Perceptions of Student Learning Facilitation During COVID-19 Pandemic in Community Schools of Shankharapur Municipality, Nepal

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic shattered the education system worldwide with a sudden transition to online and blended learning, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like Nepal. Nepal's community schools were hit hard with students, teachers, and parents adapting to Alternative Learning Facilitation (ALF) such as online learning, radio, and television learning. This study examines the perception of students, teachers, and parents regarding ALF in Shankharapur Municipality, namely on issues of slow internet connection, lack of access to devices, and technical problems. The research employed qualitative methodology with descriptive research design using primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from students, teachers, and parents of Shankharapur Municipality, while secondary data were collected from relevant newspapers, books, and websites. Parent support was vital in the learning process of students, but parents' digital illiteracy aggravated the situation. The study centers on the need for a combined learning process, both online and offline, to improve students' engagement and performance. The study also calls for the need for teacher and parental guidance, closing the digital divide, and providing even access to educational materials. While ALF was inevitable during lockdowns, its limitations, such as a lack of interactivity and real-time evaluation, were evident. The research offers recommendations to close the digital divide, enhance teacher and parent training, and integrate hybrid models of learning to improve the overall effectiveness of ALF in future learning environments.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Challenges, Collaborative Learning Perception, Alternative Learning Facilitation*

Introduction

COVID-19 had a huge disruption to the global education system as mass school closures affected close to 1.6 billion learners globally (Shrestha & Gnawali, 2021). The pandemic created an unwavering demand for schools to adopt a swift movement toward online and blended forms of learning. This, nonetheless, entailed enormous challenges, especially in low- and middle-income nations such as Nepal, where there is poor technological infrastructure and access to online resources. In Nepal, community schools play an important function in providing education to the majority of the students, who are economically disadvantaged persons or members of economically disadvantaged groups themselves. School closures during the pandemic put traditional classroom teaching on hold,

denying about 9 million school-age children meaningful access to learning (Giri & Dawadi, 2020).

Parents, policymakers, teachers, and stakeholders have complained of long-term academic losses and expanded learning gaps in students. Those who lacked access to digital tools, quality internet connectivity, and learning-friendly environments performed worse in an effort to keep up with school assignments. In order to reduce these problems, the government of Nepal brought the Student Learning Facilitation (SLF) Guide 2077, which worked towards education continuity via distance and open learning modes (SLF Guide, 2077). The distribution of self-learning packages, online learning portals, and ICT-based educational policies were launched as well as training teachers on digital teaching practices and enhancing the involvement of students in distance learning. Despite all this, students were still facing gaps in learning as they had infrequent access to computers and a weak support mechanism for online studies. It was found that students who advanced to a higher level without acquiring essential knowledge and skills had tremendous difficulty adapting to tough coursework (Broad et al., 2023). A cause for worry, more students were feared to be dropping out, particularly when students from disadvantaged communities faced problems in reenrolling in online courses. The effectiveness of alternative learning methods and the engagement of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and education authorities, remain core areas of investigation to ensure that students receive quality education and do not fall behind in academics (Khanal, 2011).

Learning refers to the development of skills to be applied in the society. As majority of students have been deprived of learning as per the national curriculum. According to CEHRD (2020), the number of children having internet access is 1,093,394. Children with no access to other media are 2,357,959 and the children at risk are 995,090. Reduced Curriculum has been designed to meet the academic objectives. Textbooks and teachers' guides have been made to support the teaching-learning activities. Self-learning materials have been made and provided. ICT training has been given to teachers to some extent to improve the teaching techniques and enhance the teaching knowledge in teachers and learning strategies in students (Dinon, 2024). Despite these realities, the learning capacity of the students has fallen and they have forgotten many things drastically. Many talented students have changed into weak ones. Many students fail their tests if they are not guided in the exam hall. There must be lacking in the perception of students, teachers, and parents on alternative learning facilitation as well as teaching-learning environments. This is necessary to be studied and analyzed for academic strength (Pei et al., 2024).

