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Original Research

Teaching Online during Covid-19 crisis: Lived Experience of Faculty Members of Nepali Business Schools

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the teaching-learning activities of almost all universities across the globe. To continue the teaching-learning activities, most of the universities switched to online mode of teaching. Using hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, this study explored the lived experiences of the faculty members of business schools who began teaching online during this pandemic. The data were collected through conversational interviews with seven faculty members who were teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in various business schools in Nepal. The analysis of data revealed six themes: (1) Faculty members were caught off guard, (2) Sneaking a peek by students, (3) Building a bridge by the faculty members, (4) Faculty members were holding on the past, (5) Students were dragging their feet, and (6) Faculty members were trying to climb a mountain without a rope. The findings suggest that the faculty members felt that they were not prepared to teach online and did not receive enough logistical support from their institutions. They also showed their skepticism regarding the effectiveness of online teaching. The implications of the study have been highlighted and some of the limitations have been indicated.

Keywords: Online teaching, COVID-19 pandemic, business school faculty

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Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 affected the lives of millions of people across the globe. Virtually all types of organizations including, government, non-government, corporate, education, healthcare etc. had to face varying degrees of impact of this pandemic. Organizations, especially in the developing countries found it difficult to cope up with the challenges put forward by this crisis as many countries had to face the second and third waves of the pandemic.

Like any other sector, the education sector had also been hard hit by the pandemic. Soon after the outbreak, educational institutions were closed in order to prevent the students, teachers, and other staff members from the infection of the deadly disease. As a result, millions of students were forced to stay out of their educational institutions for months. During the first wave of this pandemic, more than 90 percent of students were affected globally (Farid et al., 2021). Since continuation of teaching learning activities in a face-to-face mode was a remote possibility, the educational institutions had no option but to switch to online mode. But the educators as well as learners, at large, were not prepared to adopt the virtual mode of teaching and learning and most of the institutions did not have required technological infrastructure for online teaching. The situation was even worse in developing countries like Nepal.

The first case of COVID-19 in Nepal was detected on 25 January 2020 in a 32 years old Nepali student returning from Wuhan, China. As a precautionary measure, the Government of Nepal ordered the shutdown of all educational institutions from 19 March 2020 (Radhakrishnan-Nair et al., 2020). Following that, the Government of Nepal announced nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020 after the detection of the second case of COVID-19 in the country. Within a few weeks of lockdown, Universities geared up to keep the teaching learning process alive. Despite the severe unpreparedness, most of the universities and their affiliated colleges, especially in urban areas, continued the teaching learning process in virtual mode, delivering sessions online using Microsoft Team, Zoom, or GoogleMeet.

The government lifted the lockdown after 120 days and life began to return to normal. The universities also returned to face-to-face mode of teaching. However, after the outbreak of the second wave of the pandemic in April 2021, the lockdown was again enforced in almost all districts of the country and the universities were again

forced to go back to virtual mode of teaching. The faculty members, although not trained for online education, were again forced to switch over to emergency online teaching without any knowhow and careful planning. On the other hand, the adoption of a new method - online teaching is not far from several barriers such as attitudes towards technology, pedagogical beliefs as well as cultural and contextual influences (Bruggeman et al., 2022). Krishnamurthy (2020) also highlighted the skepticism among faculty members regarding online teaching despite its proven efficiency. In such situations, the psychological process that faculty members, who were at the frontline in the process of keeping the teaching learning process alive, went through in this crisis situation, is likely to be unique and worth capturing. The learning from the lived experience of these faculty members can be an important source of information for the design and delivery of academic courses using virtual mode, especially in the context of developing countries.

In this study, our interest was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the faculty members of business schools who were forced to switch from face-to-face mode of teaching to online mode due to COVID-19 pandemic. This was quite a new and unique experience to them as they had very little to no previous experience of teaching online. Particularly, we were interested in gaining insights on what the experience of online teaching was like for them. This led us to inquire upon finding the answer to the research question: What is it like to teach undergraduate and graduate students of business and management online during COVID-19 pandemic? To find answers to this research question we used van Manen's (2016) hermeneutic phenomenology as it allows us to study a phenomenon through lived experience. In the following sections, first we provide a brief overview of phenomenological philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology, which is followed by a short review of empirical research on online teaching. Thereafter, we present a brief description on the methodological approach that we have followed in completing this study. We then present the findings of the study and a discussion on the findings. Based on the findings, we draw some implications of the study. Finally we conclude highlighting the limitations and directions for future research.

Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher is considered as the founder of phenomenological philosophy. Husserl believed that essences are the sources of knowledge and his descriptive phenomenological methodologies seek to describe the essence of experiences (Gills, 2014).

On the other hand, Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, differed from Husserl's descriptive approach of doing phenomenology and suggested that "methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 33). After these two phenomenologists, many other phenomenologists have proposed different phenomenological methodologies. However, all phenomenologists primarily follow either the Husserlian approach (the descriptive phenomenology) or the Heideggerian approach (interpretive phenomenology) (Gills, 2014). Sander's phenomenology and Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method are the examples of descriptive phenomenology. Benner's interpretive phenomenology and Smith's interpretative phenomenological analysis are the examples of interpretive phenomenology. But another type of phenomenology, called the hermeneutic phenomenology propounded by Max van Manen includes both the descriptive and interpretive approach (Gills, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenological research attempts to describe and interpret meanings from lived experience. It describes what it is meant to be in the phenomena. In other words, it "tries to 'explicate' meanings that in some sense are implicit in our actions" (van Manen, 2016, p. xiv). We used van Manen's (2016) hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology to describe and interpret the study participants' lived experiences of online teaching the graduate and undergraduate students of Nepali business schools. We chose to use this methodology as many authors have suggested that it is one of the rigorous research methods for any study that seeks to find a deeper understanding of human experience (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2019).

Empirical Research on Teaching Online

Online education is not a new concept. Many universities and institutions of higher learning across the globe have been providing online education and training for the past several decades. Several studies have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of online teaching. A meta-analysis conducted by Means et al. (2009) has found that

learners perform marginally better in an online environment than in traditional face-to-face mode. Despite this research evidence of the efficacy of online teaching, the faculty members have been found to be skeptical about their own abilities to successfully handle the online classes in comparison to the classes they were handling in face-to-face mode (Wingo et al., 2017).

The empirical studies conducted before the outbreak of COVID - 19 pandemic have indicated many advantages and challenges in online teaching. One of the important advantages of online teaching is meaningful interaction since the online environment is less intimidating (Warschauer, 1997). Regarding student performance, Ni (2013) found no significant difference in the effectiveness of classroom and online learning while teaching graduate public administration research methods course. Guest et al. (2018) on the other hand found that switching to online teaching negatively affects students' satisfaction. However, this study indicated that the student's less satisfying experience is not related to the course instructor.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) had no choice but to abruptly switch to online mode of teaching almost overnight without any planning. Since the success of online teaching largely depends on different aspects of design and delivery of online courses (Pankowski, 2008), the emergency switch over to teaching online in the aftermath of COVID-19 is less likely to deliver desired outcomes such as student learning and satisfaction and faculty satisfaction. This led researchers to inquire upon various aspects of online teaching during crisis situation and as a result a plethora of empirical studies abound in literature. These studies focus on several facets of online teaching such as the effectiveness of online teaching during pandemic (Demuyakor, 2020; Tartavulea et al., 2020), strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of online modes (Dhawan, 2020), preparedness of teacher/educator using online mode (Prokopenko & Berezhna, 2020; Shenoy et al., 2020), university teachers' experience and factors affecting their experiences with online education during COVID-19 (Bruggeman et al., 2022). Govindarajan and Srivanstava (2020) argued that COVID-19 pandemic along with several other factors have led the higher education market ready for disruption and there will be a major shift from face- to-face teaching to online teaching globally.

Effectiveness of online teaching is the major concern for every stakeholder in the teaching learning process today. Bollinger and Wasilik (2009) suggest faculty satisfaction, student satisfaction, learning effectiveness, access and institutional cost effectiveness as five pillars of online teaching. According to Allen et al. (2007), online mode of teaching can be equally effective as traditional in person teaching. The researchers also suggested that instructors can be satisfied through self-gratification, intellectual challenge, interest in using technology and recognition for work (Blundell et al., 2020; Bollinger & Waslik, 2009). But Krishnamurthy' (2020) study found that faculty members showed skepticism about the effectiveness of online teaching during the pandemic. On the other hand, Marasi et al. (2020) indicated that faculty are in general satisfied with online teaching. The contradictions could be due to the uniqueness of emergency online teaching over planned online teaching (Hodges et al., 2020).

