, dishonesty and unreliability. Therefore, the present-day academic institutions lay special emphasis on executing candid protocols on the part of both the teachers and students to diminish the nonviable chances for cheating, falsehood and pretensions (Bao, 2020). The next factor confronting the effectiveness of online education is concerned with the technical hazards and their mitigation. The students are distorted from learning in case of some device and network-related hurdles. Therefore, Barr and Miller (2013) recommend that managing a particular group of technical experts always to remains in alert position to resolve any kind of obstacles instantly.

As an unproven phenomenon, the effectiveness of online educational programmes for teaching practice-based subjects like engineering, nursing, human surgery, physical science and others is yet to be explored. Adding up to the same stream of ideation, Xu and Jogger (2014) explicate that there have not been any empirical studies conducted so far to examine the effectiveness of online teaching in different disciplines compared with face-to-face mode. One of the significant studies was conducted among 40000 participating students by sampling from the database of 500000 students who had been taught both in face-to-face mode and online modes. This research was conducted in 34 technical colleges situated in Washington DC. The results explored that, as compared to the face-to-face mode of teaching, the students from online programmes showed poor performance in all the fields (Xu & Joggers, 2014). These findings of the study underscore that the online mode of teaching, instead of being a modern approach, does lack the universal applicability and effectiveness.

Another challenging facet against online education emerged especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Principally, the learners from middle and low-class families were severely affected by not being able to join the online classes swiftly. Concerning this

plight, Taylor and Mallery (2020) report a figure of 60 percent and 20 percent decrement in the number of participating students from the low income and high-income quartiles respectively. This reflects a demarcation line drawn between the well- privileged and under-privileged students digitally, a true mirror image of the real world society. Undoubtedly, the underprivileged mass of students lagged in their right to obtain digital education (Van Dijk, 2017). This indicates that online education can be an additional source of socio-economic discrimination unless the economic disparities among the public are leveled-off.

No sooner had the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 a pandemic, all the academic institutes and mass gathering zones were forcibly locked down willing to dismantle the virus transmission chain. Consequently, the traditionally adopted face-to-face classes got to standstill completely inciting woefulness among all the stakeholders, viz. students, teachers, parents, guardians and policy makers (Field, 2020). In response to the challenging scenario, to ensure the students' right to get an education, the regulating bodies of the concerned academic institutions were directed to launch online classes in a distant mode. Though the classes were commenced outright, numerous challenges were confronted by the teachers and students. Regarding this, Repanta et al. (2020) refer to the inappropriateness of the syllabus and textbooks, unavailability of devices, lack of internet access and shortage of training to teachers as the major impeding factors. Online education, relatively a new practice to the stakeholders, needs either **to** replace or modify the procedures along with contents that had been designed for a face-to-face mode of learning. Therefore, the teachers require presenting the subject matter in easily permeable chunks (Adams et al., 2005). Regarding the teachers' role, Repanta et al. (2020) stress eliminating students' anxieties. For this, they should feel free even to compromise on the expected academic achievements unless the students feel comfortable with the approach. If the academic programmes are meant to be successful via online mode, due attention must be paid to preparing human resources, well-designed syllabus and technical ameliorations.

Most of the academia in Nepal shifted their academic activities to online mode by using a range of diverse applications such as Google-Meet, Google-Class, Zoom, Microsoft-Teams, etc. especially since March 2020. However, the preparatory aspect was miserably poor. Neither the teachers nor the students were fully prepared to cope with the new context and technical devices (Dill et al., 2020). Conversely, the majority of the students were found to be complaining about either not having the digital devices (laptop, desk top tablet, and cell-phone) or the devices they had were not compatible with the advanced online applications. The study carried out by Day et al. (2020) identified that generally the students and teachers were bound to confront the challenges concerned with technological and economical facets, viz. access to and speed of the internet, financial burdens, unfamiliarity with the hardware and software of the internet and frequent cut-off of the electricity and internet line (Vollbrecht et al., 2020).