The existing literature highlights that while several initiatives such as the SLF Guide 2077, ICT training, and online portals were introduced to mitigate learning disruptions during COVID-19, students in Nepalese community schools continued to face significant challenges due to limited digital access, weak support mechanisms, and unequal learning opportunities (Shrestha & Gnawali, 2021; Giri & Dawadi, 2020; Dinon, 2024). However, there remains a research gap in understanding the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents regarding the effectiveness of alternative learning facilitation, particularly in rural and urban community school contexts, where socio-economic and infrastructural disparities persist (Broad et al., 2023; Pei et al., 2024).

There is a requirement in the future to develop more inclusive learning policies that address digital access and learning disparities. Infrastructure upgrade, internet connection development, and equitable access to instructional materials are measures necessary to see that no child is left behind in upcoming education emergencies. Alternative learning facilitation, learning setting, and assistance materials will be studied among students, instructors, and guardians, respectively. This study further strives to ascertain challenges of teaching and learning as well as the implication for developing instruction.

Research Methodology

In this research qualitative narrative review including an interviews and observation has used. The sources of data are teachers, students, parents, stakeholders, and educational reports. This qualitative narrative review study aims to find out from students, teachers, and parents about alternative facilitation of learning during Nepalese community schools in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employs participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to collect data, as per tried qualitative research procedures for acquiring intensive knowledge of social and educational phenomena (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, thematic coding is used in an effort to systematize data in a manner that patterns, themes, and inconsistencies are uncovered and ethical research practices such as voluntary participation and confidentiality are ensured. The universe of my study is students, teachers, and parents, and their perception of alternative learning facilitation. The participants of this research are four community schools in Shankharapur. There are four schools, two from the urban area and the other two from the rural setting has been. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring representation from various stakeholders involved in community schools, including teachers, students, parents, school administrators, and community members. Fundamentally this study was based on primary information sources. Therefore, on the way of collecting information, all sample schools has visited to observe teachers' classroom practices and students' activities, and to interview with them. The study was carried out in four community schools of Shankharapur Municipality, Kathmandu, comprising two urban and two rural schools, to explore alternative learning facilitation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussion

The study highlights how COVID-19 impacted learning facilitation at community schools in Shankharapur Municipality with a reference to students, teachers, and parents. Weak internet connectivity, insufficient access to devices, and technical issues were some of the principal challenges. Parental involvement was also crucial, wherein digital learning training was essential. Radio and community-based education approaches were also utilized, but ALF was challenged by students' indifference and substandard learning materials. A hybrid learning system, combining web-based and on-campus interactions, was recommended for increasing engagement and performance. The discussion also compares these findings with policies and global studies, giving insights for future education preparedness.

Perceptions of Alternative Learning Facilitation (ALF) at School

The student learned effectively by himself from textbooks and was helped by his sister at home. But he could not join virtual classes due to the lack of a mobile device and no means of access to instructors for guidance. Virtual tests were also challenging for him. Self-study fostered independence, but lacked instruction from instructors, and the lack of digital resources limited the extent of his learning. This generated an isolated learning experience. Implementation of ALF supported learners in engaging peers on Messenger to collaborate on learning. Media devices like television, radio, internet, and cell phones controlled education, with books still being crucial. The ability to contact teachers for guidance added to autonomous learning. But problems such as noise in online classrooms required active listening, and some students could not go for classes due to the lack of personal devices. Discrepancies between television classes and interpersonal learning created a void in the learning process. Technology was a key to the ALF program, and social interaction through Messenger boosted motivation. But no personal devices created a digital divide, limiting

access for some students and affecting learning opportunities. In this respect one of the student said,

> *Nepal government's Alternative Learning Facilitation (ALF) during COVID-19 has helped me to continue my studies despite numerous difficulties. Technologies like Messenger enabled interaction with peers, while mobiles, TV, radio, and virtual classrooms helped in making learning more accessible. Phone call and online media communication between teachers and students were also pivotal. However, voice, TV, and face-to-face learning differentials, as well as restricted access to personal devices, were significant barriers. Students managed to go through the challenges using common resources and self-directed learning. For effective equitable learning, there is a need for better access and facilitation.*