The empirical studies examining the impact of online teaching during COVID-19 crisis have identified several factors that affect student's engagement, satisfaction and performance. Gopal et al. (2021) found out four different factors viz. quality of instructor, course design, prompt feedback, and expectation of students are the predictor of student satisfaction which in turn positively influences student performance. Ng's (2022) study conducted in the context of aviation suggested that there is no difference between face-to-face (which used to be the preferred method before COVID-19 pandemic) and blended learning. It further suggested that even in the normal situations, blended learning seems to be more effective and educators can utilize online learning for flexibility of delivery and cost effectiveness. Similarly, Ne et al. (2020) also suggested that blended learning is more effective as it is flexible and provides better opportunities for learners to socialize.

Past studies in general have shown that there is not much difference in terms of faculty satisfaction, student satisfaction, and the effectiveness of learning in the face-to-face and online mode of teaching. However, the psychological state of the faculty members, their knowhow in pedagogy for online delivery, their technical skills, the IT infrastructure available to them, especially in times of crisis situations like COVID-19 pandemic, have significant influence on the effectiveness of online teaching and satisfaction of faculty members (e.g., Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020; Kim & Bonk, 2006).

Methodology

We used van Manen's (2016) hermeneutic phenomenological approach to have a deeper understanding of the lived experience of business school faculties who were forced to teach online in the aftermath of COVID-19. To explicate the faculties' lived experience, we followed the following six steps as suggested by van Manen (2016, pp. 30-31):

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

The research procedure including selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis has been discussed below.

Participants

We contacted faculty members of different business schools and management colleges teaching different courses to undergraduate and graduate level students. The business schools and colleges were affiliated to different universities of Nepal. We told them that the purpose of contacting them is to seek their support in our study by sharing their experience of teaching online with us. All faculty members whom we contacted gave their consent to participate in our study. To choose the participants for this study, we used purposive sampling. Our choice was based on the participants' association with business schools/management colleges, their gender, position, and the subjects they were teaching. Out of seven participants we chose, four were male and three were female. Their ages ranged from 30 years to 61 years. The faculty position included professor -1, associate professor -1, and assistant professor - 4, and one working as a visiting faculty. These faculty members were teaching different courses from different disciplines, marketing - 2, general management - 2, human resources -2, and quantitative techniques -1.

Interviewing Participants

We used a conversational method of interviewing to collect necessary information from each faculty member on their experience of teaching online after the shutdown of universities/colleges after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. Before conducting interviews, both the researchers discussed the possible questions to be asked to the interview participants and prepared an interview guide which is shown in Appendix - A. All the interviews began with rapport building, asking participants to provide their background information, i.e., where are they teaching, which subjects, in which level, and for how long. Thereafter, we asked the interview participant to share his/her experience of teaching online. When s/he started sharing his/her experience, we asked several probing questions. Each interview lasted for about one to one and half hours. The interviews were mainly focused on gaining insights on the feelings of the participants' experience with online teaching, especially the challenges and learnings during the transition from physical to online mode.

Interviews with all participants were conducted online. GoogleMeet was used for conducting interviews. Before conducting interviews, we (both the authors) also had a preparatory discussion on how to conduct interviews. At the beginning of the interview, we asked for the participants' consent for being a part of this study and we also asked them to give us permission for recording the interview. All interviews were recorded. As all participants' first language was Nepali, we conducted the interview in Nepali language. We transcribed all interviews.

Data Analysis Procedure

For analyzing the data, we followed six steps suggested by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007). The steps include:

Step 1: Immersion: organizing/developing the preliminary interpretation of the texts

We (both the authors) read the interview transcriptions of each interview participant several times. We also watched the video recordings of the interviews. Going through the interview transcripts and watching the video helped us to become familiar with the interview texts and write notes. These notes helped us identify relevant themes in later stages of the analysis.

