

University Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during Covid -19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has seriously affected all social systems, including education in Nepal. After the government decided to implement lockdowns throughout the country, all schools and universities remained closed for a long time. To overcome the loss of education from long-term lockdowns, most of the universities of Nepal sought to continue education by using digital platforms as well as they could. The purpose of the study reported here was to examine university students' perceptions of online learning during the pandemic and identify the challenges they face while learning through online mode in rural and semi-urban areas of Nepal. Using a cross-sectional online survey design, I collected data from 8 community campuses of rural and semi-urban areas of Nepal. The participants for this study were 100 master's degree students who had been learning through various online platforms since the lockdown began. Eight of those participants were interviewed to explore their perceptions of using online learning. The result showed that the majority of the students found online learning supportive during the pandemic and they preferred the continuity of online learning even after the Covid-19 pandemic. However, they faced challenges related to technology, pedagogical skills, and the socio-economic status of the students. Based on these findings, this article argues that the effectiveness of online teaching can only be further studied by considering the effects of these other social-educational factors simultaneously.

कोभिड-१९ महामारीले समाजका सबैखाले कृयाकलापमा असर गर्यो, जसमा शिक्षा अछुतो रहेन । नेपालमा सरकारले विद्यालय र विश्वविद्यालय बन्द राख्ने निर्णय गर्यो जुन भ्याक्सिन अभावका कारण निकै लामो समयसम्म रह्यो । त्यसका कारण भएको खतीलाई न्यूनीकरण गर्दै धेरैजसो विश्वविद्यालयहरूले डिजिटल खालहरूको प्रयोग गरेर सकेसम्म शिक्षालाई निरन्तरता दिन प्रयत्न गरे । यो लेखमा प्रस्तुत अन्वेषणको उद्देश्य अन्लाइन शिक्षणप्रति विश्वविद्यालयका विद्यार्थीको बुझाईलाई अध्ययन गरी उनीहरूले सामना गरेका चुनौतीलाई पहिचान गर्नु थियो । अन्तर्खण्डीय अन्लाइन सभै प्रयोग गरेर गाउँ र अर्धशहरीय क्षेत्रका ८ वटा सामुदायिक कलेजबाट आँकडा जम्मा गरिएको थियो । सहभागीहरूमा १०० जना स्नाकोत्तर तहका विद्यार्थी थिए जसले विभिन्न अन्लाइन खालहरूमाफत अध्ययन गरिरहेका थिए । तीमध्ये ८ जनालाई अन्तर्वार्ता लियो । यो अध्ययनले अन्लाइन सिकाई सहयोगी पाएका थिए भने महामारीपछि पनि यसको प्रयोगमा निरन्तरता होस भन्ने चाहना व्यक्त गरे । तर उनीहरूले प्रविधिको प्रयोगमा चुनौती भएको, अध्यापकहरूमा भएको प्रविधि मार्फत गरिने शिक्षणमा कमी भएको, र आफ्नो सामाजिक-आर्थिक स्तरका कारण अरु समस्या खप्नु परेको अनुभव पनि बताए । त्यसका आधारमा यो लेखले नेपालजस्ता समाजमा यी सामाजिक-शैक्षणिक अवस्थाको विश्लेषण एकैसाथ गरेर मात्र अन्लाइन शिक्षा कति प्रभावकारी छ भन्ने खोजी अघि बढाउन सकिन्छ भन्ने तर्क गरेको छ ।

Keywords: connectivity, Covid-19 pandemic, digital literacy, online learning, survey

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) as a worldwide pandemic in March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2019). The global burning issue of the coronavirus pandemic has affected various sectors including human life, economy, and education. Many countries including the developing countries closed their schools and universities to maintain the social distancing due to the ongoing Covid -19 (Ferrel & Ryan, 2020). During the crisis, face-to-face learning was disturbed in many countries, so there was a need for alternative ways of learning, and learning associating with information communication technology can be one of the best alternatives (Rose, 2020). Consequently, a large number of schools and universities of developed and developing countries like Nepal have adopted distance mode online learning using various E-learning platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Office 365 to deliver lectures using audio and video conferencing to compensate the educational loss during the Covid -19 pandemic. However, there may be some problems for the effective implementation of online learning in developing countries compared to the developed countries (Baticulon et al., 2021).