Just as another student explained,

> *The learning experience presents a major challenge because of limited digital tool access, especially mobile phones, affecting involvement in online learning and peer interaction. Dependence on textbooks for self-study cut him off from social learning chances and guidance from the teacher. While some aid from his sister was helpful, it was unable to replace the digital void, denying access to various learning sources. Despite such limitations, the independent study process of the learner aligns with Rogers' theory of facilitation. However, online test exercises and social-distance courses emphasize the need for additional accessible and inclusive learning solutions. His case brings to the fore the impact of the digital divide on educational equity, necessitating better access to technology and support for all students.*

In his opinion, the easy situation for teaching for him was that of availability of net connection and devices. Parent education is also essential because they do not know much about using devices and online classes. If they were well informed about the devices and online classes, they would be able to care for the children at home. Parents' role is necessary at home for better learning of the children. As regards the materials prescribed by the government as per ALF, He used Zoom on his mobile. He did not have a computer at home. Local government should provide materials for easy learning and teaching. Radio was not used for listening to classes. The better way is the visuals on TV. The weakness was that the presentation on TV class was not understood by our students. It was just for entertainment for them.

Teacher Teaching Strategies and Perception

A teacher faced significant technological obstacles, such as a lack of Wi-Fi and mobile phones, which made online education unaffordable for the majority of students. Despite efforts to use alternative modes of learning, students showed little interest in learning at home, indicating the need for more interactive and stimulating methods. Parental involvement was critical, but keeping parents involved on a full-time basis was difficult. In addressing these challenges, this teacher proposed improving internet connectivity, providing devices, and adhering to ALF guidelines, including practicing social distancing during in-class lessons in a bid to ease the learning process (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Similarly, another teacher noted weak device connectivity and internet connectivity as major hindrances to online learning. Due to these limitations, social distancing classes face-to-face were the most chosen option because they provided a safer and more interactive learning environment. To mitigate the disadvantages of e-learning, that teacher proposed providing digital resources, increasing access to the internet, and educating parents on how to enhance supporting children's learning at home. These findings would close the digital divide gap and make learning more accessible and easier for all (Fullan, 2013).

The student also felt the importance of study material, particularly the use of mobile phones, and found door-to-door education a viable way to enhance education. They also

advocated increased support from the local authorities. Despite that, issues of low internet penetration in the rural areas brought down the level of access of students to online lessons to as low as 10 percent, while online teaching of math was particularly hard. Classes that involved direct meetings with social distancing were found to be optimal, and textbooks provided by the municipality proved useful in a modest way. Despite this, homeschooling was inhibited by parents' fear of COVID-19, while online classes were poorly done. Key findings revealed that infrastructural limitations impacted the implementation of ALF, and parent technology education would improve learner engagement. The student emphasized the role of government in providing internet and devices for efficient learning. Parent participation was considered vital in enhancing children's learning, and social learning theory identified the role of symbolic models like books in education. In addition, natural learning environments were beneficial where there was no digital connectivity. In this one of the teacher reported,

> *Alternative Learning Facilitation (ALF) was marred by the level of poverty and absence of technology in his area, thus making ALF ineffective. His belief was that equipping students with computers and the internet was the ideal classroom environment. Confronted with such a challenge, face-to-face contact with students arranged according to roll number was the option taken at the school. He stressed the role of smartphones as learning devices during the COVID-19 pandemic but pointed out that online classes were not effective, with below 10 percent attendance. Teacher A suggested home and door-to-door teaching and called on local governments to offer required infrastructure and learning materials. He also pointed out the necessity of educating parents on the use of devices and online platforms to support children's learning more effectively.*

Likewise, another teacher stated,

> *I had a positive general impression of ALF but felt its effect was circumscribed. Though parent books provided were slightly helpful, online lectures were not used effectively. In his opinion, learning situations could be enhanced if the government provided needed devices and internet. Due to a lack of resources, the students were taught face-to-face on a shift basis. He found that learning under natural conditions with social distancing worked better. He emphasized the importance of learning material and recommended adopting home visits and door-to-door education to maximize learning. He also emphasized the importance of making parents learn about using devices and online classes to help their children learn, and how parental participation played a critical role.*

