

## Article History

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**PhD Thesis Abstract****Experiences of Online and Distance Learners of Nepali Universities**Lina Gurung\* *PhD Thesis, 2021, Kathmandu University School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal*

Online and distance education has emerged as an alternative way of providing accessibility to learners irrespective of time and space. Its implementation in Nepali universities started within this decade amidst inadequate institutional preparation and less oriented learners. My doctoral thesis was a narrative inquiry into the experiences of online and distance education learners in Nepali universities who were experiencing it for the first time. The focus was on their motivation towards and throughout the online and distance education program, the power relations students experience in new learning contexts, and how they construct their identity. I have used the inductive approach and interpretive paradigm to make meanings from the stories of my six research participants, who were students of graduate programs at two universities in Nepal.

The intrinsic motivation of online and distance learners helps in their degree completion. The motivation is influenced by positive perceptions, family support, the tutor's feedback, and appreciation. Intrinsic motivation becomes sustainable if the learner can relate to and use it in their professional and personal life. While exploring the discourse of the digital divide, the power relations of online and distance learners with information communication technology (ICT) were visible. I got inference that learners gain digital skills and can transform their lives by being confident and technology-friendly. Access to the materials and skills enables the learners to

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experience the powerful position while those who do not have access strive for it and making them feel powerless. I argue that all learners do not necessarily transform or have positive learning experiences in online and distance education programs. The learners are controlled by disciplinary power, where they try to maintain their image or align with the normalization as expected by society. However, learners, irrespective of their gender, benefit from the advantages of online and distance learning (ODL). While transitioning from conventional to alternative learning, learners have unique experiences with negative and positive emotions. In such a condition, adult online learners always strive to keep the highest hierarchy of their self-believed identity standard. During the process, they seek social interaction similar to face-to-face mode but experience minimal interaction between peers and teachers. Learners face conflicting conditions in the new role but always try to create a conducive environment to retrieve their better image. The university has a vital role in valuing their experience and providing support to learners to create a unique learning environment in online and distance education.

The complete paradigm shift from conventional to online mode has brought many challenges to Nepali learners due to the stereotypical society, social norms, and individual as well as institutional unpreparedness. In this regard, the blended learning mode can effectively prepare the students gradually for the completely different alternative mode of learning. This study has drawn attention to the gap between the new practices of the modern world and the conventional society of Nepal, which is not yet ready to incorporate the alternative mode of learning completely. ODL demands better planning, more investment, training, learner-centered designing of the curriculum, and so on.

*Keywords:* Online and distance education, digital skills, online and distance learning, universities, Nepal