Several studies across the world found online learning as flexible, easy to use, and better control over the environment (Govindasamy, 2001). Other benefits include increase continence, easy access to resources regardless of space and time, and less expensive, and the success of e-learning depends on the factors including accessibility, usage of appropriate methods, course content, and the criteria of assessment (Rosenberg, 2001). Similarly, Adam et al. (2012) argued that online learning can be equally effective as the face to face classes if it is managed appropriately. Moreover, the students of the 21st century may be motivated towards learning through technology, and this mode of learning can be one of the useful alternatives during a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. However, despite its multiple advantages, there are a few limitations of e-learning such as less interaction between teacher and students, social isolation, and connectivity issues (Kwary & Fauzie, 2018). The adequate preparation for online learning, training to recipients and providers, and technical enhancement can mitigate the challenges and make online learning effective.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the government of Nepal imposed a countrywide lockdown from 24 March 2020 and it lasted until 21 July 2020. The government closed schools and campuses across the country during the long lockdown. UNESCO (2020) estimated that the prolonged lockdowns in Nepal during the Covid-19 affected nearly nine million students, out of them 404,718 belonged to higher education level students. The long period of disturbance of educational institutions dramatically increased distance education through online mode. Despite the challenges for operating online learning effectively, different universities in Nepal such as Kathmandu University, Tribhuvan University, and Nepal Open University have started online classes using the zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Office 365 (Kathmandu University, 2020; Tribhuvan University, 2020).

The growing use of online learning in the universities of Nepal during the Covid-19 pandemic and the mixed responses of my students in my classes triggered me to carry out this research on online learning and students' perceptions in the context of rural Nepal. This study aims to investigate university students' perceptions of using online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific objectives based on the research questions for the study are to explore university students' perceptions of learning through online mode

during the pandemic, and to examine the challenges they face while using online mode in the context of rural and semi-urban Nepal. For this survey, I selected 100 master's level students using stratified random sampling representing seven provinces of Nepal. I forwarded the Google form to the master level students who were studying online mode since the beginning of lockdown. I received their responses from the Google form. Furthermore, I interviewed 8 participants from each campus and collected qualitative data. Based on these quantitative and qualitative data, I explored the students' perceptions of using online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study can be significant to the policymaker and the university teachers to decide on the alternative learning policy focusing on the students of rural Nepal. Similarly, the study can provide insights to policymakers and other higher educational institutions on managing disturbance and loss in education during crisis in future.

Literature Review

Various studies in different contexts explored the students' perceptions and experiences on online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Agarwal and Kaushik (2020) reported that the majority of the postgraduate students in India found online learning supportive, feasible and cheap during Covid – 19 because students got the opportunity to continue their studies at a time when the face-to-face classroom was impossible. Likewise, Awadalla et al. (2020) reported that the majority of the medical undergraduate students perceived E-learning as the best solution during the Covid - 19. However, the problems like connectivity limitation, unfamiliarity with the online learning system, limited technical support, and time flexibility disturbed them for effective implementation of online classes in Sudan. In a survey, Acharya et al. (2020) explored that although the majority of students in Nepal have faced problems like internet access, electricity connectivity, institutional policy, and economic crisis to manage the devices for online learning, it has brought more opportunities to reform the traditional teaching-learning paradigm. In a different context, Rohman et al. (2020) found that the majority of university students had negative perceptions of online mode education although they agreed that it was the appropriate alternative during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they reported that the unstable and high cost of internet service was responsible for making online education less effective in Indonesia.

