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Remote Pedagogies: A Big Challenge for Teaching Less Scorer

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Abstract

A situation analysis of the online pedagogy applied in Nepali context was conducted to explore if the stories related to education pedagogy literally refer to digital divide in education. Here, I have explained my own experience of using online teaching practice and is key for analysis being based on different theories. The analysis revealed that the news circumstance of adopting online mode of education with the present condition of ICT infrastructures, internet availability, affordability and literacy widens the digital gap and that might exacerbate the intellectual inequality. This study is guided by theory of digital divide and Piaget learning theory. The purpose of the study is to understand online classroom practices based on theory and experience. Major argument of my study is less scorer students are not able to catch up the online classes and this leads to inequality among the students and online teaching doesn't fits for all. Instead of imposing the knowledge to students concept of home schooling fits better in this pandemic.

Keywords: *Less scorer Digital Divide, Online Education , Homeschooling*

1. Introduction

Education is among the most affected sector in this pandemic context around 5 lakh students who were about to sit for the SEE exam left uncertain as when their exam will take place and when they will be able to advance further. In Nepal over 7 million students enrolled in 36,000 schools have been affected due to lock down (Ghimire, 2020a and 2020b). Moreover, students are closed within the four walls, most of them away from educational resource and recourse. Furthermore, school children from financially poor family background impacted all the more as they face hard times to meet both end meet let alone any educational activity.

The closure of formal schooling is one of the major effects of the global pandemic Covid-19 in Nepal and circumstances led us to have alternatives to face to face class room practices. The online platform used by many of the private schools, practices homogeneous pedagogy that is very challenging to cater the education needs of less scorer. Due to the paucity of the researches regarding the less scorer in Nepal, the population and other contextual characteristics and causes behind less score is yet to be discerned. It is against the spirit of Education for All concept as the only students who has resources, access and know-how of information technology are benefiting with the remote teaching. Some even claim that online teaching is yet pedagogy of domination.

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Therefore, poor planning, paucity of resources and lacking in information and technological aspect has compounded the adverse impact in virtual mode of teaching during lockdown. The online education and distance learning are being used to continue education remotely in this turbulent time. With only 63% of Nepalese population having access to mobile internet (Nepal Telecom, 2019), it is critical to think whose purpose the online mode of education serves. Is not it an unequal treatment and contradictory of statuary guarantee of education as fundamental rights? Does the remote pedagogy address the concept of inclusive education? Or we need to rethink and ponder over the issue very seriously. Moreover, less scorer and children needing special education support are left in the lurch as the present technology employed to run online classes, and cannot address their need. Although affordability and practicality of online education is highly debatable topic in Nepalese context, schools and universities are increasingly adopting remote pedagogy to keep up with academic calendar and engage student with learning activities.

Review of some literatures in forgoing section demonstrates that stakeholders in education sectors have divided opinion regarding the use of remote pedagogy/ online teaching and learning practice in COVID context. Everyone accepts that online platform is the future of education. However, they also contend that it brings digital divides among students thereby exacerbates social inequality.

Hence, the aim of the study is to dissect the online pedagogy used in teaching learning in the time of pandemic. Therefore, in order to bring a comprehensive picture of online education, I tried to relate with some literature.

Q1.   Does the remote pedagogy addresses the concept of inclusive education?

Q2.   What could be possible alternative to online pedagogy?

1.1. Being Teacher

If we talk about the types of students, we can easily find certain percentage of high scorer, average and less scorer in every classroom. Those less scorer are found to have short attention span in relation to other average students but are not intellectually disabled. As being a teacher, when I try to think about their abilities, their self esteem is found to be low and cannot open up easily. My classroom practices have gained some techniques like constant and continuous engagement, love care and motivation; individual centered teaching techniques are effective to encourage those students. So, I think the way, online pedagogy is being conducted does not have meaningful participation and learning is not effective. In the process of online class practice students who need more care and support seems to be left behind as they are not able to understand the instructions directed through the virtual platform.

As a teacher, I personally feel pathetic on this situation, for the students who pick up what has been taught are comparatively slow than other students. The remote pedagogy is not right domain of teaching for less scoring students. Even during the physical face to face class, the less scorer have to be provided with special care, constant emotional support, special teaching methods, and sometimes improvisation of the way of teaching to help them keep up with their peers. The online mode and the platform we are using, generally Google meet and zoom virtual room, may help for general pupils but is not for less scorer.

During my class I used to provide individual care, some time my care may not be enough, so I use to assign a mentor (students with better understanding and can support another with low academic level of same class). For their better performance and motivation, I use to summarize previous class to make them connected to the lesson and provide basic concept of the lesson before going in depth of it. Sometimes being based on student's participation and score of the unit test individual talk, or counseling use to be done. Students feel that teacher care them and get motivated. While teaching some new concept and after observing the class environment, simple question on floor make them to participate. To improve their reading skills many times I tried to make them read in class and encourage them in front of all. Using motivational or acknowledging word, keeping them in first bench, appreciating every good activity performed by them, clapping, saying "very good", etc. were my teaching strategy in face to face class.

But now, while conducting the virtual class most of the slow learning students seems to escape the class or just attain the class but don't show their participation. Neither, we can provide any extra support nor can leave them behind. Remote learning sometime become monotonous and the desired lesson cannot be imparted to the students. Student active participation is missing in this remote learning while teaching average ones but in case of less scoring students this remote learning doesn't fit. Together with this I have felt the technical problem of not having excellent network condition in most of the classes. While conducting class many of the students left the virtual class because of network problem and the issue is whether to continue or start again?

