



Face-to-Face and Virtual Instruction Practices in Nepali Schools

Krishna Bahadur G.C. ^{1*}

1. Lecturer, Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the education sector along with the other sectors in Nepal. The education system and its major components have been disrupted by the pandemic. In this regard, I have prepared a research article to explore the status and practice of face-to-face and virtual instruction in school education in Nepal.

The first objective of this paper is to assess the present situation of the face-to-face mode of schooling. The second objective is to analyze the current state of virtual learning and the third objective is to study the change from face-to-face and virtual learning in the education system. This research is qualitative one. This is delimited in the secondary schools of the Gorkha Municipality. I have selected the schools of the study area purposively. I have used non-participant observation, focus group discussion, and open-ended interviews to generate information and it was the primary source. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an alternative mode of instruction, i.e., a virtual mode. I have found that depending solely upon the virtual mode of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic situation has been less effective in the study site due to poor internet access and electronic devices. The blended approach has been more effective in the instructional process.

Keywords: blended approach, COVID-19, paradigm shift, pedagogy, virtual learning

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*Corresponding author; K. B. G.C. (gckrishna1986@gmail.com)



1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented change in the global context, particularly in the pedagogical approaches. Sometimes, the usual ways of teaching and learning are replaced by new and different ways all over the world. This is the shifting paradigm in the academic arena. The status and practice of face-to-face and virtual instruction in school education represent the major theme of this paper.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Nepal is facing the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic in its various sectors to date. The consequence of the lockdown means schools and universities have been temporarily closed for nearly two months. UNESCO has estimated that nearly nine million (8,796,624) students in Nepal are affected due to school and university closures in response to the pandemic (Dawadi, Giri & Simkhada, 2020). 958,127 or 11% are in pre-primary, 2,466,570, or 28% are in primary, and 3,463,763, or 39% are in secondary. Similarly, 404,718, or 5% are in tertiary education (ibid.). This figure shows that most of the education system, all levels of schools, and universities are directly affected by the pandemic. Similarly, Nepal has got a window to redefine the education system during the lockdown (Surkhali & Garbuja, 2020). It has created an environment for an alternative way of instruction which has changed from a face-to-face mode to a virtual one.

When the situation is not favorable for face-to-face instruction, virtual teaching and learning (e-learning) are used as the best alternative techniques of instruction. More than 94% of the world's student population is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices, i.e., face-to-face teaching and learning practices. Reopening of schools after the relaxation of restrictions is another major challenge with various new standards. There is a kind of pressure to explore new techniques of instruction and evaluation systems in the education sector of the country during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and even in the future. There is a paradigm shift in the way educators deliver quality education through various virtual platforms (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Virtual learning, distance learning, and continuing education are some of the solutions to this pandemic period.

Various countries in the world have used their resources to provide education in alternative ways. They have virtual learning practices in the normal situation, but at

this time they have practiced a lot. Some technologically advanced countries have easily adopted the distance mode of schooling, i.e., Germany, Australia, Italy, France, UK, USA, etc. (Dawadi, Giri & Simkhada, 2020). In such countries, they have quickly enhanced their virtual learning platforms like Moodle, Learning Management System-LMS, and Cloud systems. China and India have both established national virtual learning portals during the pandemic period. They have increased access to the national repository of learning resources for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and publishers. To ensure learning, China has mobilized all provincial and national virtual platforms and telecom service providers, upgraded the bandwidth of major digital platforms, and mobilized societal resources, both human and material. India has provided access to thousands of complete courses in multiple languages (Azzi-Huck & Shmis, 2020 as cited by Dawadi, Giri & Simkhada, 2020). These practices have strengthened virtual learning with the security and collaboration of all service providers. Countries that have poor access to technology have practiced radio and television for their virtual learning classes.

During the period of COVID-19, most of the time, schools and universities have closed their face-to-face modes of schooling. At that time, such closure hurts a student's knowledge and skill development. Many students have faced the mental problems of alternative schooling. In the Nepalese context, digital learning creates inequality in access to education. People who have easy access to virtual learning platforms have a learning opportunity. Those who do not have access to virtual devices do not get the opportunity to learn. It creates a digital divide in the process of teaching and learning. During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal mobilized the resources and materials for the continuation of education, but it was less fruitful because of the diversified socio-cultural status. Though the country's universities and educational institutions have acquired some hybrid pedagogical systems, they are not well-managed or sufficient (Khanal, 2021). In the context of Nepal, the home and community are to be mobilized; the background and limitations of the home and community also need to be an important consideration (Mahboob, 2020; Dawadi, Giri & Simkhada, 2020). Consequently, the inevitable variations of society have varied access to virtual learning and the alternative process of schooling.