Among various studies conducted in the field of online education, Lee (2014) qualitative study upon eight teachers and two administrators on the growth of online education explicated that the expansion of online education, as a symbol of academic advancement, requires scientifically designed new coursed and their regular revisions. Likewise, the survey conducted by Wood (2008) to determines students' level of satisfaction with the overall services provided to them revealed that the students were partially satisfied with the services, the most vital aspect for academic excellence, tendered by their departments and colleges. Furthermore, Lim's (2020) research explored faculty's attitudes on emergency adoption of the online mode of teaching which explored that out of 49.3 percent were supportive to online classes,27percent were neutral between

face-to-face and online classes and 22.7% were negative about launching the online classes. However, many of the respondents expressed their reservations on the prescribed course contents and students' reluctance to persist in the online classes; on the same line, Jone's (2010) qualitative phenomenological study explicated participants' perceptions on the student-centered online learning environment, using the collected information from 20 college teachers. His analysis produced the three main themes; (a) the classroom environment should be fully student centred, (b) there should be active participation of students in learning tasks, and (c) the teachers must be fully trained and supportive to learners.

Nobody denies the fact that there must be adequate amendments in the existing socio-physical infrastructures for executing online education. However, the question arises seeking the guidelines and parametres for standard reference. This is due to the fact that the abrupt transition to online classes, as a novice practice, amidst the pandemic situation pushed the teachers, students and administrative bodies into a state of bewilderment due to not getting any exact track for the way-out. In this pretext, some of the leading academia proposed some valuable suggestions, based on their prior acquaintance, in open source web sites (Miller, 2020). Some of the invaluable suggestions tendered by veteran faculties and other dignitaries could prove to be an insightful reference to restructure the online pedagogy. Regarding this, Darby (2019) suggests to use familiar tools which have been prescribed by the institutional management agencies to ensure proper organization, communication, execution and assessment. Similarly, Miller (2020) speaks for verifying the quality of instructional aids and other resources. Further, the teachers need to confirm on the quality of assignments submitted by the students and feedbacks provided to them. Moreover, he says, the theoretical and practical portions of the contents should be dealt with judicious credit hours. In the same stream of ideation, Darby (2019) recommends to specify the subject matters to handle in synchronous and asynchronous modes for students' information. Finally, Ganon (2019) advises to organize the conference sessions on a regular basis to solve the learners' complexities promptly. The common problems would be solved and uploaded in audio, video and audio-video forms as per the necessity. It fosters the feeling of sanctuary and togetherness; among the learners.

The abrupt transition to online classes especially during the COVID-19 pandemic without any scientific planning and procedures in a developing country like Nepal enticed me to explore the assessing perceptions of the teachers and students, the most vital and immediate stakeholders, to online education.

METHODOLOGY

This study has adopted phenomenological research design that expects interpretive paradigm (Leavy, 2017). It is an objective procedure for collecting information, analyzing them and exploring the mystique phenomena concealed in the society. This is an extensively adopted research design in the field of social sciences. The objective of this study is concerned with online instruction and learning that I selected as a phenomenon to investigate. Therefore, it is essentially worthwhile to investigate the experiences of the teachers and students concerning online education.

This study employed both primary and secondary sources of information. The cooperating teachers and students were the primary source of information whereas different books, past research reports, journal articles and web-based resources related to the title were utilized as the secondary source of information.

Having been a phenomenological study under the qualitative paradigm, unstructured interviews and non-participant class observation (fifteen interviews and

three class observations) were used as the tools for collecting information. In non-participant class observation, Dorneyei (2007) illustrates that the researcher observes the participants' activities without participating there as a member. Therefore, the researcher had not used any observation schedules and interview protocols. Thus, to maintain variations full of essence (Finlay, 2009), the researcher collected primary information from six teachers and nine students involved in three different campuses affiliated with distinct universities of Nepal; two teachers and three students from each campus.

The information collected from the class observations and interviews were processed and analyzed one by one. Then, appropriate thematic topics were developed categorically. The researcher has incorporated all the ideas, facts and logical opinions systematically and objectively. Afterwards, all the information was analyzed and interpreted precisely under the discussion section. This study has paid due attention to ethical aspects during the entire research process. First of all, the researcher has strictly controlled plagiarism by citing, quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing the ideas, statements and views by allotting necessary credit in each part of writing. The researcher coded, categorized, analysed and interpreted the information by using alpha-numeric codes for the teachers (T1...,T2...), students (S1..., S2...) and campuses (C1...,C2...) to substitute the real names.

