

Online Learning Experience in Nepal: An Observation during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

An online learning has debatable issue since 1990s, though it entices the attention of entire globe throughout the pandemic covid-19. In this context, the considerable aim of this research work is to look over the prevalence of online learning in Nepal. Also, the paper inclined to know the experiences of Nepalese management graduates towards online learning vs physical classes and its effectiveness. This study has applied descriptive method for backing the purpose of this research. A purposive technique has been implanted to select the respondents. A survey based, the research instrument used consist of structured questionnaire. Dataprocessing with application of SPSS and MS excel for data analysis. This paper found that learning experience of both learning approach is determined by the way of taking and making an infrastructure for learning environment. Thus, it concludes that measuring the quality of these approach are largely depends on the operating capacity of individual and institutions as well in Nepalese climate as these approaches has their own strength and limitations. The educational stakeholders of Nepal have been experiencing dilemma of coping the challenges of new learning approach put forward by the covid-19. In this environment, this paper comprehends such issues and filled the gap in Nepalese context. Therefore, findings of this study would be important to all the academic players for their future survival strategies. Finally, there is big place available for further exploration for future researches as this paper has only considered the descriptive analysis.

Keywords: Online learning, Physical learning, Management graduates, Covid-19, Nepal

1. Introduction

Online learning platform has been one of the key modes of education system that has evolved with the evolution of the internet. The mechanism of online learning is based on virtual classroom where participants remotely perceive the teaching learning experience. Henceforth, this practice is considered as distance learning. Meanwhile, this system is also known as an e-learning as it is established on a formal teaching principle with the support of electronic resources. The major components of e-learning are computer, digital devices and internet which basically creates a virtual environment for the learning (Gorbunova and Kalimullin, 2017; La). With an evolution of internet and academic system, E-learning has established itself as a network enabled transmission of skills and knowledge. The ongoing disaster has made the online learning platform the most reliable option for the students to experience the education in present context (UNESCO, 2020). It is essential to consider the online studies as one of the alternative resolutions of the face-to-face learnings. Over the last few years, the renowned academies have been increasingly shifting their activities in online platform (Bao, 2020). Some of the examples are Tsinghua, Peking University, Harvard, MIT, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge and many alike (Picciano, 2017; Demuyakor, 2020; Bao, 2020). Furthermore, it has also enabled the liberty of accommodating large number of participants at the time. For the participants who are unable to get the privilege of joining the live session

can also get the recorded lesson as per their convenience. Therefore, the practice of ICT enables different scholars to generate, disseminate and utilize the different study matters with ease (Fry, 2001; Kvon et al., 2018; Abed, 2019).

The learner has an opportunity to experience individual mode or blended mode as per the requirement and the preference. Therefore, such environment can put forward an opportunity for flexibility, interaction and collaboration among the learners (Gedera, Williams and Wright, 2013). The scholars across the globe can learn efficiently and transfer the information as well as the study materials with speed and ease through e-learning (Ouadoud, Rida and Chafiq, 2021). E-learning has emerged as a scientific advancement that enable the progression of designing, delivering, and managing both official and non-official information sharing and studies without any physical presence and limitations. The e-learning has aided education sector through physical mode of communication also to virtual communications. Technological infrastructure has addressed the escalating interest of prospective learners in this field by providing number of online courses with practical and economical approach (Totaro et al., 2005; Tanner, Noser and Totaro, 2009). Therefore, the popularity of online programs has also been on the higher side because of the raising numbers of individuals who are willing to pursue the further academic career but are unable to relinquish their existing personal and professional commitments.

Nepal Government, on 19th March 2020, put forward the restriction on physical classes and examinations that was due in that period. Meanwhile, government took the decision to lockdown Nepal from March 24th, 2020 as the measure to prevent from Covid-19. Because of the lockdowns and circumstances emerged due to pandemic the academic calendar of universities and colleges has been disrupted. Many speculations have been made during this period regarding the academic sessions and examinations. However, the constant rise in the covid-19 cases has made it difficult for the government and the many academic authorities to give concrete decisions regarding the future of Nepalese academic system. There have been certain changes in the government rule regarding the lockdown in later days, but the scenario of education sector is still indistinct. It has been seen a pedagogical and methodological changes in Nepalese education over the period of the current pandemic. Thus, in this context there is a room for further research. So, this article is intended to inspect the online learning experiences in Nepal during covid-19 pandemic.