During the period of school closure, existing inequalities connected to different socio-economic situations of the Nepalese people have increased mainly due to the lack of resources, including access to educational technologies and the internet, and a lack of physical spaces to carry out home-based learning among families from poorer backgrounds (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo, 2020). People who have poor access to the devices of virtual learning have less benefit from the virtual learning process.

So, there is technological variation among people, which creates inequality in education.

The changing nature of students and available technologies has required academics to change their approaches to teaching to gain improved learning outcomes (Hativa & Goodyear, 2021 as cited by Redmond, 2011). There are new changes for both instructors and students in the blended learning process (Downing & Dymont, 2013). Though there are many changes in the blended approach to learning, it is needed to provide knowledge to the learners from which they can work effectively in society and at their workplace.

There is a boundless effect of the COVID-19 pandemic situation on the education sector. There is virtual instructional practice during the pandemic situation but the exact scenario of students' presentation, teachers' training towards the virtual mode of instruction, and the evaluation system along with the new pedagogical practice is less good than hearing from the school teachers in terms of their informal discussion. There is less study of the present situation of face-to-face and virtual education systems at the school level. Similarly, much research on the status and practice of face-to-face and virtual education in higher education is not done. So, what is the present situation of the face-to-face mode of instruction? What is the current state of virtual learning? What are the changes between face-to-face and virtual instruction? are objective-related research questions.

For supporting my evidence, I have linked the theory of interpretivism which is a theoretical framework of this study. Interpretivism has a single phenomenon but multiple interpretations. In this paradigm, the truth can be determined by a process of measurement (Lan, 2018). According to interpretivism, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. Creswell (2007) has emphasized that interpretivism has its unique context, so there is no generalization of the result (Creswell, 2007). Harmmersley (2013) has emphasized multiple interpretations of the phenomenon (Lan, 2018). Interpretivism has multiple realities and subjective ideas. According to interpretivism, one can conduct research in a natural setting (Lan, 2018). It is believed that authentic information can be generated from the field through the respondents' subjective reality. It has an interactive interview and detailed perspectives. Similarly, a researcher can probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, perceptions, views, feelings, and perspectives (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). The Intrepretivist has emphasized the better insight of the respondent through the data collection tools. Its beautiful aspect is that its ontological view tends to be subjective rather than objective (Mack, 2010).

2. Methodology

The methodology includes the study design, area, population and sampling, and data analysis procedure. The study site of this research work is Gorkha district which lies in the Gandaki province of Nepal. This study has qualitative nature. The qualitative design explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative design is a type of design in which the final written report has a flexible structure. In this design, those who engage in this inquiry form support a research approach that honors an inductive style. In the same way, it focuses on the personal meaning and the importance of expressing the complexity of a situation. Similarly, the total population of this research is the subject teachers and students of five private and equal number of community schools at the secondary level. For this instance, I have used purposive sampling techniques to select the schools, subject teachers, and students. Likewise, I have generated the information from the study area through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion (FGD), which are the tools of primary sources of information. I have used an observation checklist to collect the information from the classroom of all the selected schools. From the checklist, I have explored the present status of face-to-face and virtual modes of instruction and how the change occurs from the face-to-face and virtual instructional modes to the students. Similarly, I have used semi-structured interviews with subject teachers of ten selected schools to collect the information. In the same way, I have used focus group discussions for two groups of students from private and community schools. Through, video recording I have generated information from the students. I analyzed the information by generating the theme of the information and providing them with some evidence along with theoretical support.

3. Result and Discussion

The result and discussion of this research work are mentioned under these sub-topics.

3.1. The Current Status of Face-to-Face Instruction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, all the schools in the Gorkha municipality have been conducted in physical mode. All the classes at the secondary level are running smoothly. In this academic session 2078/2079, which lasted about two months (February-March), all the schools were totally closed. Since that time, selected schools in the Gorkha district have been using alternative modes or the virtual mode

of schooling. Except for such time, most of the months of this year are in favor of the physical mode of schooling.

