



Abstract

This paper aims to explore the grade XII students experiences of online learning in COVID-19. Moreover, this study attempts to highlight the scope and challenges of online learning in COVID-19 pandemic. In-depth interview was conducted to bring the participants' experiences of online learning. The participants represent the private colleges of Kathmandu. This study was a qualitative, narrative inquiry guided by interpretive paradigm. The findings indicate that participants improved their academic performances and were more responsible, attentive than face to face mode. Moreover, online learning has created a gap in the relationship, learning and caused the digital divide. This area is under research thus, this paper aims to shed some light on the scope of online learning and provides empirical evidence for the scope of online learning and gives us an in-depth understanding of one of the key aspects of online learning, students, because students play a vital role in the success of online education.

Key Words- COVID-19, Online Learning, experiences, scope, challenges

Scope and Challenges of online learning in Covid-19: Students Narrative

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Introduction

The COVID- 19 has a huge negative impact in the world affecting almost all the sectors in the world and Nepal. The first-ever case of COVID- 19 was a Nepali student who returned to the form City of Wuhan on 25th January 2020(Chalise, 2020). Post lockdown on 11th March 2020 in the country all the educational institutions were completely closed. Since then the journey of online learning for most of the students began, including mine. (Carliner, 2004) defines online learning as an educational material that is presented on a computer. Whereas, (Pace, Stacie, & Barker, 2020) says online instructions during the pandemic is rather crisis teaching. According to UNESCO, 2020), nearly nine million (8,796,624) students in Nepal are affected by this lockdown post-COVID-19. However, thanks to technologies and apps like Google Meet, Google Classroom, Zoom, Microsoft Teams Nepali students could continue their learning using these online learning tools.

According to (Dawadi, Giri, & Simkhada, 2020) 958,127(11%) students of pre-primary level are in online learning, followed by 2,466,570(28%) students in primary, whereas 3,463,763(39%) students in secondary and 404,718(5%) students in tertiary education.This means education has shifted its paradigm from traditional face to face teaching to e-learning \ digital teaching especially in the pandemic.As a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the countries are in isolation, so many cities are empty, and the affect can also be seen in the school and colleges. Thus, online learning was only solution to many academic institution across Nepal.

When online learning was introduced among students, it was not the act out of thought, rather, the need of the time as we experienced the closure of colleges and educational institutions encouraged to use e-learning. And interestingly students were not well prepared for online learning before the pandemic (Mailizar, Almanthari, Maulina, & Bruce, 2020) However, students adopted online learning and turned their challenges into learning. I remember an email from my professor and it was about resuming our M.Phil. first semester through online mode. I was asked to attend the class through Google meet. I was reluctant to join the class via google meet because the first experience is always full of curiosity and nervousness. Nevertheless, my learning experience in online mode was mixed feeling.Excitement and frustations was the common feeling through out the journey. Stable network always excited me and poor network connection was

frustrating. I was amazed to experience that online mode breaks the geographical barrier and made it possible for me to continue my M.Phil though I was in Dolakha.(i.e network issues, and no reliable internet).

Moreover, I was able to enjoy my space and continued learning. There were a lot of opportunities, but there were challenges too. The most notable challenge was a network and internet issue. Though our education curriculum promotes the use of ICT in education, practically we were far from this. But the pandemic has made us use the available technologies to continue the learning. Therefore, online learning was very new to me and I wanted to know more about online learning by researching this area.

Online learning is under the research area therefore, there is a lack of adequate research to show the actual impact of the closure on education and shift to online mode. Though there are few pieces of research, interestingly the researches are mostly on challenges of teachers (Wallace, Acharya, et al., 2020, Allo, 2020, Adnan & Anwar, 2020, Mailizar, Almanthari, Maulina, & Bruce, 2020, Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj, & Sethi, 2020, Pace, Stacie, & Barker, 2020) but students narration is unexplored yet. in the context of Nepal. Moreover, this research was necessary to carry out as students play a vital role in the success of online education and students' experiences are essential to many institutions, teachers and policymakers to design and use for online learning in the context of Nepal. Therefore this study attempted to explore grade XII English language learners' experiences of online learning in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study. This study explored the lived experiences of English Language learners of Grade XII, during COVID-19 pandemic. To explore the lived experiences of participants I used narrative inquiry guided by the interpretative paradigm. As I believe in subjective reality, interpretive paradigm helped me to understand my participants lived experiences from their world view. Furthermore, I believe that a more complete and credible description of the life experience is possible as narrative inquiry explored the story of online learning of my participants. The meaning of the study was created through explorations of participants' lived experiences and my reflection. The English language learners' experiences were explored using narrative inquiry as this method focuses lives and experiences of humans as (Connelly & Clandinin,1990) as cited in Creswell,2012.

Moreover, The participants one male and one female were purposively selected who did online learning during the pandemic from Grade XII, who were studying in private college in Kathmandu. I selected two participants to provide richer and cogent lived experiences of the participants.

All participants were studying at private school in Kathmandu Valley, with an age group between 17-20. This research study focused on interviewing two students. They are young, energetic, confident and are in a position to answer my research questions. I took face to face in-depth interviews of the participants and it was the main tool of data collection. Then the collected data were codified and analyzed using themes. I took their consent and did not harm them. Pseudo names were used to protect their confidentiality.