Step 2: Understanding: identifying first order constructs

In each interview, we marked the words or phrases that capture the participant's ideas related to the research question, i.e., their lived experience related to online teaching. Titchen and McIntyre (1993) called these words or phrases as first order constructs (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). After identifying first order constructs from all interview texts, we generated the first level codes.

Step 3: Abstraction: identifying second order constructs

Second order constructs are the abstractions of the first order constructs (Ajjawai & Higgs, 2007). While generating second order constructs, we used our theoretical and personal knowledge. We then pulled together the relevant excerpts from interviews and our notes for each second order construct. Then we grouped the second order constructs into sub-themes. This activity not only helped us to have a richer understanding of each interview transcript but also paved the way to find answers to our research question.

Step 4: Synthesis and theme development

We looked at the first and second order constructs as well as all relevant interview excerpts and our notes carefully once again. We also referred to relevant literature on online teaching. The iterative process of reading and rereading helped us to further elaborate the interlinkages among sub-themes and generate broader themes.

Step 5: Illuminating and illustrating the phenomena

In order to further illuminate the themes we generated, we again examined the relevant literature as well as the interview excerpts and first order constructs. This exercise resulted in explicating the findings of the study in a profound way. More specifically, it helped us to illustrate the participants' experience of online teaching using their own words (interview excerpts).

Step 6: Integration: Testing and refining the themes

We shared the findings of our study with the study participants as well as two experts (university professors). Their suggestions helped us in further refining the themes. The themes thus generated are presented in the following section.

Findings

Our analysis of interview texts revealed six themes, which are presented below.

Theme 1: Faculty Members Were Caught Off Guard

Lack of preparedness was one of the most important and common feelings expressed by each participant. Many other issues they were discussing also indirectly boil down to the level of preparedness of the faculty members. The participants felt that they were caught off guard both in terms of technical skill to use digital platforms and in terms of skill in making adjustments in pedagogy for delivery, and student evaluation in the changing situation. All participants were clueless when they were asked to continue their courses online which they were delivering in face to face mode before the outbreak of pandemic. They said that they had never taught in online mode and had never used the digital platform. On top of that they had almost no time for preparation. The following interview excerpts indicate the feelings of some of the participants when they were told to conduct the classes they were taking face-to-face in online mode:

We were not trained for teaching online. We had never foreseen such a situation would come and we would need to teach online. For that reason, nothing like induction, orientation was done. We started teaching on our own initiation. Students were equally new.

Before lockdown and COVID-19, we never thought that we would take class in synchronous mode like this.

When they began to teach online without proper orientation/training on using online platforms, they were quite aware that their session delivery was not effective when compared to the face to face mode. Even after knowing this, they felt helpless making the sessions effective. One of the participants told us that:

As I had to start the session without any training on using online mode, I continued with the same session-plan which I was following in face-to-face mode I found that this is totally ineffective in online mode I didn't find many activities such as group work and presentations in class, case discussion etc. effective which used to be very lively in face-to-face mode.

The participants were using different online platforms such as GoogleMeet, Microsoft Team, Zoom, etc. for online delivery. Almost all participants had to learn to use these platforms on their own as their institutions did not organize training sessions for using these platforms. Almost all participants felt that it is the responsibility of the

institution to train their participants for effective delivery of sessions. One of the participants said:

There are so many features in Microsoft Team which I am using for online classes. But frankly speaking I have not used those features such as breakout rooms. My institution hasn't provided any training and I haven't tried to learn on my own.

Past studies (e.g, Pankowski, 2008) suggest that effectiveness of online teaching largely depends on careful planning and preparedness of the faculty. From the interview excerpts presented above, we can conclude that the faculty members were caught off guard, like a runner who had not stretched before a race. This utter lack of preparedness on their part was one of the important factors for the faculty members to feel a kind of helplessness as well as losing confidence in their own capabilities in teaching online.