Abbasi et al. (2020) reported that students in Pakistan have found online learning less appealing due to its limitations for the practical aspects of learning. However, earlier in India, Ali et al. (2016) revealed that online learning increased students' satisfaction level towards learning. Similarly, Baczek et al. (2020) in a survey revealed that there is no significant difference between face-to-face and online learning to increase students' knowledge in Poland. They further reported that e-learning was less effective in comparison to face-to-face learning to increase skills and social competence. However, they reported some advantages of online learning such as learning may be possible anytime anywhere at their own pace and continuous access to online materials. In a different context, Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) found that online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has created some challenges as well as opportunities for university students. They further reported the challenges related to technology, socio-economic factors, digital competence, assessment and supervision, heavy workload, and the opportunities like research innovations, technological innovations, and socio-economical innovations.

In a survey in the Indian university, Muthuprasad et al. (2021) reported that the majority of students experienced online classes as an effective means to manage the curriculum in the absence of physical classes during the Covid-19 pandemic due to its flexibility and provenience nature. However, the problems like connectivity issues and little technology knowledge marked it a challenge for students for regular learning. In a similar line, Gautam et al. (2021) revealed that online learning has become an effective tool as alternative learning in Nepali universities as it not only supported learning continuity but also controlled the teachers' and students' anxiety and made them free from psychological disorders during the Covid-19 pandemic. They further suggested that the universities of Nepal need to develop in various aspects such as techno-friendly curriculum, adequate and effective IT infrastructure, trained and designed faculty, supportive students, and proactive management. Earlier in a qualitative study, Laksna (2020) explored that the majority of the students were satisfied with online learning skills, quality of online academic interactions, and online learning infrastructure in Thailand. Regarding the ease and usefulness perceptions on various online platforms, Faudy et al. (2021) found that Zoom was the most useful online

platform compared to other platforms such as Google meet, Google classroom, and LMS in the universities of Indonesia.

Several studies on online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the various aspects of online learning including teachers' and students' perceptions and experiences. However, a few literatures have attempted to explore the university students' perceptions of using the online mode of learning in the context of rural and semi-urban Nepal. I tried to fill this gap with this study focusing on how students have perceived online learning and what challenges they have faced while learning through online mode. Moreover, this study can add literature in the context of Nepal on online learning.

Methodology

Method and Participants

I used a cross-sectional survey design using a mixed-method approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) in this study. I used a questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions to collect quantitative and qualitative data. I used a quantitative survey tool to find out the participants' demographic background, the devices they used for online learning, their prior experiences, digital knowledge and their satisfaction level on provided online learning facilities. Similarly, the open-ended questions included in the survey form and in-depth interviews with selected participants explored the participants' perceptions of using online learning and the challenges they face in the context of rural and semi-urban Nepal.

The participants involved in this study were 100 master level students from different community campuses of Nepal. With the idea of Kumar (2010), I followed a stratified random sampling method to select the participants for the study. Out of 400 masters level students studying through online mode in 8 community campuses, I selected 100 students representing 7 provinces of Nepal. Similarly, I interviewed 8 participants following purposive sampling, one from each campus to explore their perceptions and experiences of using online learning. I included master's level students as the participants because most of the campuses used online mode for this level since the lockdown began.

Data Sources

I used the Internet survey and administered it online through Google form as suggested by Nesbary (2000), Sue and Ritter (2012), and Creswell and Creswell (2013). The questionnaire used at the online survey consisted of 15 questions in which 12 items were closed-ended questions, and three items were open-ended questions. I arranged the questionnaire in two main sections. The first section investigated the students' experience of using online learning along with information of the devices and platforms they used and their satisfaction towards the online mode of learning. The second section explored students' perception of using online learning, the usefulness of online learning even after the pandemic, and the challenges they have faced in managing online learning. Furthermore, I used in-depth interviews to explore the participants' perceptions and experiences of learning through online mode during the pandemic.