2. Review of Literature

E-learning implies to the application of ICT to facilitate the learning process. Abbad et al. (2009), specified E-learning as a learning which is operated by use of electronic means. These definitions have outlined to the E-learning that is vested by the usage of information and digital technology. In addition, E-learning is confined by LaRose et. al, (1998); Keller and Cernerud, (2002); Arkorful and Abaidoo, (2014) as the internet and web grounded study. Internet and web-based study now emerged as compulsion in academic organizations and is being implemented in academic institutions all over the world. The application of E-Learning can have diverse outlooks, including spread education, online-distance learning and hybrid learning. The usage of ICT has been a supportive aspect for the traditional classroom assisting the diverse processes of education system. It can be applied in traditional classroom, online learning or both (Maltz et al., 2005; Arkorful and Abaidoo, 2014). The prevalence of flexibility in the online courses is not the only reason why students are attracted to this mechanism. The online courses benefit the learner in many aspects including the convenience and compatibility advantages as per their learning needs.

The growth and expansion of ICT along with the usage of cyberspace have transformed the traditional teaching system (Wang et al. 2007). According to Love and Fry (2006), academic institutions have developed the level of advance online course capability to facilitate cyber education market. Virtual learning is now developed as integral part of higher

teaching learning pedagogy. The establishment and progression of the e-learning tools have facilitated the cause of developing the online education system as a whole (Dublin, 2003). Zhang et. al., (2006); Judahil et. al., (2007); Brown et. al., (2008); Arkorful and Abaidoo, (2014) articulated that e-learning allows the discovery of much adaptable education system with less commutation time. The use of interactive video facility allows learners to observe and analyze the entire session at the time of convenience and need. Meanwhile, teachers can have varieties of ways to teach and provide feedbacks. This division of perception has started a discussion whether virtual classes are effective or physical classes (Oliaro and Trotter, 2010; Schoenfeld-Tacher et al., 2001). A fundamental base for this argument is the nonappearance of paralinguistic assistance in online study (Tolmie and Boyle, 2000). Meanwhile, the absenteeism of physical proximity helps unexpressive students to participate since barriers which restrict them to communicate is minimal in virtual platform whether synchronous or asynchronous. However, the absenteeism of paralinguistic assistance might lead towards a negative educational experience. Price et al. (2007) suggested that learners perceive their online experience less attractive & less connecting and both teacher and student need to go through trainings to compensate for the insufficient communication assistance.

Advancement in digital technology has produced more alternatives for current educational practice (Yang and Arjomand, 1999). However, the divergence ability in ICT is essential within participants. E-learning systems facilitate better communication among students and instructors. Students can take part in their course easily and access the online resources as per their requirements. Meanwhile, e-learning also facilitate differently abled individuals to pursue their academic career from their desired location (Singh, 2001; Hemsley, 2002; Sadler-Smith, 2000 and Brown et. al.,2001; Arkorful and Abaidoo, 2014). While experiencing the changing aspects of environment throughout the covid period, there has been significant change found in pattern of teaching methodology from physical classes to online classes. In summary, the education society around the globe including Nepal specially tribhuvan university has been experiencing the dilemma of coping the online education in a system put forwarded by this crisis. Therefore, this paper seeks to describe the online learning experience during the covid-19 in the context of Tribhuvan university, Nepal.

3. Methodology

This study focused on how an outbreak of Corona Virus has diverted educational institutions towards digital mode. The study has applied a descriptive and analytical method to inspect the experience of Nepalese management students about online classes over traditional physical classes throughout this pandemic created by corona virus. Multi stage sampling has been implemented to select the respondents. The survey uses structure questionnaire (based on 5-point likert scale) to obtain the first-hand data from the 400 management graduates from Tribhuvan University affiliated colleges which are pursuing the degree of MBS, BBA, BBM and BBS program. The questionnaire has been distributed through physically. After gathering and processing the responses of questionnaire it was found 370 questionnaires responses usable for data analysis. The questionnaire concerning experience of online class of Tribhuvan University students were based on studies of Arkorful and Abaidoo, (2014); Abed, (2019); Filius et al. (2019); Jeong and So (2020). SPSS and MS- Excel have been applied for data processing. To understand the Nepalese management graduate's involvement in online class, their preferred time for online class, preference to use digital technology and effectiveness of online classes percentage, bar diagrams and pie chart has been used. Also, to investigate the different dimensions of the online classes mean and standard deviation has been applied.