What we gained with Online Learning

The benefits of online learning are limitless. Most of the teaching-learning activities were online and it was a reliable option to study. Some of the prospects of online learning shared by my participants are interesting and I am going to discuss it giving a theme.

Responsible

Online learning helped my participants to become responsible as learning was according to their interest. They were relaxed and happy as they were in their personal space, which provided them with freedom in the learning environment. This freedom in their learning made them enjoy each session with their teachers. They shared how this online learning made them more responsible as a student, which they think would not have been possible in the physical class.

In an online class, they listened to their teachers on their own will and motivation and that was a different and new feeling for them In physical classes their parents used to force them and they always felt learning for their parents, not for them, but now they are happy to learn for themselves and special thanks go to online learning.

My participant said, *“Interestingly I was more serious about my studies in online learning, unlike my physical class, after a few days of an online class I started to record the video for study purpose and watched it many times to improve my academics”*. Thus my participant is blessed with online learning as it helped him to boost their academic performances and at the same time developing their technological skills, which is an essential skill in today's world.

Similarly, Mumin shared “ *I was attentive in my online class which was surprising to me too because I never used to be that attentive in my face to face class. I used to write a note in my copy and later studied it in-depth. My parents once said to me ``now my daughter is responsible for her education and I was overwhelmed to hear that.*”.

Thanks to online learning, my participant was attentive and realized the importance of learning which made her serious about her studies. Not only this, her parents praised her for her academic activities, which was an unforgettable moment for her. Many beautiful memories are built in the pandemic, and it was possible only because my students did online learning. Also, 2020 findings also suggest that online learning was very helpful to the students in the pandemic. Online learning made the study fun and gave them the freedom to learn, which helped to make the students responsible for their study.

Thus, online learning is an option as it may help to engage students in meaningful learning which makes them responsible. Students’ felt some responsibility for their learning outcomes (Blackmon & Major, 2012).

Peer Culture

Peer culture is one of the biggest issues in mass learning. Peer pressure causes disruptive behaviour of the students. Studies show that the influence of peer groups among students can boost their anxiety especially on their education (Kadir, Atmowasdoyo & Salija 2018). My both participants also experienced the same. Face to face classes used to be very noisy for them and side talks between friends were the most common and essential everyday rituals of my participants. More than teachers talk, they were interested in friends gossiping and desperately wanted to be part of that gossip group. The noise of the class made sense for them as there were a lot of students in the same class. They could not concentrate on their studies and sometimes they were not interested, too.

Mumin shared “ *the best part of the online learning was it was noise-free, jati je gare pani class ma sathi haru ko ta halla hune nai hune, tara online ma chai nahune (It was inevitable to avoid noise in the physical class, however in case of online learning, there was no such noisy environment)*”.

My participant was the victim of the noisy environment caused by her peers in the regular face to face class. Her helplessness to minimize the noise made by her friends in the class was

visible when she was sharing her experiences. Her satisfaction was also observed when she expressed her relief as the online class was not noisy at all and she was not forced to be a part of unnecessary talk. Due to less noise, she could concentrate on her class and she was able to improve her academics.

Thus the peer culture in the form of noise was a hurdle in learning activities, whereas her obstacle was changed into opportunities due to online learning.

Pandit, a boy student was also a victim of peer culture but different than, of Mumin as his story was different he said: *“Me and my friends never paid attention to the teacher and subject in the face to face class. You know boys are like that and there used to be a lot of interaction with friends but not with teachers. Me and my friends were involved in activities that do not make sense but in online learning, there was no interaction with friends”*.

His story was interesting as he was explaining that boys' attitudes in the class are a little different than girls. These attitudes of his boys' friends had distracted him from learning. His friends were distracter agents and the focus was more on other than study. Therefore, there was no environment for learning, however, the situation changed in online learning, and Mr.pandit was no more distracted by his friends and he was more focused on learning.

Hence, students become free from peer pressure and learn freely in online compared to face to face class. Similarly, (Moldes, Biton, Gonzaga, & Moneva, 2019) research suggests that peer pressure in high school affects the academic performances of the students, but in contrast to face to face learning, online learning improved the academic performances of the participants as they were not the victim of peer pressure.

Recorded Video is the best

The recorded videos of teachers have benefitted most of the students to uplift their academic performances. The main features of the recorded videos are: students can watch it as many times as they like. They used to watch the recorded videos of the class to solve the subject matter. I also utilized recorded videos of my professors and later watched it many times. These recorded videos made me confident in certain content of the subject, like my participants. Their excitement about the recorded (flipped video) , how they used it to complete their homework and better their understanding in subject matter was very satisfying to me, as I also experienced the same.

Both shared *“another best part of the online learning was the recorded videos. We used to get recorded videos, and we had the freedom to watch those videos as many times as we liked. I watched the videos to do assignments and practise grammar that was taught in the class”*.