Data Analysis

Following the idea of Creswell and Creswell (2014), I analyzed the online survey responses from 100 participants of 8 different campuses under Tribhuvan University. I analyzed the quantitative data using simple statistics. The open-ended questions and the responses from the interviews were undergone thematic analysis in which I developed two themes to describe the participants' answers. I maintained research ethics while collecting data and doing overall research work by taking the participants' consent and maintaining anonymity by using pseudo names of the participants and the campuses they represented.

Findings

I collected the information from 100 graduate students who were learning through online mode in eight community campuses of rural and semi-urban areas of Nepal. The results revealed the university students' perceptions of using online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the available quantitative and qualitative data, I have listed the results of the study under the following headings and themes.

Demographic Details of the Respondents

The participants were the master's level students of the community campuses of Nepal. Out of the participants, 65% were

girls whereas 35% were boys. The data reveals that the number of female students was higher in the master level compared to the boys which shows the growth of female students in higher education even in the rural and semi-urban areas of Nepal. Similarly, the participants were from the three major streams: humanities, management, and education. The majority of the participants (40%) were from education whereas the participants from humanities and management were 35% and 25% respectively. This shows the growing trend of students in the education stream in community campuses of Nepal.

Experience of Online Learning before the Pandemic

Among the respondents, the majority of them (90%) had no prior experience of using online learning whereas only 10% were having prior knowledge of online classes. However, 40% of them were digitally literate before the pandemic. Since a few universities had online learning programs in higher education before the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal, many students might have inadequate knowledge about online learning systems. The low experience of students on online learning can hinder effective use of online learning during a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic.

Devices used by the Participants

Out of the total informants, 56% of them used smartphones for the online class whereas 44% of them used laptop computers. As the majority of them used smartphones for online learning, they reported that they faced problems in searching learning resources, uploading assignments, and downloading the required resources immediately. Similarly, the majority of them used data packs from Nepal Telecom as they had no access to Wi-Fi. It shows that university students of rural Nepal have inadequate infrastructure for online learning which can create a barrier for effective learning.

Online Platforms used by the Respondents

Out of various online platforms, the majority of the participants and teachers used Zoom for online learning. The data shows that 55% of them used Zoom whereas 32% and 13% of the respondents used Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams respectively. Despite the effectiveness and multiple functions of Microsoft Teams for online learning, many participants used free

platforms. This shows that students' economic status can influence the use of effective devices for online learning.

Preference for Online Learning after Covid-19

The data shows that online learning in higher education has become popular for students from rural and semi-urban areas of Nepal, especially for those who did not have access to face-to-face learning. Motivated with online learning, 40% of the participants demanded for the continuity of online learning even after the Covid-19 pandemic and 40% of them demanded a blended class. This shows that online learning can be an effective means of alternative learning not only during a crisis, but also for the students who cannot present physically due to various reasons. However, they reported several benefits of face-to-face learning over online learning.

Participants' Satisfaction on Online Learning

The majority of the participants were satisfied with the online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the survey report, 56% of them were satisfied and 8% of them were very satisfied. The Rest of them were partially satisfied. Despite some challenges, the participants were satisfied with online learning because they could give continuity of their study with teachers' scaffolding during the pandemic.

Students' Perceptions of Online Learning

The participants had mixed perceptions of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of them found online learning useful as it provided a chance to continue their study while staying at home, developed digital technology skills, and felt comfortable while learning. However, the majority of them reported that they had limited pedagogical activities and could not get regular feedback on their assignments. The following table shows the responses of the participants involved in the study.

Table 1: Students' Perceptions of Online Learning

Perceptions	Percent (%)
I could continue my study even in pandemic.	80
I developed some digital technology skills.	70
I could learn anytime, anywhere.	80
Teachers used a variety of activities to facilitate us.	40
I felt it was easy to submit my assignments.	50

My teachers provided feedback regularly on my assignments.	45
I could present almost all the class.	75
We had more classroom interaction.	45
Sufficient time was allowed for discussion and questions.	40
My teachers were able to teach through online mode.	70
I felt comfortable learning through online mode during the pandemic.	65

The participants involved in the interviews reported that they perceived online learning as a useful and safe mode of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the terror of the coronavirus, students enjoyed learning through various online platforms. However, they faced problems and got confused when they could not update with online technology. For example:

I think online learning helps us to continue our studies during this fearful situation of the Covid-19 pandemic. We can join the class living safely at our homes and the time is very flexible (Fulman, Fulbari Campus).