4. Result and Analysis

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

| Study Level | Participants Gender | | | | Total | % |
|-------------|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| | Male | % | Female | % | | |
| Master | 115 | 31.08 | 70 | 18.93 | 206 | 55.67 |
| Bachelor | 73 | 19.72 | 112 | 30.27 | 164 | 44.33 |
| Total | 188 | 50.80 | 182 | 49.20 | 370 | 100.00 |

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 1 displays the demographic information of management graduates who are participated in survey. It shows that 50.80% were male and 49.20% were female. Table further demonstrated 31.08% participants were masterlevel male students whereas 18.93% participants were master level female students. Table also shows that only 19.72% respondents were bachelor level male students whereas 30.27% respondents were bachelor level female students. The table shows that majority of male respondents were from master’s level and majority of female respondents were from bachelor level although the total numbers of male and female students was almost equal which indicated that the male students have greater academic qualifications during the study.

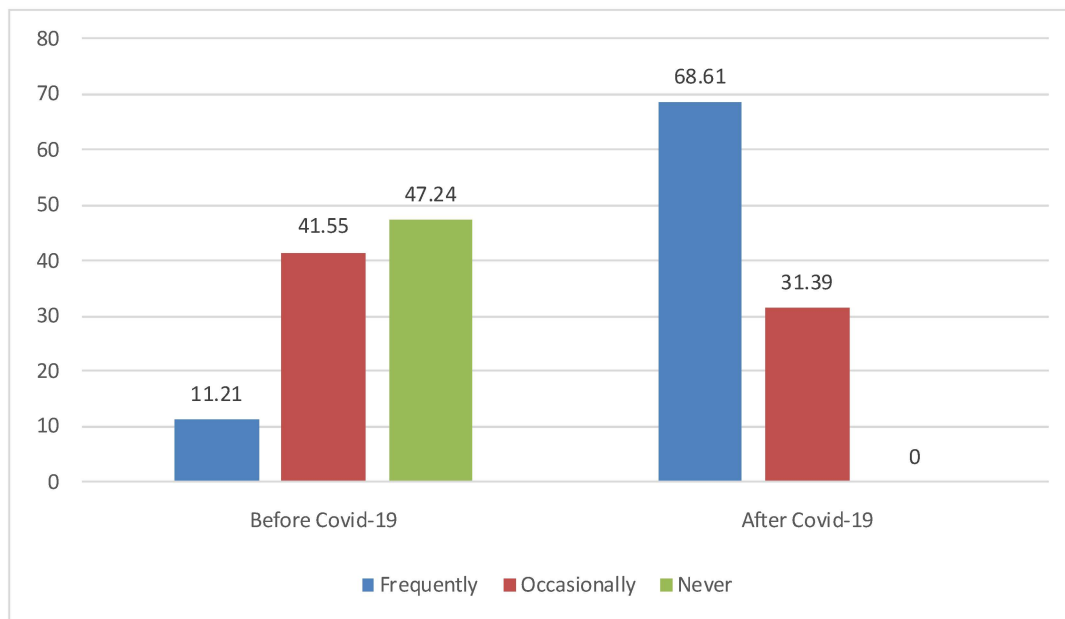


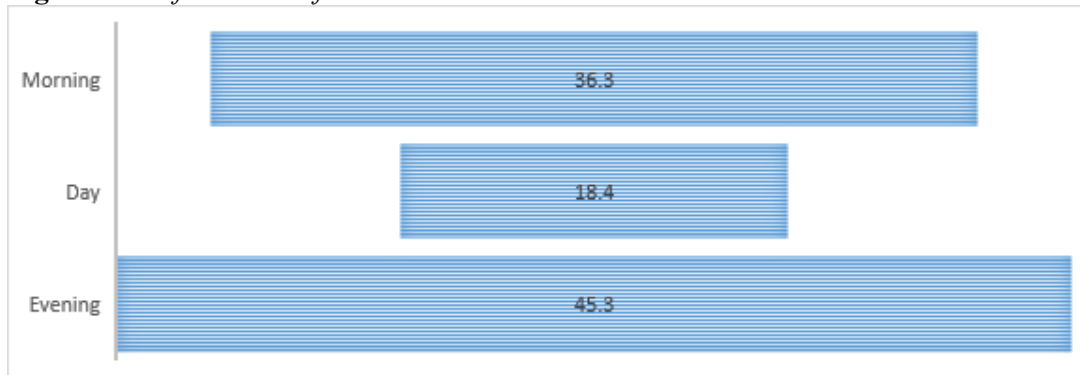
Figure1: Management Graduates Involvement in Online Class

Source: Survey, 2021

Figure 1 shows the weather respondent students were ever participated in online class or not before and after COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that about 47.24% respondents were never participated in any online classes