Face to face classes are limited to the classroom and students memory. If students forget the points it would have been over for them which was one of the basic problems faced by my participants and maybe by many other students. But they could explore any area of the subject in the videos, and later they could utilize it for learning. The student had become self-directed learners and they learnt asynchronously at any time in a day (Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj, & Sethi, 2020).

Equity

When education is personalized, students may not get a chance to understand the importance of equity. One of the purposes of education is to produce a noble citizen for the country. When students do not share the same space with different caste, creed, sex, race they don't understand the culture, may not be empathetic and compassionate. And I believe these qualities are essential for humans to be a noble citizen of the nation.

Mumin *“The interaction with friends was minimal, so I don't have any idea about my friends. We used to share a lot of things but in online learning, I could n't even see my friends. I miss that bonding and sharing with my friends.”*

Moreover, equity helps students to strengthen their health, and they can have emotional regulation. In absence of classroom socialization, students may not develop their socio-emotional aspect, lack better health, feel insecure and all these will have an effect on their academic scores. The student lacked interaction with the instructor, and traditional classroom socialization (Adnan & Anwar, 2020), which made them incomplete.

Digital Divide

It is the problem of 21st-century education. As some of the institutions of developed cities are ready to access the tools of information and communication technologies whereas most parts are without access to the tools of information and communication technologies. Moreover, technologies are not supported by internet facilities and lack reliable internet service creating a gap in learning among the students from developed and remote parts in the country.

Mr.pandit said: *“Many of my friends count not join the online class as they have moved to their hometown post lockdown”. They were away from access to the internet and few friends who had access to the internet suffered from a poor internet connection. They missed almost all the classes of online learning, I don’t know how they did their exams”*.

This may create a gap between students of developed cities and remote areas of my country. Some factors for digital divide are socio-political, economic, and geographical. In our context, geographical and economic factors are the most prominent. I also felt the same, I still remember the days of M.Phil first semester, where I had to look at an area that had internet facilities. I used to go to the mini jungle of my village to take the classes. However, those challenges were overcome by me but many students may be in that zone till now. Most students do not have access to high speed or reliable internet services and are thus struggling with online learning. (Adnan & Anwar, 2020) creating a digital gap among the students of developed cities and underdeveloped cities.

Boring

Learning has to be challenging and fun for them. If the lesson and teaching methods are not student-centred, they get distracted by other technologies like phones and others.

Pandit: *“I used to switch myself to my cell phone and scrolled other things rather than listening to my teacher's lectures, because it was boring, therefore, I want my teacher to be a little active and teach us something that is fun and challenging to us”*.

If the learning is more teacher-centred, this is likely to happen, so online learning has to be more engaging (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998) for learning to take place. Furthermore (Prensky, 2010) also highlights the importance of student-centred teaching online and suggests challenging the students by assigning different roles to play, for example the role of researcher.

Thus, online learning can be better if it becomes more student-centred and teachers are required to develop the lesson plan that challenges their thinking capabilities.

They were frustrated due to poor internet connection and sometimes their wifi would go without any reason. They showed concern for their friends who were in remote and semi-urban places of our countries who could not attend the class only because of internet and connection issues.

“Many of my friends could not attend the class, as they had internet issues, for them face to face class is good, Online learning is for those only who have a good internet and stable network. Thus, I wish to have face to face classes for my friends” said Mumin very sadly.

Online learning was at its peak during the pandemic, many students were able to continue their learning that was only possible due to online learning. On the other hand, many students in the country were deprived of education only because of lack of internet access and very poor internet connection. It is very sad to hear all these from my participants as I was also the victim of these pertinent issues. Therefore, students can enjoy online learning to the fullest if all these technical issues will be addressed by concerned authorities.

However, they could not deny the advantages and facilities they enjoyed due to online learning. They are thankful to online learning as they were privileged to continue their studies despite COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

After analyzing the story of participants, I came with a certain understanding. Firstly, both the participants' experiences were positive and they appreciated the online learning mode. Online learning helped them to be responsible, attentive, and they were successful in improving their academic performances. Secondly, online learning has created the gap in the relationship, the gap in learning and digital divide too. Moreover, some technical reformations in online learning can boost up the students' learning experiences. Similarly, the pedagogical shift from teacher-centred i.e lectures based on student-centred learning is necessary to engage the students in meaningful learning and to the optimum utilization of online learning in the context of Nepal. Nevertheless, online learning emerged as a rescuer in the pandemic situation like COVID-19.

Proper planning and execution are necessary before and during running the online class for now and future. There are prospects of online learning in the context of Nepal, therefore it should be embraced by teachers, students for future use even without a pandemic situation..

This small scale study with a limited time frame is a preliminary one and cannot provide conclusive evidence on high school students' online learning experiences of English language class in general. Furthermore, this research was limited to students' experiences of online learning during the pandemic. Nevertheless, it can represent the specific context and place and may be relevant to those who share the same context and place like research participants.

Despite its limitations, the research provides empirical evidence for the scope of online learning and gives us insights to one of the key aspects of online learning i.e. students. After all students play a vital role in the success of online education. Thus, more online teaching and learning are promoted in the English language classroom, the more knowledge will be created about the pros and cons of online learning in the context of Nepal.

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