We are getting the benefit of online learning during a crisis like this. It is an opportunity to contact our teachers and friends using technology. But it is difficult to submit assignments. It requires sound digital skills to operate the system successfully, but I have little knowledge of how to use it for the first time (Jaya, Janahit Campus).

The above comments indicate that the participants perceived online learning as one of the effective means to continue the teaching learning process during the pandemic as it is not limited by space and time. Nevertheless, online learning requires digital skills to use the learning platforms and many students face problems submitting their assignments due to inadequate technical knowledge.

The study explored that online learning was useful for university students during the Covid-19 pandemic despite some technological problems. The majority of the students were positive towards online classes as they could continue their learning even in the pandemic. Similarly, many students perceived that online learning has developed their digital skills and updated with the latest information communication technology. Likewise, online learning

enabled them to learn any time any space using digital tools which can save their time and minimize the cost. For example:

I was not able to continue my class due to my job in the village. Now, technology has provided me the opportunity to join the class and connect with my teachers and friends from my home and workplace. I have developed digital skills after learning through online mode. Online learning would be easier for the students who are far from university and difficult to take face-to-face class. (Abhaya, ABC campus)

Abhaya's comments indicate that students have perceived online learning as an opportunity to connect with their teachers and friends wherever they live. Abhaya further added, "I see many friends looking for alternative means to continue their study as they cannot leave their jobs." Abhaya's response shows that online learning can be an effective means to increase the enrollment rate of the students by providing access to higher education in their place.

Besides continuous learning, participants involved in the study reported that online learning could provide a chance to learn technical skills. For example:

Learning through online mode has developed various technical skills like using e-mail, googling information, and downloading documents from search engines. I was not familiar with digital technology before we started online learning, now I feel I have developed many skills along with my curricular activities (Binita, Binayak Campus).

Binita's comments reveal that students perceived the online mode of learning as a means to develop technical skills along with their academic skills to make them more dynamic learners. As the medium of sharing documents and submitting an assignment is digital technology in online learning, the students can gradually develop the required technical skills.

The majority of the participants took online learning as flexible, cost-effective, and tools for easy access to learning resources. However, it can be a burden for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. For example:

Although online learning is effective, managing the device and affording the internet data pack is

difficult for me. I have no device to use for online learning, and I use my father's smartphone to join my class. I would learn effectively if I had a laptop computer with a Wi-fi facility (Cristina, Kirti Campus)

The response of Cristina has raised a serious issue about online learning as it can be a cause of inequality in learning. Those who do not have access to the internet and learning devices may get frustrated. For example:

I couldn't join an online class for two months as I didn't have a smartphone to join it. I got frustrated when my teachers repeatedly asked me to join the class. Finally, my parents took a loan to buy a smartphone (Sima, Shuvakamana Campus).

Despite the usefulness of the online mode of learning, it can be a problem for students from low economic backgrounds as they may have economic problems managing the devices for online learning. Students' low economic status can prevent many students from accessing online learning.

Challenges Faced by Students

Despite the benefits of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic to continue their study and enhance their technological efficiency, the data reveal that the students involved in the study faced some challenges in shifting to the new mode of learning. Mostly, they reported the challenges related to technology, pedagogy, digital competence, assessment and supervision, and socio-economic factors. The following table shows the major challenges faced by the participants involved in the study.