before pandemic. Nearly 42% participating students were taking online classes occasionally before COVID-19 pandemic and only 11.21% respondent were taken online classes frequently before pandemic. Table also shows that after COVID-19 all respondent student participated in online classes, where; 68.61% respondent

students are participating in online classes frequently and about 31.39% respondent students are participating in online classes occasionally. These figures indicate that the practice of online classes in Nepal before COVID-19 pandemic were very less though some of the graduates were participated in online training and distance mode courses. After COVID-19 pandemic, it is almost a compulsion to operate online classes by all the universities and affiliated colleges of Nepal as operating traditional physical classes are not possible due to this global pandemic.

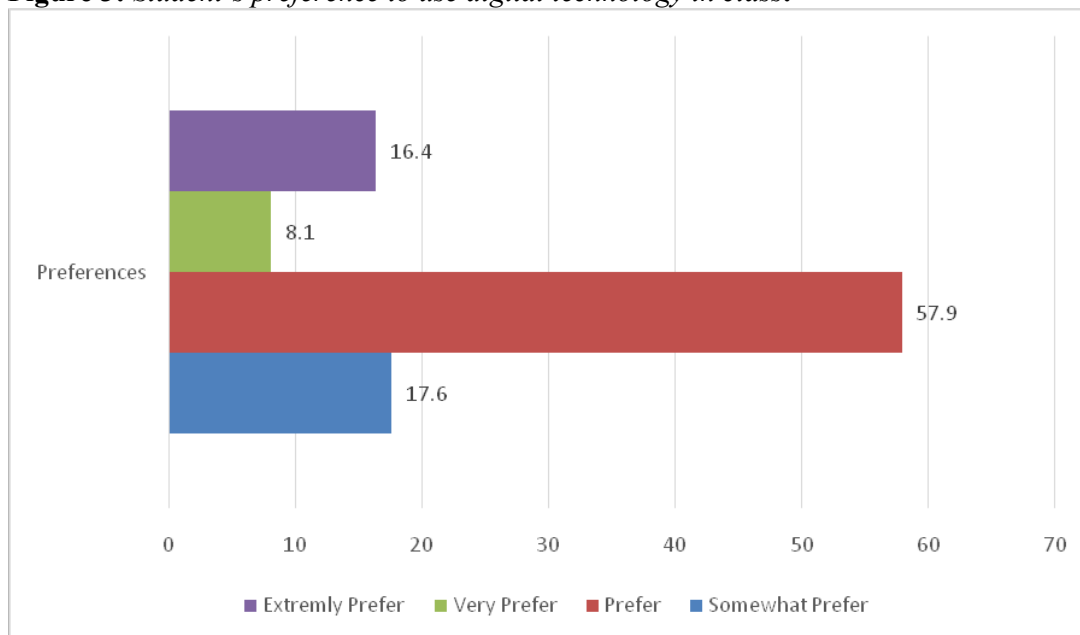
Figure 2: Preferred time for online classes



Source: Survey, 2021

Figure 2 displays the Nepalese management students’ preferred time to take online classes. Figure shows that 37.58% respondent students preferred morning time to take online classes and 43.80% respondent students preferred evening time for online classes whereas only 18.62% respondent students preferred day time for online classes. Figure indicate that as majority of students prefer either evening or morning time for online class as majority of master’s level students are job holders and bachelor level management students preferred their day time either for job or preparing for potential jobs.