Moreover, the two teachers agreed that the problem of Alternative Learning Facilitation (ALF) under the COVID-19 pandemic was poverty, less technology, and scarce resources, which rendered learning online useless. They also underlined the significance of technology, especially the use of smartphones, and the need for devices and connectivity. Because of these problems, they resorted to teaching face-to-face in shifts, observing social distance. They highlighted the central role of parent involvement and the requirement for parents to be taught digital literacy. In ALF's improvement, they suggested home visits, instruction at the doorsteps, and greater government involvement in providing learning material and resources.

Parents Strategies and Perception

A saw the value of Alternative Learning Formats (ALF) in preventing student dropouts but preferred face-to-face learning, which was more effective in inspiring students. Despite COVID-19 setbacks and the fact that it was difficult to access schools, a parent saw ALF as inevitable during the lockdown. ALF provided a conducive home learning environment, compelling the use of TV programs and mobile phones in education. But issues

like poor internet connectivity, large class sizes via the internet, and lack of interactive testing instruments slowed its effectiveness. TV instruction was seen as one-way and low in interaction, while computer-based applications enhanced learning but needed adequate instruction. Parent A suggested the inclusion of distance learning into face-to-face classes and giving students access to the internet and computer-based resources for a better learning experience (Doung-In, 2017). On the other hand, another parent complained about the challenges of rural settings, such as limited internet and resources, which made ALF less effective. Time management problems and the reluctance of children to prioritize entertainment over learning in the presence of TV and mobile phones were challenges. In order to improve ALF in rural settings, that parent advocated for the use of new models of learning, better internet connectivity, and the proper use of TV as a learning platform (Creswell, 2013).

One of the parents reported,

> *He thought ALF was not as efficient as regular classes due to problems like weak internet connections. Online classes were useful to some extent, but he would have preferred a combination of online classes and homeschooling in a welcoming, non-scolding environment. He suggested encouraging regular TV programs for increased learning and used mobiles, reference books, and TV as study tools. A major issue was large online class sizes. He emphasized the requirement for a stimulating home learning environment and active guardian involvement. Despite challenges, he still felt that ALF was worthwhile for student learning.*

As another parent described,

> *ALF in lockdown as a necessary evil, but they would have preferred teaching in person. They viewed it as providing "normal learning" but was flawed, particularly in testing, as it was mostly one-way. Materials that were provided, such as texts, graphs, and cellular phones, were adequate, but challenges were faced. Parent B believed there could be focus on motivation and suggested techniques like stories, phone messaging apps, and TV classes, but mentioned the limitations of television. They highlighted the use of computers in transferring education. Parent B, in general, thought ALF was beneficial but has to be bettered, especially with respect to evaluation and environmental factors.*

From above discussion, two parents recognized the value of Alternative Learning Facilitation (ALF) during the COVID-19 pandemic but noted drawbacks. A parent would rather attend classes in person than ALF, opting for online learning and homeschooling. Another parent recognized ALF to be effective during regular learning but noted areas of limitation in assessment. They gave improvement recommendations.

Role of Technology in Learning

The role of technology in improving learning experiences during pursuing alternative Learning Format (ALF) was significant. Especially for students who own contemporary digital devices such as mobile phones, internet, television, and radio, the contribution was vast. Students could access online classes, participate in virtual debates, and navigate a wide bank of educational content, all of which improved their understanding of the topics. However, the digital divide created massive inequalities, particularly among rural students or those without constant access to these essential technologies. Students without personal devices or constant internet access struggled to keep up with their peers, missing out on essential learning material, which led to uneven academic achievement and results. This gap in accessibility reflects the importance of closing the digital divide through equal opportunities for all learners to learn (UNESCO, 2020). To this effect one of the students stated,

> *Having mobile phone and internet helped me participate in online classes and grasp the lessons well, but some of my friends could not participate because they did not have devices. Personally, I also had an issue because I did not have my own phone, and my family was not able to cover every-day internet data.*