RESULTS

The process of imparting and obtaining education has an inestimably long history; perhaps, as old as the human civilization itself. However, the modes and manners have been remodelled periodically to circumscribe the demands of novice time and context. The face-to-face mode of formal education adopted since the Gurukul period has traversed a long way up to its current status integrating several philosophical, strategic and tactical standpoints into its discourse. With the advent of modern web-based computer technology, the traditional face-to-face approach of instruction and learning started gradually shifting into online mode from the 1990s. Although a small section of the academic world had already stepped into the virtual mode, the COVID-19 pandemic immensely magnified the number of academia, nearly all, adopting the online mode of instruction since the mid of March, 2020.

As a result of being an emergency transitioning, the socio-physical infrastructures fundamentally required to launch online classes which were highly diverse and even pathetic. Above all, the situation of the under- resourced developing country got severely panicked due to confronting extravagant hurdles. Although the complexities had been encountered by the teachers and students and other stakeholders, neither of them were able to specify the actual causes, consequences and remedies. Such a state of dilemma stirred up the researcher for conducting this research.

Both the teachers and students expressed their distinct views regarding the effectiveness of online education. By considering their views expressed during the interviews and the ideas investigated from the class observations, the information has been analyzed into three different themes:

Views on Training and Support Services

Training and support services keep a vital concern in every academic endeavour. Regarding the online classes launched emergently during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher interviewed the teachers and students to investigate the extent and efficiency of the training and support services provided to them whether some kind of training were provided to them or not. Concerning this, the participating teachers from different campuses expressed their diverse views and opinions. Two of the three sampled

campuses (C1 and C3) conducted orientation programmes virtually through Zoom for two days, while one campus (C2) did not conduct any training and orientation for the teachers. Even those teachers who joined the online class orientation programmes stated that the programmes were not much explicating, comprehensible and comprehensive. In this connection, one of the teachers (T1) argued that:

Though I am not ignorant of simple computer operations, the instructors' explanation could not help me much. I kept on listening to them but could not catch up on anything precisely. The programme should have been launched in the intensive training- cum workshop model by allotting a few more days.

Similar to this view, another participant (T2) expressed "I joined the orientation programme with the support of my daughter. Still, I could not learn how to schedule the classes and call for meetings. I learnt these things from my daughter later on". Conversely two teachers (T3&T4) expressed their satisfaction with the online orientation programmes. They said that they fairly understood the ideas and techniques instructed at the orientation programmes.

On the other hand, the participants from the group of students expressed their diverse views regarding the sufficiency and effectiveness of the online orientation programmes. Unlike the teachers, most of the students reported having already learnt basic computer operations and application manipulating procedures. Therefore, the required processes like downloading, installing and joining class through referred applications like MS-Teams, Zoom and Google-Meet on their devices. The IDs and passwords were provided by their respective institutions. But, not any formal training and orientation programmes were organized for the students. As with the query raised to identify whether they faced some kind of problems during the online classes, two of the participants (S1 & S2) stated that they needed the help of friends to install and run the applications in the initial days. But, later on, they became able to do the necessary tasks themselves.

Challenges Encountered During the Online Classes

The researcher attempted to delve into the teachers' and students' lived challenges on the online mode of teaching under this theme. The participating teachers and students underscored a range of diverse challenges and hurdles that they confronted when executing the online classes; in this connection, T1 from C1 stated:

The students have very low participation in the online classes. Nearly 25 percent in the Bachelor's degree and 50 percent in the master's degree seem to have joined in the online classes. Similarly, the students do not keep their video on even if requested; as a result, I cannot keep close eyes over their alertness, attentiveness and facial expressions. The classes seem heavily running with the one-way trafficking of the information.

The practice of teaching and learning through virtual mode is a novice practice in Nepal. May it be any field such as education, business or other social activities; there could be several challenges that arise during the execution of some new undertakings. Referring to some striking challenges borne during the execution of online classes, T3 from C1 Campus mentioned:

My classes are frequently disturbed by the power cut and internet disconnection. Similarly, students often join the classes and disappear afterwards. When I ask them for the reason for disappearing from the class, they show the reason for the electric power cut-off and internet disconnection. Another challenge I encountered is the lack of monitoring of the teachers' and students' activities.