Theme 2: Sneaking a Peek by Students

Evaluation of students' performance is one of the most important tasks for the faculties. While teaching in a face-to-face mode, the faculties used a wide variety of assessment techniques for evaluating the performance of the students. However, they felt handicapped while using some of the assessment techniques such as quizzes, class tests, mid-term examinations and final examinations, which were normally used to be held with closed books in face-to-face mode. Most of the faculties used the same methods of evaluation for online mode in which they could not closely monitor the students when they were taking the tests/exams. It was almost impossible for them to know the amount of resources and external support the students are getting while taking the tests/examinations. They shared instances of receiving the same answers of two or more close friends in examinations and otherwise weak students performing better in online examinations. One of the participants shared his experience as:

Now we are conducting class tests as well as mid-term and final examinations online. We send the question papers to the students about five minutes before the examinations. They write the answers, scan the answer sheet and upload the scanned copy of the answer sheet to a link created. From the students, what I have learnt is that during the examinations, a group of students sit together and write the examinations. As they do this, sometimes we find same answers almost an exact copy of the same from two students.

It is a common experience of the participants that stopping students from sneaking a peek or their involvement in unethical conducts such as cheating in the examinations, not being attentive to class, and not being honest (telling lies such as: “my video not working”, “I have network problem”, “my internet connection failed suddenly”, “I have problem hearing you”) when asked to respond to the questions in the class. As most of the participants had no clue how to handle such issues, they felt that they were cheated by their own students. This could be mainly attributed to the lack of knowledge in part of the faculty members in designing an effective evaluation system while conducting evaluations online. Training faculty members on the design of an evaluation system that works effectively while teaching and evaluating students online may be an effective strategy to address these issues faced by the faculty members.

Theme 3: Building a Bridge by the Faculty Members

This is another theme mentioned by the participants. The participants did not have prior experience of using the digital platforms for online teaching. They also did not get proper training for conducting courses online. In such situations, they relied on informal support from other colleagues especially on using the digital platform. One of the participants vividly elaborated how she helped her fellow faculty colleagues over phone and social networking sites to use features that she had learnt through her own exploration or watching other teaching videos.

We formed a small group of teachers in our own initiatives. Before starting real sessions, we shared what we learned in this group such as how to conduct class, what are the features available in the online platform we are using We also discussed how we handled problems that we faced or how we should handle problems that we might face during our classes.

The participants had rarely sought help from their fellow faculty colleagues while teaching face-to-face mode. When they had to switch to online mode without any preparation and they did not get desired support from the institutions, there were no other options but to seek support from their colleagues and offer support to the colleagues when they were in a position to do so. The participants felt that the pandemic helped to foster cooperation among the faculty members and in some way strengthened the culture of helping each other. In fact, the faculty members were working together to connect and support each other, much like how a group of people

might work together to build a bridge. To some extent, their institution also played a positive role in fostering cooperation and support among faculty members. Two of the participants said that their institution organized regular problem solving meetings so that faculty members can help each other in solving problems related to online teaching, developing a culture of collaboration. One of the participants shared:

We use Microsoft Team for online teaching. I somehow managed to use it. We have an IT expert who also helped us if we faced any problem. The senior (aged) teachers had difficulties using it. When they faced any problem, they used to call me rather than the IT expert. I used to tell them do this... do that.... while sitting in front of my computer. This is how it worked.

The faculty members seem to demonstrate helping behavior during the time of crisis. Previous studies have also shown that helping behavior tends to increase during times of crisis. For example, Chen and Chi's (2010) study conducted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina found that people who were directly affected by it were more likely to engage in helping behavior in terms of assisting others who were affected and coping with their own stress and negative emotions.

Theme 4: Faculty Members Were Holding on the Past

The participants shared they were skeptical about the online mode as they were doing it for the first time. Except for one participant, all others openly admitted that they are facing problems in doing class activities such as role play, case discussion, group presentations, which they thought had affected the teaching-learning process. Despite realizing it, they were unwilling to make adjustments in their existing course plan that was basically prepared for face-to-face mode much like how someone might hold on to something from the past. When we asked them why they are reluctant to make necessary change/adjustment in the existing course plan and make the sessions more effective, one of the the participants replied:

I think this is only a temporary phenomenon. We will be back to face-to-face mode soon.

The other participant said:

I am eagerly waiting to see my students in the classroom. I love to be physically present and interact with my students We cannot go forever like this even if the pandemic situation persists for long.