Table 2: Challenges Faced by Students

Challenges	Percent (%)
My internet connectivity was low.	85
There was frequent electricity power cut.	75
I had inadequate knowledge in digital technology.	60
I felt it was difficult to manage effective online learning devices.	68
The assessment and supervision system was ineffective.	60
It was economic burden to my family.	70

The participants involved in the interviews also reported that technological constraints such as poor Internet connectivity, frequent power cut, and lack of technical knowledge in operation were the major challenges in using online learning effectively. Similarly, they explained that the dependency of online classes on technical devices and lack of adequate digital knowledge of students and teachers also created problems for effective online learning. For example:

When I join the class, I often miss some important instructions given by the teachers due to the poor Internet service. As this is my first experience of learning through online mode and I have little knowledge on digital technology. I feel it is difficult to download the learning resources and submit an assignment. I am always late to submit the given assignment though the task is not easy (Sima, Shuvakamana Campus).

Sima's problem might be the representative one; many participants' may experience a similar challenge in using the online mode of learning. The unstable internet connectivity and low digital literacy can be the barrier for effective online learning.

Since there is a short history of online modes of learning in Nepal, the participants reported that teachers' incompetency and learners' inefficacy were also intervening factors for the effective implementation of online learning. This can create problems in students' assessment and supervision. For example:

Some teachers seem confused about using online mode. They give lectures all the time and give subjective types of questions for the assignment. Since the mode of learning is different, they teach in the same way as they usually teach in the traditional classroom. We rarely get time for interaction (Dipak, Janasewa Campus).

Dipak's response reveals that the lack of competent teachers in using online pedagogical skills and their low motivation to adapt to the changing situation also created a challenge in students' learning. Similarly, they also shared their experience that lack of interaction among students hindered in promoting their interpersonal communication skills. Moreover, the management of the device and the cost for the data package were also challenging factors for the

students from a low socio-economic background which can be the cause of inequality in the access to online learning.

Discussion

The university students of Nepal perceived online and virtual learning as an alternative way of delivering skills and knowledge during the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning by staying at their place might be cheaper and easier compared to face -to-face learning. The majority of the students found online and virtual learning supportive to continue their studies along with a job. This argument is supported by the study of Agarwal and Kaushik (2020) in India as the majority of the university students found online learning as feasible, cheap, and suggested to make a part of the postgraduate level beyond the prevailing lockdown. Similarly, Bączek et al. (2020) found that medical students found online learning as a powerful tool to gain knowledge because of the continuous access to online materials, learning being distanced physically at their own pace, and comfortable surroundings. Furthermore, Rohman et al. (2020) concluded that despite several obstacles, university students' perception on online learning is relatively good during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, Abbasi (2020) and Rohman (2020) reported that students perceived online learning to have little impact compared to face-to-face learning although online learning was the right solution during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, Sujarwo et al. (2020) found that online learning missed classroom interactions and direct guidance of the instructors which made it difficult for students to understand the concept clearly.

Despite the wide coverage of online learning, the participants experienced that they get less time to engage in the activities like interaction, group discussion, and group work and pair work as in the face-to-face classroom. Similarly, they missed the emotional attachment among their friends and teachers. Bączek et al. (2020) and Abbasi (2020) also found that online learning limited student-student interaction which decreased their social connections with teachers, peers, and the university community.

Out of various learning platforms for online learning, the participants used freely available platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom instead of Microsoft Teams. Because of the cost, the participants might have compromised with the effective learning platforms. This is in line with Faudy et al. (2021), who found that

Zoom was the most popular platform in the universities of Indonesia. In contrast to this, Gohiya and Gohiya (2020) explored that the students' perceptions of Microsoft Teams were popular among the students in India as it has multiple functions such as Moodle to submit the assignment, backup recording, attendance, etc.

Despite the growing use of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and the positive reaction of university students towards online learning, students of rural areas may face problems related to technological issues including unstable internet service, frequent power cut, lack of technical knowledge to use devices for students and teachers, high cost for the internet service, and lack of technical support from the university or campuses for students. This finding is supported by several studies (Acharya et al., 2020; Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020; Awadalla et al., 2020; Rose, 2020) as they revealed that the majority of the students had a problem with the Internet service and electrical connectivity and some students. Similarly, students' less experience of online learning hindered Nepali university students for effective online learning during the crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. This is supported by Sujarwo et al. (2020) who explored that many students did not have experience of using online learning before the Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of experience could deter them from using online mode.

