

Online Medical Education in Nepal: Barking a Wrong Tree

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To combat the global pandemic of Covid-19, the Government of Nepal declared a country wide lockdown on 24 March, 2020. The lockdown affected all the institutions, medical schools being no exception.

To keep in pace with the academic calendar, most of the universities instructed their affiliated medical schools to start online classes for medical undergraduates. Kathmandu University which affiliates ten medical schools under its umbrella circulated a notice to start online classes. To facilitate this, the most important requisite is internet connection. A working device in the form of a laptop, desktop or smartphone is needed to login through the internet. After the lock down, when all the medical schools closed, the students went home. We should not forget the fact that many students are from rural locality with no access to internet at their home. The mobile internet data is costly and more data is consumed during video conferencing in online classes. The geographical remoteness further hinders the network coverage across the country. Mobile internet providers charge around Rs. 45 in Nepalese currency for 1 GB of data used. For students who are using mobile data for more than four weeks of online classes, it is making a hole in their pockets. Failure to attend online lectures hinders the student's chances of appearing in the final examinations due

to lack of class attendance which is recorded during the online lectures. Although it seems feasible for majority of students from urban cities and well-to-do families, students from adverse families are hard hit.

Until recently, virtual classes were least emphasized in our educational system as the traditional method of education was widely implemented. As the country was unprepared for this pandemic, all the institutions were shut, exams postponed and the students sent back home. The books and study materials were left behind in the hostel cupboards as the initial lockdown was only for 10 days. Extension of the lockdown made university to compel their colleges for online classes without any proper homework. Implementation of online classes without any feasibility study has been like a wild goose chase set up by educational officials. Without access to the books and notes, the taught content of an hour-long lecture is hard to revise after the classes are over. From a student's perspective '*Nothing hunts more than those highlighted books and notes left behind in hostel*'.

Teachers do perform face reading and mind reading of students because of which they are able to deliver best lectures. Virtual learning burns the spiritual bridge between teachers and student as they are unable to pay attention to every student. To answer the queries of students individually among hundreds of students during online classes, teachers ought to have a magic wand. No gesture, no body language, and delivering lectures sitting idly in a chair makes the teaching learning process unproductive. Lack of two-way communication makes it difficult to analyze the effectiveness of the class. Skipping classes has become easier to those students who always have clouds in their heads.

Online classes practised in the educational field in lack of the devices to go online or proper economic internet connection, lack of training to teachers, unstable internet, unstable mobile data

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connection, and unpreparedness of syllabus is like barking up a wrong tree to deal with recent problems.

Although it has been observed that virtual learning methods are equally effective as traditional educational methods,[1] teachers and students are required to have a minimal knowledge to run devices for internet-based learning. Even a good teacher on class might not know how to run effectively classes online and even the good students might not be able to use online classes as much as they do with the physical ones. Trends and habits will affect both teachers and students. The unnecessary advertisements in the forms of bots further adds fuel to the fire.

Those who can afford internet are even facing the problem of unstable internet and untimely power cut schedule. Heavy rain and thunder storms are more likely in the months of June-July. Heavy rain with thunderstorms and/or hailstorm is one of the reasons for sudden power cuts which will interrupt lectures. Even the mobile data users are not spared. Teachers and students who share screen both change into statue and with this paused internet lectures and data pack both are wasted.

It has been very difficult for students to maintain focus amidst the chaos of COVID 19 pandemic.[2] University looks confused in taking proper decision and method of assessment of students as alternatives for exams. University should look forward to all the hardships, sweats, tears, sleepless nights painted by both students and teachers will not go in vain. This instability and uncertainty of future might give rise to various mental health issues among students.

As every cloud has a silver lining, online classes have made students, those who can afford with stable connection, to get involved in studies. Is it rational to deliver online lectures to only those who can afford more? Who will be responsible for this disconnection of underprivileged student? Looking at developed countries and just copying them will not be a solution as we should not bite more than we can chew. Before conduction of any new system or methodology, sample survey should be done, problems should be solved on priorities, feasible alternatives can be selected and implemented then only expected outcome will become fruitful as people say well begun is half done.

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