Likewise, there might be many impeding factors related to students' personal and social life that detract them from the process of smooth learning. Emphasizing some of such detracting factors as reported by a student; T5, the teacher from C3, remarked:

The students, time and again, set forth their domestic problems behind for being absent from the class. They sometimes show the cause of not getting a recharge card to buy a data package; at other times they show the reason for being busy on some unavoidable domestic works. There are not any measures to check their lies and baloney.

On the other hand, all the participants from the students' section presented some distinct but similar views about the challenges that they got through during the online mode of learning. Overall, the students did not respond positively regarding the process and product maintained by the online classes pointing to the challenges that he faced, S2 from C2 shared:

I have hardly been able to join an entire class due to the power cut-off and internet disconnection. The teachers suggest taking a cheap data package and joining the class; however, by the time we rejoin the class, important slides and teachers' elaborations are already missed out. Even if he is from the downtown, he squeezes his eyebrows for the plight of his friends who are living in the suburbs and hinterlands.

Such elaborations made by the students shed a light on the facets that they are confronting the most. Network down and intermittent power-cut are the most recursive problems among others. Regarding the pedagogic contents, S2 expressed:

It is difficult to understand the contents just by listening to the teachers' voice. Often, there do not seem synchronicity between the points shown by the mouse pointer and the teachers' explanations. This gets us to miss the important points and the chain of information being delivered by the teachers often breaks up.

Furthermore, four of the students reported to have been suffered from feelings of segregation and loneliness during the virtual classes. They are devoid of any opportunity to co-work with friends for learning difficult points. In the same line of argumentation, S3 from C2 expressed that her attention gets deviated from the contents frequently being explained by the teachers. Had the class been running in the physical class, in the direct presence of a teacher, there would have been psycho- moral obligations to adhere sincerely to the subject matters as presented by the teacher. Likewise, some mischievous colleagues frequently get to distort their attention by creating silly noises like getting the microphone off, disfiguring the slides, playing music, exchanging intolerable texts and videos into friends' inboxes and so on. The live class presentations observed by the researcher justified most of the aspects raised by the teachers and students as being congruent with the online class realities. One of the teachers (T5) was scolding the students for coming late to join the class. While the students seemed to be citing the reasons for the non-connection of the internet, its slowness, power cut-off, domestic engagement and the like. Similarly, another teacher, T3 reported that only five students out of the 32 had been joining the classes. The teachers seemed frustrated with the frequent entry and departure of the students for some unidentified reasons. The students complained about the blurring of the screen and non-hearing of the teacher's voice.

Limitations of Online Education

Under this theme, the researcher aimed at investigating the underlying limitations of online education. The limitations can be studied globally as well as locally in the typical context of Nepal. Regarding this, different respondents expressed varied opinions and arguments. When asked to state the limitations, T6 from C2 noted:

There is a great problem of inflexibility both on the part of the teachers and students. The teachers and students who had been accustomed to the traditional face-to-

face mode of instruction and learning seem to have found the online mode extra burdensome. As a result, some of the teachers and students might turn out to be rather impolite to each other due to the stress caused by the hurdles in adjusting to the novice practice of online education.

Expressing the similar arguments, one of the respondents, T3 from C1 pointed," It is difficult to conduct online education by ignoring the physical classes. This is because online classes are no more suitable for practical- based subjects". Likewise, T5 said," Online educational programmes were designed by considering the human resource and physical infrastructures of the advanced countries. It is counterproductive to bring them straightly down to practise in the under-resourced country like Nepal". Likewise, another teacher, T6 from C2, who has long been teaching at the school of engineering illustrated:

As a teacher of survey engineering, I had never been as frustrated before as this year. The nature of my subject does not suit the fundamental approaches required for the online education system. Everything has to be taught and learnt by physically handling the gadgets or equipment. It does not develop bodily-kinesthetic skills even if the things are displayed and explained dozens of times.