3.2. The current status of face-to-face instruction in private schools

From the Gorkha municipality, there are only five secondary boarding schools have been selected in this study. They have similar types of conditions in physical classes or the face-to-face mode of instruction. The efforts of the school administration affects the overall educational activities in the schools. I have explained the present status of the face-to-face mode of schooling within the sub-topics.

3.2.1. Student's regularity

In the face-to-face mode of schooling, private schools can maintain the regularity of students. Various arguments of respondents which I have gathered from the interview have shown the regularity of students in the classroom situation after the pandemic situation. Similarly, I have generated information through non-participatory observation; I have found the regularity of students in the school is better when 90 percent of students are present. The regularity of students represents their participation in the learning process, homework, regular work, interaction with their peers and teachers, sincerity of their work, and participation in extra-curricular activities. I have generated information through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) from students in this case. The regularity of students is higher than during the pandemic situation. According to their views, they are almost time present in school after a pandemic situation but in the pandemic situation, they have poor access in the classroom. Students argued that they are mostly attending the school after pandemic situations physically which makes them easier to learn something, interact with colleagues, and get feedback from teachers.

Students have felt free in their activities in the classroom after the COVID-19 pandemic. Interactive classroom, peer, extra class activities (ECA), and other activities are properly conducted in the schools. Though an individual's opinion is subjective according to interpretivism, the respondent's voice represents the situation of selected private schools. The physical mode of the schooling system supports the regularity of students, whereas the virtual mode does not (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo, 2020). The physical mode is more attractive for secondary-level students, which provides different opportunities and ensures their regularity. This type of regularity supports making the classroom more inclusive. Inclusiveness is sometimes related to human rights. The right to education does not automatically imply inclusion (Stubbs, 2002).

3.2.2. Complication of work

In Nepal this year, about one to two months were disturbed by the COVID-19 pandemic strikethrough. At that time, only the students' engagement in the classroom takes place but no more achievements were gained. Teaching time is lost in that period. Overall, courses must be completed in this academic year, in physical classes. Instead of revision, the course's completeness is the major responsibility of a subject teacher. So, with less time, most of the teachers have felt pressured to complete the course on time. Though teachers' well-being and readiness are key requirements for them to undertake a new approach to teaching in a difficult time, they are unable to take on challenges due to the responsibility of the administration and themselves (Khanal, 2021).

Now, in the face-to-face mode of instruction, teachers are swayed to complete the course on time with better achievement. Students can construct some knowledge with their own experience, but that is not enough and is more valuable than the formal pre-determined course of the government of Nepal. So, the teachers are feeling a lot of pressure in the teaching and learning process. This feeling is expressed by the students also. Students' voices reflect that the knowledge construction process is ongoing but the pressure of the teacher is harmful to the content delivery process.

Likewise, I have generated information through non-participant observation in the case of the teacher's work. It is more difficult to complete their course in a limited time because most of the teachers have repeated their previous course content due to the incompleteness for all children.

This evidence has support that there is more complexity to completing the teacher's work i.e. teaching, homework checking, evaluation, ECAs, and students' practical work. Interpretivism argues in the multiple realities so the interpretation of students and the teachers is subjective in this case.

3.3. The current state of face-to-face instruction in community schools

In the community schools of Gorkha municipality, the current status of face-to-face instruction is satisfy-able which is under the subtopic:

3.3.1. Motivation, feedback, and evaluation processes

It has been critical to empower learners for fostering self-directed learning with motivation (Nepal & K.C., 2021). Though motivating is a challenging aspect of learning, after the pandemic situation students' motivation toward the subject matter

and the learning process is quite better. They are getting regular feedback from the teachers. They are evaluated through formative and summative evaluation processes. Schools are conducting internal examinations as corrective evaluations. Motivation supports increasing the achievement level. Feedback and a regular evaluation process help to better performance and achievement.

I have gathered information through FGD in the case of motivation, feedback, and evaluation process. Through FGD I have found that students are motivated in the learning process after the pandemic situation which was less attractive during the pandemic situation. Similarly, they have to get direct feedback from their subject teachers and they can correct their mistakes. Likewise, the evaluation process is better in the physical mode of instruction which is less effective during a pandemic situation.