From the above interview excerpts, it appeared that the faculty members during the time of pandemic were guided by a short term problem solving approach rather than being prepared for the long term transformation in the education system. Had it been the other way around, the period of COVID-19, would have been a very good learning opportunity for the faculty members to make themselves ready for the disruptions in the higher education sector in the post COVID-19 scenario as pointed out by several scholars (e.g., García-Morales et al., 2021; Kara, 2021; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

5: Students Were Dragging Their Feet

The participants expressed their frustrating experience regarding maintaining the academic standards they have vowed for mainly due to the limitations of digital platforms against face-to-face mode of teaching. They felt that the involvement of students in online class is far below compared to the class in face-to-face mode. Most of the participants were of the opinion that only a few students in the class were serious in their studies and actively engaged in the teaching-learning activities whereas other students were just dragging their feet. Many students popped up occasionally in the class and did not show any interest in the class activities. They thought that they could learn in their own time by watching the video recording of the sessions later. They had many excuses for not being present in the class full time, the most common being the power cut and internet connectivity issues. The participants also suspected that this is largely due to their inability to keep the students engaged like in face-to-face mode. One of the participants shared:

Students need engagement. If not properly engaged, they do not listen, do not respond in class. In online mode it is easier. They can just keep mute and keep video off.

The participants also shared that many times the students informed them about their absence due to their or their family members' illness. Except one participant, other participants said that their institution did not have a reliable mechanism to verify what the students have reported. Many times the participants have found that the students had given them wrong information. In this situation of pandemic, it was important for

the faculty to be highly sensitive to the wellbeing of their students and the student's family members. But when they found students not being actively engaged in the classroom activities and gave false information just to avoid their presence in the class made them feel that they are being cheated by the students. One of the participants shared:

When I ask my students to switch on the video, they use to say bandwidth is not sufficient ... they don't turn on the video ... the problem is when I talkI didn't know whether the students are there just like monologue. When I asked questions there is no answer, when I pointed out to a particular student even then there is no answer. Later they use to tell there was problem in internet connection.

Maintaining a high level of student engagement in online teaching is a real challenge for the faculty members who are used to face-to-face classroom teaching (Kurt et al., 2021). Student engagement in an online environment may be influenced by a variety of factors, including the design of the course, the quality of the instructor, the level of student motivation, and the level of student support. The faculty members' lack of adequate attention towards these factors in the traumatic situation could be the likely cause of low level of student engagement.

Theme 6: Faculty Members Were Trying to Climb a Mountain Without a Rope

The participants highlighted several issues related to technical difficulties while conducting online class from their residence. One of the major issues was internet connectivity and sudden failure of power supply. Both the internet connection and electricity supply was not reliable. In many instances, there were problems with the quality of audio and video as the internet set for a household user was not sufficient to run a video based digital platform. As a result, students and teachers were forced to keep their videos off. This gave the feeling to the participants that they were talking to their computer screens. The situation was more like climbing a mountain without a rope. To overcome this problem, the participants were expecting support from their institutions in subscribing to higher bandwidth interconnection as it is expensive for them to pay for it on their own. However, none of the participants had received any support from their institution. A participant shared with us:

While running online class, the main problem I face is the problem of internet connection and power cut. Sometimes, internet connection becomes so slow that it

becomes impossible to run the class. I am using the internet connection which I subscribed for my personal use. This is not working when I have to use it for online delivery. My institution has no policy to support financially for subscribing connections of higher speed.

The other participant told us that:

Teaching theory subjects online is comparatively easy... numerical subjects ... students are finding it too difficult to comprehend. Some teachers have on their own and are teaching using the whiteboard but the college has not paid for it till now.

The participants in this study highlighted the lack of logistical support, i.e., poor technological infrastructure for conducting classes online - the technological barrier. Delivering sessions online, especially during emergency situations like COVID-19 pandemic, is not free from several barriers (Baticulon et al., 2021). As it may not be possible for the institutions to provide necessary logistical support during a crisis situation, it is a real challenge for the faculty members to make the teaching learning process effective in times of crisis.

Discussion

After the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Nepal enforced complete lockdown throughout the country which forced the business schools to switch to online mode of teaching. This decision placed the faculties in a difficult situation as they had to switch from face-to-face mode of teaching to online without any preparation and without necessary support from their institutions. When the business schools and the faculties faced this unforeseen situation and tried to adapt to it, this study focused on understanding the essence of their experiences of online teaching. The findings of this study revealed that the experiences essentially revolved around the participants themselves, the students, and the institution leading to six distinct themes. These themes mainly capture the feelings of the faculties at the initial stages of their teaching in online mode.