Likewise, the teacher reported,

> *Technology made it easy to teach and connect with the students, but many could not participate regularly due to poor internet connectivity. It was disheartening to see some students make good progress while others, especially those in rural areas, were left behind because they did not have digital tools.*

To this effect, the parent testified,

> *We tried providing mobile phones to our children, but given that there are many children in the household, it was difficult for all of them to participate. Not all families have the capacity for internet and smartphone, and it was disheartening to see my child lag behind while others enjoyed the opportunity for online education.*

This shows during the COVID-19 pandemic, students, teachers, and parents found it challenging to access online education due to limited access to devices and internet unaffordability. Low-income and rural households fell behind, and teachers faced inconsistent engagement. The digital divide led to parents and students feeling emotional pain, stressing the need for equal access to education and the need for more advanced digital infrastructure.

Social and Collaborative Learning

Cooperative and social learning were integral in enhancing student engagement in ALF. Discussion boards and peer-to-peer collaboration provided students with more than sufficient arenas for idea exchange, conceptual clarification, and co-operative project execution. Co-operative learning provides impetus to problem-solving, critical thinking, and exchange of information that lead to in-depth conceptual understanding. Those students who lacked internet connectivity were unable to contribute to co-operative processes that disadvantaged them. The absence of peer interaction denied them the chance to learn from group discussions and collaborative problem-solving, which are key components of active learning. This deprivation ultimately limited the students' overall learning experience and engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). On this, one student stated,

> *I enjoyed taking part in online discussions with friends in class, as it enabled me to understand lessons more and made learning more enjoyable. But I also felt left out when I could not take part in online discussions, which made learning a lot more challenging for me without working with others.*

Likewise, another teacher stated,

> *Collaborative learning encouraged problem-solving and critical thinking among students, but digital disadvantaged students were denied these enriching experiences. While there were students who excelled at peer discussion, other students, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, were disadvantaged by limited access.*

To this effect, the parent stated,

> *My child gained valuable knowledge from group discussions in online classes, but I concerned myself about those who could not participate. Nonetheless, without internet access, my child lost the opportunity to engage with friends and learn through discussion, which impacted their motivation and overall learning.*

This shows that the online learning has pros and cons. It is enjoyable for students, but exclusion on the basis of non-participation is likely. Teachers promote group learning for critical thinking, but digital unavailability can be against participation. Parents are also tested to advocate for digital accessibility in inclusive education.

Challenges in Remote Learning

Some challenges eroded the success of remote learning under ALF. Poor internet, lack of personal devices, and parents' digital illiteracy were some of the most significant challenges. These disproportionately impacted students who were from low-income or rural families and limited their access to online learning. Students were unable to take online classes and hence lost out on learning due to a lack of stable internet or devices. Furthermore, the parents' own deficiency in digital literacy also hampered them from supporting their children's learning, thus making such matters more complex. Furthermore, the online classes were often hampered by technical problems, ambient noise, and poor attendance, adding to student disengagement and academic performance (OECD, 2020). On this note, one student reported,

> *Limited access to technology and a reliable internet connection greatly affected students' ability to engage in online learning. Slow internet and shared resources hindered students' attendance and learning, highlighting the digital divide and the challenges they faced in participating in online learning and continuing their studies.*

The teacher mentioned,

> *Most students struggled to attend online classes due to a weak internet connection, and even those that did attend were constantly disrupted. At the same time, parents were unable to help their children because they had no idea how to use digital tools.*

Likewise, the parent stated,

> *I had no idea about how to work online learning applications, so I was unable to teach my kid accordingly. By remaining in a rural area where the internet connectivity is poor, it became more frustrating as my kid lost their education due to technical problems.*

Likewise, online learning is seriously handicapped by technology deficiency and uneven internet connection. The students are not able to attend classes, and parents are likewise not computer literate, so there are missed lessons and frustration in the rural area.