Interpretivism argues that there are diverse ways of seeing and experiencing the world through different contexts and cultures (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). According to the view of respondents, motivation toward learning inspires students in every situation. Similarly, regular feedback on a student's performance supports them in improving their achievement. A student's achievement is evaluated by a formative and summative evaluation process. Selected community schools are using formative and summative evaluation systems in Gorkha municipality.

3.4. The Current State of Virtual Learning

In the Gorkha municipality, the physical or face-to-face (F2F) mode of schools is running after the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual classes are stopped. Though face-to-face classes are running these days, schools have used technology for better instruction.

3.5. A virtual classroom situation during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic situation, virtual classes were conducted in the Gorkha municipality. The virtual learning environment is a technology-based learning environment through the Internet (Dhakal, 2022). At that time, the status of virtual classes was less accessible. I have trying to explore the status of virtual classes during the COVID-19 pandemic situation under some sub-topics.

3.5.1. Participation of students

During the COVID-19 pandemic situation, there was less participation of students in schools (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Private schools have tried to increase participation in their schools, but community schools were unable to increase the participation of students. There are various reasons for the lower participation in

schools during that situation. Comparatively, private schools have economically sound students in the secondary rather than in the community schools. So, except for other reasons, boarding schools were able to conduct the virtual class, but the participation of students in the classroom was also poor. It was better participation than the community schools, but not satisfactory.

Students have poor present in schools during the pandemic situation for various reasons. Internet connectivity, easy accessibility, and power interruptions are the common issues that we face often in developing countries for virtual learning (Adhikari et al., 2020). Some of the similar causes of the lower participation of students in private and community schools are as follows:

Lack of Internet: Due to poor Internet access, students at private and community schools have been absent. In the urban areas of Gorkha municipality, the internet was comparatively more accessible than in the remote. Most of the students are from the remote areas of the district in the community schools. So, the main cause of the lower participation of students in the virtual class was a lack of internet access.

Lack of devices: Due to the lack of appropriate devices, i.e., android mobiles, laptops, desktop computers, and tablets, students were unable to access the virtual classroom. This problem is in the community schools than the private schools of the Gorkha municipality.

The problem of electricity: Gorkha district lies in the Himalayan and hilly regions. It has geographically high mountains, hilly areas, and plain land areas. Most areas lack electricity due to their geographical location. Though the Gorkha municipality has access to electricity, it has fluctuated due to the wind, rainfall, and electricity supply itself. Due to the problem with electricity, students' participation was poor in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

The financial burden to the parents: Parents have been unable to join their children in virtual classes due to a lack of supportive devices and an insufficient number of devices. They have felt the economic burden of buying a new device and many devices for each child in the house. It was another reason for students' absenteeism in virtual classes.

3.5.2. Knowledge of information and communication technology

During the pandemic situation, most students and teachers have little knowledge of the operationalization of information and communication technology (ICT). In the

previous situations of first and second lockdowns in the country, teachers and students were unable to use electronic devices. These days the use of ICT is increased because of the sincerity of the school administration and the teachers as well. In the case of COVID-19, it is the professional activity of teachers based on their perceptions and experiences to fulfill their duties, responsibilities, and accountability to respond to educational dilemmas that come across their path (Caingcoy, 2021). Regarding this, the boarding schools have been able to conduct virtual classes during the pandemic situation. Besides, due to the negligence of the community school's administration and the teachers, students were not able to use the devices and conduct virtual classes. It shows the responsibility and accountability of a teacher in private and community schools. Instead of using devices and conducting virtual classes, community schools have the practice of physical community classes. Such classes were only for basic-level students, guided by the learning facilitation guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology.

In this case, I have generated information through FGD, the students as respondents have argued that most of the students have poor access to the virtual classroom and various teachers have poor knowledge of ICT. They have increased their efficiency in recent days. From the non-participant observation, I have generated this type of information from the selected schools. When I saw working on the computer, the teachers have poor knowledge reflects the poor byproduct in case of teaching the content.

3.6. Change from Face-to-Face and Virtual Modes of Instruction

Various changes occur in the face-to-face and virtual modes of instruction after the COVID-19 pandemic situation. I have explored some changes from such instructional modes regarding face-to-face mode of instruction.