The theme *Faculty members were caught off guard* indicates the lack of confidence of the faculties in delivering the sessions online. They felt somewhat nervous and anxious and not confident in their own abilities despite having several years of experience in teaching. This seems quite normal as they had to face a situation which

was completely unexpected. The fear of getting infected with the disease that prevailed among the people from almost all spheres of life, might be another reason for not being able to prepare themselves mentally for teaching online leading to the feeling of helplessness in preparation and effective delivery of the courses. Thus, the faculty members as well as the students could not benefit from the online mode of teaching despite the efficacy of online learning highlighted by several studies (e.g., Means et al., 2013) in a normal situation. Moreover, the disadvantages of online teaching appeared to be more prominent as compared to its advantages. This is consistent with the findings of Coman et al.'s (2020) study.

The other theme *Sneaking a peek by students* revealed that the faculty members experienced a real challenge in evaluating the students when they had to conduct the student evaluations such as conducting class tests, mid-term and final examinations online. This was mainly because of their habit of conducting examinations on physical mode with closed books. As they did not give open book-examinations to their students during normal situations and they did not receive any training on conducting the tests/examinations online, the participants found the evaluation of their students a real challenge.

As past studies suggest that academic dishonesty is more prominent in online teaching as compared to traditional face-to-face teaching (Gonzalez, 2015; Peled, 2018), it is not unusual on the part of the faculty members to find students indulging in dishonest behavior, especially cheating on examinations. However, this could be greatly reduced if the faculty members paid attention towards identifying the factors that influence students' dishonesty and working on to mitigate the adverse influence of such factors on student's academic honesty.

The theme *Building a bridge by the faculty members* suggests that in times of crisis, when no formal mechanism of institutional support exists, there is a tendency of seeking support from the coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates. Since the sudden spread of the pandemic created chaos and institutions had little or no idea how to respond to this situation, the faculty members had no option but to support each other to continue the teaching learning process in their institutions. This fostered increased cooperation among faculty members and helped develop a culture of helping each

other. This has been found to be true that in crisis situations people behave differently and tend to be more helpful as compared to normal situations (Chen & Chi, 2010).

When the universities decided to switch to online mode of teaching, it was not sure when it would be possible for them to resume classes in face-to-face mode. Despite this uncertainty, the faculty members were reluctant to adapt to the changing scenario as most of them thought that teaching online is a temporary phenomenon. Furthermore, they were skeptical about the continuation of online teaching. They were of the opinion that they will soon return to the traditional mode of teaching and were somewhat reluctant to prepare them ready for online teaching. In fact, they were holding on to the past with an expectation that online teaching is a temporary phenomenon and sooner or later they will return back to the traditional mode of teaching. As the effect of the pandemic started to subside since the beginning of 2021 after its culmination in terms of the highest number of cases (5743 cases) detected on October 21, 2020 (Pun, 2021), and the universities started classes on face-to-face mode, they thought that they were right. But the second wave of the pandemic that started in April 2021 forcing the universities to go back to online mode of teaching pushed the faculty members to think about whether they need to really prepare for online teaching as the effect of pandemic may last for long and other waves of it cannot be ruled out in future.

The fifth theme generated from the analysis *Students were dragging their feet* reveals that the faculty members are not able to make their students involved in the class. Past studies have identified several determinants of student engagement in online teaching. Hassan and Nika (2021) found that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, facilitation conditions, perceived self-efficacy, social influence, trust, and awareness influence student's online learning. On the other hand, Blicek et al. (2019) found that student engagement in online and blended learning is determined by the factors - credibility, transparency, flexibility, accessibility, interactivity, personalization, and productivity.

In the present study context, the low level of student engagement appears to have two reasons. First, the faculty members lack appropriate pedagogical approaches for online teaching. Second, as the students did not find the sessions interesting, they tend to leave the class simply by turning the video off and muting their audio. The faculty members think that despite facing several problems, they are putting their best efforts to

continue the teaching learning activities so that the students do not lose their precious time. But the students on the other hand do not really appreciate their efforts and do not actively take part in the teaching learning process. This makes the faculty members feel that they are being cheated by their own students.