Online education, as a new approach in Nepal, requires intensive studies from the side of policy making agencies and concerned academia to explore the substantial ground realities. Stating the abrupt transition to online classes, T4 added:

Online education in the context of Nepal has been similar to blank firing in the sky. The emergency circular was issued from the central office to conduct online classes hurriedly. Instead of consoling the teachers' pathos trembled by the horror of the COVID-19 pandemic, the online classes pushed them into the maze of mess. Such mismanagement is likely to exert derogative effects if executed abruptly without preparing appropriate infrastructures and human resources.

Some participants raised the concern of feeling loneliness and one way fluttering over the screen. While the others talked about their domestic hazards at the time of pursuing the online classes.

On the other hand, the group of participating students presented a range of diverse opinions. Talking about the limitations, S3 from C2 noted, "Despite being a modern ICT based approach, online education did not seem practically fruitful. All the programmes should not be kept in a single basket and dealt with uniformly. It may shade down the positive prospects of virtual education". The essence of this view underscores that a programme must be implemented particularly by analyzing the typical feasibility features of the programme in an institution. In the same line of thought, S4 from C1 mentioned "In fact, the online classes running now do not comply with the real spirit of the distant and online mode of pedagogy. As practised in the external world; asynchronous mode, the crux of online education seems neglected". This argument stresses the requirement of pursuing asynchronous mode as a major component with the synchronous mode of online pedagogy. Similarly, S7 from C3 stated that the teachers and students seem to be lagging to understand mutual feelings and sentiments. The teachers simply vocalize the subject matters without preparing any additional audio- visual materials whereas students do not join the classes sincerely. Likewise, S2, an engineering student, cited his worriedness about the professional quality and competence in the future due to lacking practical works compared to those who were and will be educated only in the face-to-face mode.

The researcher identified several limiting aspects during the class observation phase. Some aspects were purely person-specific while others were related to general policies and tenets. The pitfalls such as frequent power cut, disconnection and downing of the network, absence and irregularity of the students, teachers' sluggishness and

insincerity, lack of training and monitoring, fewer interactions between or among the teachers and students, etc. were directly perceptible when observing the classes.

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to explore the teachers' and students' lived perspectives on online academic programmes currently adopted by different campuses. The sample information was collected from the teachers and students who involved in three different campuses of the Pokhara valley. Online mode of education; as a new experience to the entire academic, administrative and policy-related stakeholders, was chosen as the main research question to delve into the ground realities via in-depth interviews and intensive class observations.

Having collected the required data, the researcher analyzed them by fulfilling all the parameters recommended for qualitative research. The analysis investigated that the teachers and students expressed their views with ample reservations, not negative, on online education. They specified that online classes are the obligatory resort for the time being, however, they seemed assertive to online education as a novice gait to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into academia.

Concerning the training and support services provided to the teachers before launching the online programmes, the results revealed that only two campuses out of three conducted online class orientation programmes while one of them notified them for devoid of any kind of training and orientation. Even if the teachers who were trained intensively for two consecutive days, expressed their gruesome dissatisfaction on the effectiveness of their technological capabilities were so pathetic that they were not able even to commit very common computer operations such as downloading resource materials, uploading files; assigning, receiving and correcting students' assignments and the like. Such impoverished plights of the pedagogues precisely refer to that the concerned academia has to implement some efficient measures for capacitating their faculties to run the classes smoothly. Specifically, most of the senior teachers educated in the pre-computer era seem to be deficient in basic ICT skills in the context of Nepal. These findings seem congruent with those that were explored by Vollbrecht et al. (2020) who underpinned the teachers' and students' unfamiliarity to hardware and software operations of the computer.

On the other hand, the respondents from the students' group were found more confident on ICT related issues. Most of them did not cite any problem with uploading, downloading, responding and surfing on the computer. Only two of the nine students reported that they learnt downloading and installation with friends' support. This illustrates that, compared to teachers; the students are more confident and proficient in handling ICT devices and applications.

Regarding the challenges confronted by the teachers and students while running the online classes, the results reveal that the most striking challenges have been engendered by repetitious electric power cut-off, unavailability of the internet service, poor bandwidth (even when it is available) and frequent downing of the network. Moreover, the results depict that both the teachers and students disfavour it owing to not having frequent constructive feedback conveniently. This hinders the prospects of learning through pair-work, group-work and mass discussion. Further, the total presence of the students is too low; only 25percent in the bachelors' degree and 50 percent in the master's degree join the class regularly. Due to having a lesser presence both the teachers and students get through laxness in enthusiasm and execution. Likewise, some stringent challenges were posed by lacking a congruous monitoring system of the total academic mechanism.