Figure 3: Student’s preference to use digital technology in class.



Source: Survey, 2021

Figure 3 illustrates the student’s preference to use digital technologies in their classes for teaching and learning activities. It shows that 17.6% respondents somewhat prefer digital technologies in their classes and majority (57.9%) of respondent students prefer digital technologies in their classes. Table also shows that 16.4% respondents extremely prefer digital technologies in their classes. Figure indicated that all the participated respondent students prefer digital technologies in their classes to improve the quality of learning with help modern and digital technologies.

Table 2 Descriptive Analysis on the Different Dimensions of Online Classes

| S.N. | Statements | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------|--|------|----------------|
| 1 | Online learning provide flexibility in class setting over physical learnings. | 4.34 | 0.81 |
| 2 | Online learning has better interactions and communication than physical learning. | 2.35 | 1.12 |
| 3 | Numerical topics are difficult to study in online learning than physical study. | 4.22 | 0.83 |
| 4 | ICT used throughout online learning enhances the quality of understanding. | 4.58 | 0.69 |
| 5 | Online learning facilitates to explore new knowledge than of physical study. | 4.28 | 0.77 |
| 6 | Methods of online study is multifaceted and sophisticated than physical study. | 3.74 | 1.25 |
| 7 | Peer’s learning culture is low in online learning than physical learning. | 4.32 | 0.89 |
| 8 | Lacking of organized classroom atmosphere in online classes can be observed. | 4.46 | 0.71 |
| 9 | It is complex to conduct examinations in online platform than physical classes. | 4.10 | 0.83 |
| 10 | Self-discipline is essential component of online learning than physical classes | 4.41 | 0.65 |
| 11 | Accessibility to study materials is easy in online learning than physical learning | 3.75 | 0.72 |

Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.87$

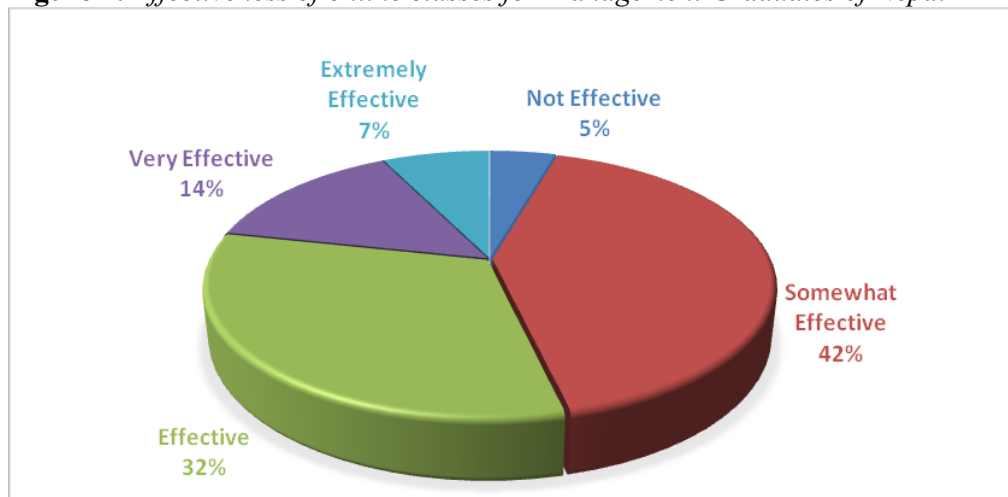
N=370

Source: Survey, 2021

The reliability statistics shows the alpha value of 0.87 of different aspects of online classes of Nepalese management students, which are all together 11 items. Nunally (1978) express that the alpha value greater or equal with 0.70 is acceptable and shows the reliable data. Table 2 shows the descriptive presentation and analysis of information obtained from the survey of 370 management students of different colleges affiliated to Tribhuvan University Nepal about the different aspects of online class and traditional face to face class. Table shows that majority (M=4.34 out of 5) of respondents believed that online learning time is more flexible over physical learning indicating scholars can participate on their online classes as per their convenient time and location. In line with this, Al-Rawashdeh et al. (2021) stating that online learning delivers the opportunity to the learners to take classes whenever and wherever as per the convenient. Table displays the disagreement of participants