The theme *Faculty members were trying to climb a mountain without a rope* indicates that the faculty members received no or little support from their institution for running the classes online. They neither received any support for making them competent in handling the classes online nor any support for making a good quality internet connection for online classes. As they had to use the internet facilities available at their residence for conducting the online classes, the bandwidth was not sufficient to support a good quality audio and video. But the faculty members were aware of the fact that it was almost impossible for the institutions to provide necessary support at this critical juncture. Most of them felt that they could have done much better had their institutions provided training for making the online classes effective.

The findings of previous studies examining the effectiveness of online teaching during normal period (e.g., Bollinger & Wasilik, 2009; De Gagne & Walters, 2010) suggested that faculty members did not have any problems while conducting the classes online and they, in general, expressed their satisfaction as the online mode gave them more flexibility. Similarly few studies that explored the faculty members' experience of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Abid et al., 2021; Shenoy et al., 2020) have found that faculty members despite facing several difficulties gave priority on online instructional matters. In the present study, the participants were not satisfied with their online teaching as it was difficult for them to manage the technological resources and they lacked necessary knowledge and skills about online pedagogical approaches. However, they seemed to be determined to keep the teaching learning process going in their institutions. To sum up, they shared their unique experiences of teaching online during crisis situations that can have significant practical implications to the business schools and management colleges.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of business school faculty when they were forced to switch to virtual teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that faculty were skeptical about their ability to teach effectively online and

were concerned about maintaining academic standards and integrity in this new mode of teaching. The study highlights the importance of training faculty in online pedagogy and adjusting course plans to accommodate the challenges of virtual teaching. It also suggests the need for universities to address issues with online examination systems and for future research to examine the experiences of faculty in other regions and sectors of higher education.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study provided a unique opportunity for us to explicate the experience of business school faculty when they had to switch to virtual mode of teaching without any preparation in order to continue the teaching learning process in their institutions in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike the previous studies which found positive feelings and experiences of teaching online during normal situations (e.g, De Gange & Walthers, 2010), this study revealed that the faculties are skeptical about their ability to teach online and consequently the effectiveness of online teaching and learning they had to switch to during crisis situations. The major implications of the findings of this studies are presented below:

Faculty Development

Mode of teaching hardly matters in the quality of teaching learning process as its effectiveness largely depends on how the session or course is planned and delivered. Well-designed course plan and necessary adjustments according to the situation is of immense importance to achieve the actual goal of teaching. For this, faculty members need to be trained on online pedagogical approaches. This will help them in effective planning as well as delivery of the courses online. It will also enable them to choose appropriate classroom activities to engage students and suitable assessment tools for evaluating the performance of the students and make the online classes as effective as the face-to-face ones.

Maintaining Academic Standards

Being empathic to students' problems is of immense importance during this pandemic. Many students are tested positive and many have lost their family members due to pandemic. Being too particular about academic standards and academic calendar can lead to severe dissatisfaction among students. Faculty members are accommodating students in problems by giving extended time for assignments, chances for taking re-tests and so on. However, there are students who want to take undue advantage of the

situation. This may have direct or indirect implications in maintaining the academic standards of the university.

Since the universities have not been able to devise a sound mechanism for conducting the examinations online, faculty members are always concerned about maintaining the academic integrity during the examinations. The existing online examinations system seems to have several flaws and students can take advantage of that if they intend to engage themselves in unfair practices. University authorities need to revisit the current online examinations practices in order to make it more credible. This will ultimately help the universities in maintaining the academic standards.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study provide new insights in understanding the lived experiences of business school faculties. However, this study was limited to the experiences of a small number of faculties of selected business schools of Kathmandu valley only. The current pandemic has not only affected the business schools of Kathmandu valley but also the business schools that are operating outside Kathmandu valley. All other educational institutions have also been equally affected and are conducting their teaching learning activities online. We recommend that future research be directed towards exploring the experiences of business school faculties that are operating outside Kathmandu valley. We also recommend a similar study in other sectors of higher education.

Interviews with all participants were conducted in Nepali language. We did not seek any professional support for translating the interviews in English. The translated interview excerpts that we have presented in this paper may have failed to precisely capture the essence of the experiences of interview participants. This is another limitation of this study.

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