Importance of Teacher and Parental Guidance

Teachers played a vital role in motivating the students and guiding them through the ALF process. Their support and encouragement were critical in sustaining student motivation, especially when there was little face-to-face interaction. The instructors adapted the mode of teaching so that they would make maximum use of available resources, often going out of their way to give additional help through phone calls or other channels of alternative communication. Their involvement made ALF a success. Parent involvement was also instrumental in enabling the students to succeed in distance learning. Parents needed to become extremely involved in ensuring their children's education, time management, and motivation. But that was not always convenient, as parents' digital literacy was low in some cases, which forced them to learn alongside children (Jantzen, 2021).

To this end, the student remarked,

> *My teacher used to call and ask about me as well as explain lessons when I could not get it. Without their encouragement, I would have lost enthusiasm for studying in online classes.*

Likewise, the teacher also added,

> *We had to adopt new methods to help students, for instance, sending messages through mobile or explaining lessons through phone calls. Encouraging students without physical contact was difficult, but we tried our best to guide them.*

Similarly, the parent also added,

> *I tried to help my child with online studies, but sometimes I used to find it tough because I was not familiar with technology. I also had to modify my own timetable to*

enable my child's learning so that they could attend classes and complete assignments.

This shows that the student appreciated the ongoing encouragement and support of the teacher in online classes, and it maintained the interest and understanding. Teachers managed the challenge of online learning by sending notes via mobile messages and conducting lessons via phone calls. Parents struggled with new technology but attempted to adjust schedules to get their child to attend lessons and complete homework. Ongoing encouragement from parents and teachers was necessary for student success.

Limitations of ALF

Even though ALF had provided a means for alternative continuing education, it had several limitations which impacted its success. Learning via television and radio, even though giving an alternative to physical classroom environments, had no interactivity and thus made the learning process more of a passive nature. The students were unable to engage in live discussions or raise questions, which are of great importance for participative learning and improved understanding. Moreover, ALF's evaluation procedure was not adequate, making tracking of students' progress difficult to assess effectively. Assignments and quizzes, the standard methods adopted for traditional appraisals, were challenging to implement in distant regions, therefore, without instant feedback and degrading learning experiences. Rural area students were at a disadvantage particularly by having less-than-suitable infrastructure access, sluggish internet, and limited access to devices and resources (Boserup, 2014).

To this effect, the student described,

Watching lessons on television was not the same as attending class because I couldn't ask questions when I didn't understand. We had homework, but without feedback, I didn't know if I was learning properly.

Likewise, the teacher described,

Teaching through TV and radio was a challenge because we couldn't interact with students or see their understanding in real-time. Tracking student progress was also difficult since most students didn't have internet access to post assignments or quizzes.

Likewise, the parent complained,

My child watched the lessons on television, but without the instruction of a teacher, it was hard for them to stay attentive. We live in a rural area with bad internet, so my child missed out on much learning.

Globally, the research looks back at the crisis of students, teachers, and parents in the education sector. The students complained about concentration struggles through unclear questions and no immediate feedback, and the teachers against real-time interactions and internet connections. The parents also had a lack of ample opportunities to access learning in past rural areas.

Conclusion

The transition to Alternative Learning Formats (ALF) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal exposed extreme barriers to learning, especially among students from disadvantaged groups. The digital divide with poor internet connection, few devices, and connectivity problems undermined online learning effectiveness. Parental participation, which plays a key role in student performance, was additionally hampered by digital illiteracy, creating a need for extensive training and assistance. The study also indicated that online learning and learning through television or radio, as a substitute, were less interactive and could not offer one-on-one instruction by teachers, thus limiting students' participation and attainment. Despite these limitations, a blended mode of online learning and traditional classroom interactions was proposed to amplify student participation and performance. This approach would be more successful in bridging the gaps of accessibility, particularly in rural

areas, where inadequate digital tools and poor internet connectivity were most evident. In the future, it should focus on building up infrastructure, offering equal access to learning technology, and performing digital literacy training for parents and teachers. By bridging the digital divide and enhancing interactive learning tools, ALF could become an even more effective and fairer vehicle for education, not just in times of crises but also in future learning contexts.

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