Students have flexibility in learning through online mode. Unlike traditional learning, students can learn anytime and anywhere at their convenience. They can interact with teachers synchronously (through video conferencing, or live chat) and asynchronously (through learning activities provided electronically (Agung & Surtikanti, 2020)). Learning through online mode can provide access to the rural students to continue their higher education along with their jobs. However, Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) reported that the challenges related to technology, pedagogical skills, and socio-economic background of the students can create significant barriers against effective learning online.

Since online learning has little history in the context of Nepal, the participants experienced problems in using the new mode of learning due to the lack of digital skills and adequate preparation including infrastructure management and limited gadget facilities, and Internet connectivity. This is in line with the study of Sujarwo et al. (2020) which believes that students' experiences and knowledge with digital skills play an important role for effective online learning and

those who lack these skills and infrastructure do not have an equal chance in learning. Similarly, Rusdiana & Nugroho (2017) suggest that colleges or universities can play a significant role in providing infrastructure facilities to the teachers and the students, and effective scaffolding from teachers encourages students in learning.

Many students' perceptions about online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic indicate that online learning was considered effective in reducing the spread of the Covid-19 virus by reducing the anxiety of students and teachers. This is supported by the study of Wijayanengtias and Claretta (2020), which states the psychological role of online learning along with academic activities. However, many students' perceptions reveal that online learning has several problems for its effective implementation in the pandemic time. It is in line with the findings of Agarwal and Kaushik (2020), which highlights the problems like inadequate infrastructure, lack of teachers' preparation, and low motivation of students.

Broadly put, the current study revealed that the effectiveness of online teaching depends quite heavily on the “other” social-educational factors of a given place. It showed that academic and policy discourses should only be advanced by considering those factors simultaneously. Asking whether online education is effective in itself—especially in contexts like Nepal’s where the socioeconomic and educational frameworks and resources in place are not strong and sound—is like trying to study the health of trees without asking how good the soil, water, and climate on which they depend. Obvious as this may sound, there is a need to educate educators about the importance of situating their claims and hopes about the power of educational technology not only on how well technology is actually able to achieve educational goals but also on how other factors influencing technology use are shaping its use and effectiveness.

Conclusion

The unexpected spread of the Covid-19 has severely impacted the everyday lives of ordinary people across the world. Many educational institutions couldn't give the continuity of their regular academic activities in face-to-face mode during the crisis. For many universities, online learning became one of the effective means to continue their teaching learning process. Despite the challenges of using online learning with inadequate infrastructure, the Nepali university students have a favorable perspective on online learning

during the Covid-19 pandemic. They perceived online learning to be very helpful to continue their study and can be one of the effective means of learning in case such a crisis happens in future. It can be equally useful even after the pandemic to continue their study along with jobs as it is flexible in terms of time and space. However, few significant issues faced are problems in powerful internet connectivity and electricity, lack of digital literacy, financial problems to manage devices like laptop computers and smart cell phones, costly data packages, and some problems related to teachers and institutions. Various responsible agencies such as the government, teachers and schools should bring programs to support the students from low economic backgrounds who need some support like financial support and internet access connectivity.

Since learning through online mode is new in the rural and semi-urban areas of Nepal, this study has explored how the graduate students perceived and experienced using the online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic. The instructors should design online classes in such a way that they can motivate students to focus on online learning enthusiastically and should introduce various instructional techniques to increase the interaction between learners and instructors. Training on online classes is needed for both learners and course instructors. Furthermore, the results of the study can be an important input to decide the mode of learning addressing the need of the students who are excluded from an access to higher education due to several problems such as economic crisis, jobs, and geographical distance even after the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal.

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