3.6.1. Lack of reading habits

There is a major change that occurs from the pandemic situation which has created a problem of poor reading habits in students. Students who were engaged in electronic devices are familiar with the devices regularly; students who were absent from the virtual class have poor reading habits. The regularity of physical school and the habit of reading and writing before the pandemic situation have been disturbed, nowadays; they have felt much difficulty in reading and writing exercises. Its major causes are the virtual mode of instruction, lack of physical monitoring, and poor interaction with the teachers and their colleagues. This problem is similar in private and community schools.

Correspondently, I have generated information from the FGD of private and community school students. Regarding reading habits, their view is that there is a shifting paradigm in the student's reading skills. They have spent most of their time on an electronic device rather than the physical reading habit. So, the reading habit of students is overturning due to the use of electronic devices especially mobile phone and their virtual environment during the pandemic situation.

3.6.2. Psychological changes

The virtual classroom has created changes of loneliness, boredom, monotony, and sometimes depression during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. These types of changes are sometimes a kind of problem. Each time a student is left alone at home, it creates psychological changes, i.e., monotony, anxiety, and depression. Even after a pandemic situation, its effects have been seen in an individual. So, lack of reading habits, misuse of mobile phones, and aggressiveness of students are the causes of psychological changes

Similarly, I have generated information from the non-participant observation regarding the psychological change in the students. I have found that some of the students are staring and calm during the time of focus group discussion. That behavior has reflected the psychological change of the pandemic situation.

This evidence has presented the psychological changes in the students during the pandemic situation. So, while technology has simplified the learning process, its disadvantages are manifesting as psychological problems in students. That's why it is a continuing problem that influences every activity of an individual.

3.6.3. Shifting paradigm and blended mode of instruction

This is added change between face-to-face and virtual modes of instruction. The shifting paradigm in the pedagogical as well as the medium practice is the major change after the pandemic situation. The physical mode and the virtual mode of instruction are used together which is the blended mode. There is a shifting paradigm in the field of teaching and learning, motivation, student participation, use of ICT, student interaction, and the evaluation process which is reflecting the blended approach to instruction (Dawadi, Giri & Simkhada, 2020). For various reasons, in the present situation or the post-COVID-19 pandemic, the virtual mode of instruction is less effective. The physical mode of instruction also has different types of problems and changes. In this situation, the blended mode of instruction is the best way of reducing the problems of the physical mode of instruction. Additionally, within traditional pedagogical approaches, the blending modes of the education

system could be implemented to improve the quality of education at an affordable cost with limited trained human resources (Pal et al., 2021).

Similarly, I have explored the information from the field through FGD and the students' view is that, in the present situation, the physical mode of instruction using technology is better, but shortly it will be better if there is easy access to the internet and the electronic devices of students. Likewise, I have generated the information through the interview guidelines from the subject teachers. Respondents of private and community schools have similar ideas and perspectives on this issue. They have argued that the blended mode will be better soon, but there must be training for the teacher, easy access to the internet, and electronic devices, and awareness of parents.

Correspondingly I have created some information from non-participant observation in the classroom through an observation checklist. In that situation, I have found that the physical mode of the schooling system is the best way for the lower grades, but in the upper grades, the virtual mode of instruction is also an effective way. However, within a perspective of change and innovation, a virtual learning environment may play a paramount role in supporting learning in non-formal and informal contexts as well (Ale, 2022). In the case of the secondary level, the physical mode with technology is the best. The paradigm shift in education from traditional to online is a huge threat. A collaborative approach is needed for the institutions to seamlessly operationalize the virtual classes (Upadhyay, Koirala & Sedain, 2021). Though it creates various problems, this practice reflects the shifting paradigm of pedagogy in classroom instruction.

4. Conclusion

Along with technology, teachers and students are changing their ways of thinking. From the discussion, I have concluded that the virtual mode of instruction is an alternative way of learning, but it has many problems these days. The physical mode of instruction is the best way of teaching and learning. If there is any type of pandemic problem in the country, at that time a blended mode of instruction will be better. Shifting paradigms for pedagogical practice is becoming more essential in the education sector. There should be enough preparedness to implement the blended pedagogical practice in the academic sector. That's why the physical mode of instruction with technology reflects the shifting paradigm of instructional practice in the education system. In the Nepalese context, the blended mode of instruction will be more fruitful shortly. It will be helpful to implement the blended approach

in the academic sector, which will bring about the perfection of pedagogical practices.

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