Some students reported that they could not pay due attention to study because of being entangled in domestic chores. Most of them referred to have been suffering from some kind of psycho-physical complexities like laziness, loneliness, lethargy and frustration induced by elongated confinement at home without external physical contact. Here, these findings are compatible with the conclusions arrived at by Vollbrecht et al. (2020) who noted that both the students' and teachers' groups were facing the problems of electric power-cut and unavailability of sound internet facility. The researcher investigated that the challenges specified by the teachers and students during the interviews were in harmony with the aspects detected during the class observations. The class observations also illuminated that the challenges like lesser participation of the students, negligible interactions between teachers and students, slow speed of the internet, inability to observe students' activities and so on.

Regarding the prevailing limitations of online education, the results explicate that both the groups of students and teachers perceive online education as being inflexible. They are inflexible through the perspective of their long habit of doing through a face-to-face mode of teaching and learning. Further, they cite the constraints of not possessing adequate means, resources and general environment. Likewise, they indicate stress and anxiety created by the new mode of pedagogy.

In the same line, the limitations of online education seem more aggravating in an under-resourced nation like Nepal. The existing policies and procedures enacted by considering the context of advanced countries do not prove to be compatible with the destitute context of Nepal. Moreover, the results concretized the fact that the online mode of pedagogy does not accord with teaching some practical subjects like nursing, hotel management, engineering, chemistry, physics and others which require spending more than 50 percent of the credit hours in laboratory activities under the direct supervision of the teacher or instructor. Generally, there seem complete disregards to online mode from the teachers and students involved in technical institutions. This finding seems congruent with that of Dill et al. (2020) who concluded that the online mode of teaching is not very effective for teaching practical subjects which require learning from through laboratory practice.

The study also explicates that most of the students are emotionally hurt and psychologically lonesome in the virtual mode. They stated their inability to foster knowledge and skill through group-works and pair-works cooperatively. Likewise, the results imply that online programmes should be introduced both in synchronous and asynchronous modes; the two vital and complementary dimensions. Since the online classes were introduced without meeting the basic prerequisites, the students seem anxious about their professional expertise after getting the degree compared to their predecessors and successors who were and will be completely educated in the physical mode. Therefore, the sincere students expected more learning resources such as reference books, e-textbooks, practice books, old question papers, model questions, audio-video aids, which are mostly scarce currently. The scarcity of ample learning resources explored from this study is congruous with the conclusions of Wood (2008) who admits that the students being educated through the online mode are principally confronting the scarcity of adequate learning materials and scientific support services.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This phenomenological study was conducted to explore the students' and teachers' experiences of online education programmes in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The results depict that the online mode for imparting formal education is full of numerous pitfalls owing to lacking sound infrastructures on social, economical and

technical facets. Above all, the preparatory aspect is excessively fragile. The existing resources and approaches of Nepal are not sufficient enough to implement the online mode of education successfully. The majority of the senior teachers educated in the pre-computer era are not in favour of online education while the novice ones are ready to pursue both the virtual and physical modes side by side. The teachers expect intensive pieces of trainings and workshops as the scanty training and orientation programmes organized by their campuses could not convert them into technology-savvy pedagogues. Conversely, the students were found to be technologically more efficient compared to the teachers' status.

The study explicated that the students and teachers were confronted with numerous challenges while executing the virtual classes. The obstacles primarily loomed due to frequent power cut-off, poor internet bandwidth, non-access to internet facility, screen blurring, voice extinction, the distraction of attention, feeling of loneliness, less participation in the online classes, lack of effective monitoring and regulation, misunderstandings between teachers and students and so on. Similarly, the course contents adopted for were not apt for virtual mode since they were originally designed for the face-to-face mode of teaching. Regarding their suggestions, there were harmonious opinions from both the teachers and students. In general, admitting online education as a demand of contemporary global society, they tendered invaluable suggestions to reform policy, practice and managerial issues of online education.

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