(M=2.35) that online classes are more interactive and communicative than face-to-face class, for some students; online learning is more interactive and communicative and for some students physical class is more interactive which is supported by their deviated opinion on it by SD (1.12). The table reveals that most of the students believed (M=4.22) that numerical subjects are more difficult to study in online learning due to quantitative nature of the subjects. Table displays that respondent are agreed (M=4.58), that ICT mandatory to take online classes enhances the quality of learning experience over physical learning. Likewise, table indicated that the majority (M=4.28) learners feel that online learning helps scholars to realize new knowledge over physical learning meaning that online learning helps to be familiar with computer and information technologies. Table also implies that average (3.74) students are experiencing that methods of online study is multifaceted and sophisticated than physical study. However, different views can be seen on it (SD=1.25) which mean, for technology friendly learners online learning is not complex whereas for technology unfriendly learners could face some problems through online learning. Table shows that majority (M=4.32) of students believed that peer’s learning culture is low in online learning than physical learning. Table also specify that majority (M=4.46) of respondent experience that lacking of organized classroom atmosphere in online classes than physical classes. Table shows that respondent students felt (M=4.10) that complexity to conduct examinations in online platform than physical classes. Table indicated that majority (M=4.41) students experience that self-discipline is essential component of online learning than physical classes for better understanding efficient learning environment. Similarly, table describe (M=3.75) students felt that Accessibility to study materials is easy in online learning than physical learning. The findings of the table specified that Nepalese management graduates confronted merits as well as challenges of the online learning over physical study. As Al-Rawashdehet al. (2021) suggested that cruciality to recognize the transformations among online learning and physical learning as both of this leaning approach has their own strengths and weakness.

Figure 4: Effectiveness of online classes for Management Graduates of Nepal



Source: Survey, 2021

Figure 4 express that Nepalese management student’s view on effectiveness of online class for their studies. Pai-chart shows 5% students believed that online classes are not effective for their study. It also displays that 42% students feels that online class is somewhat effective for their study whereas 32% students believed that online class is effective for their study. About 14% students feels that online class is very effective whereas 7% respondent

students feel that online classes are extremely effective for their study. Figure indicated that majority of respondent students experienced that online class is effective for their study with use of modern technologies which enhances the application of technologies for academic purposes however there was noticeable number of students who feels that these online classes have the better learning experience.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of COVID-19 is clearly seen in the Nepalese academic sector like other sectors as all the stakeholders of education system is either mentally or physically affected. Similarly, there may be several downside and limitations that students may experience during online classes. The study discovers that Nepalese management students have perceived the both advantage along with some challenges while practicing the online classes. Similarly, the management graduate has experience that technological facilities is an essential to operate online classes to enhance quality of learning experience and help students to interact and acquired new knowledge. Thus, the paper concludes that the experience of online classes with uses of digital technology is effective to enhance their technological skills along with basic subject knowledge. So, this study recommend that the universities and colleges of Nepal can use the online platform for teaching learning practice as a pre and post covid-19 pandemic and can blend the modality of the both after the pandemic ends. The study reveals that the average students who perceived that the online learning mode is incredibly complex and highly sophisticated, shown the deviation in their responses. Students expressed that the peer learning attitude lacks in the online platform. It is perceived that physical distance discourage the peer learning habits. Moreover, this study also reflects the management graduates are comfortable with the study materials and resources accessible in online class as compared to that they receive in the face-to-face class. Despite of many limitations, the online class can be a productive alternative of the face-to-face class if it is operated in a proper way. Therefore, the proper action plan, strategy for effective digital infrastructure to operate teaching learning activities are must be timely addressed by the concerned authorities. Finally, the result of this study could be useful for all the academic concern for their forthcoming teaching learning strategies.

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