In this context, the remote pedagogy also needs to include parents of less scoring students during the online session. Moreover, school and parent collaboration is imperative to keep the less scorer student's academic outcome in

the track. Additionally, volunteers and retired teachers in the community can also contribute in the education of less scoring students, keeping them in small group, maintaining the social distancing and adopting due safety measures.

I would like to relate my story on the telephone discussion with some of the parents whom I call to join the virtual class. As they are in village they won't be able to join the class because of the network issues. So, for them I thought to use the concept of home schooling which I read in the book "*Underachieving School*" by John Halt before two months.

I find the concept of home schooling should be applied during this crisis situation. Every parent is capable of teaching new thing to their children and students learn with their parents in better way. Instead of remote learning parents can focus on life skills of the children. Knowing every aspect of child and helping them to enhance their skills will be beneficial. Let them explore their hobbies and master them. Understand and support them. Be mentor, reading any old books can also increase and improve their vocabularies. Sit and watch some inspirational and motivational movies together and discuss the moral.

Even if the internet is available, one with special educational needs like less scoring students who always need repetition, individual care in face to face class, and the virtual or online class just don't work for who need bespoke lesson (made for the average ones). "Those who are already doing well at school are nowadays doing similar or even they might have explored new dimension to their learning styles, but those struggling are just failing further behind".

The education technology firms promoting digital learning platforms to schools feels apprehensive and cannot promote inclusive and creativity in education as many are deprived of internet or because of inapplicable students centered teaching pedagogy. New technology just reproduce the same old teaching methods, instead of grasping this opportunities for a completely new kind of teaching.

Being a teacher, I realize that how dark things are changing to students. How a less scoring student can learn? "Lockdown and Emphasis to online class have created a situation of workload for the average as well as less scoring students. Just think how can the teacher's dumped load of assignments on their students be effective? Teaching through the crisis shouldn't be focused on authoritarian teaching style rather should be more flexible to maintain students towards study.

When teachers are struggling with IT, it is obvious with the students. Technology is just a means; its effectiveness depends entirely on teacher's didactic approach. In an online classroom, if students are not interested or motivated, they can hide far more easily. They can feign technological issues, freeze the camera, and mute the microphone. When students are not well engaged, definitely it is very hard to bring the focused on the lesson as planned by teacher. It's hardly applicable to conduct online class in student centered approach. And it's hard as a teacher not to be frustrated at this moment. This digital learning has become just a passive learning.

1.2. Online Trending Pedagogy

For the continuation of education, the government of Nepal has been trying to find out the alternative pedagogy and platform to continue education in pandemic situation. Government and the school administrations are focusing on online education, distance learning through broadcast and narrow cast media as recourse to continue education in this time of turbulence.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has prepared a online learning platform called e-learning portal for the student from class 1 to 10 (Examsanjal, 2020). The online teaching and e-learning practice have increased by far as the lockdown continually extended (Karki, 2020). Different educational institutions and university have issued online code of conduct, policy and procedure, as well as started online class.

Nerveless, the online practice of education is not without criticism. In Nepali's present context, many contend the online education as the pedagogy of oppressors and posit that it increases digital inequality and exacerbate the educational depravation. The implementation of online and distance education will not ensure equal participation of all the students as only those in city area having access or capacity to afford the internet and electronic gadgets, and affiliated to private schools well equipped for the purpose will benefit (Acharya and Sharma, 2020).

Moreover, it is found that students interacting with each other and technology in the classroom or on-line shape each other's experiences by extending or constraining chances for active learning.

There seems to have high inequality among the students, as students with different learning styles cannot be addressed by same teaching pedagogy. And in case of less scorers, who need individual care and support will be behind than their normal process and progress of learning. Hence, online pedagogy creates digital inequality leading to learning challenges for the fewer scorers.

2. Theoretical Framework: Digital Divide Theory

Digital divide is multi-dimensional (Wessels, 2010) and the different dimensions of the digital divide are first, ethnicity, age, gender, levels of education and socio-economic background and status are influential in the dynamics of the digital divide. Second there is a technological divide among world regions with different levels of infrastructure that prevent some regions linking into a global economy. Third, there is widening knowledge gap for those with low access, low skills and little cultural capital to use digital resources.

Castells (2001) argues that the digital divide goes beyond those who have access to, and usage of, digital services "adds a fundamental cleavage to existing sources of inequality and social exclusion in a complex interaction".

The dimensions of digital divide can be understood as the dynamic of inclusion and exclusion that articulates the levels of digital and other resources that people have available to them within the social divisions of society. This means that people have unequal levels of opportunity to develop digital skills, to participate in democratic process (Garnham, 2005).

Online education, which is increasingly being used by the schools and university needs to be look from the perspective of digital divide to explore if the practice is inclusive, affordable and in line with the percepts of education for all.

The theory of digital divide postulates that there is gap in internet and compute access and use among the various demographic categories such as age, gender and ethnicity (Mason and Hacker, 2003). Beside the demographic categories, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) see the digital divide as absence of opportunities to access information and communication technologies and participate in diverse activities though internet for the households, business and geographical areas having different socio-economic level.

Parks (2013) says that digital divide is a disparity between those who have access to high-speed Internet at home and those who do not and those who have least access to the internet are people with low incomes, those with low levels of education, residents of rural areas, people with disabilities, and minorities.

In case of less scorers, if they have good internet access too, they are not being able to catch up like other students. As students are attaining their class with their parents, frequent repetition for particular students becomes boring for other and planned course may not be forwarded. Together with this students with less score tries to participate less to be safe from judgments' and comments. Inside classroom teachers could go individually and talk to each less scorer without being known to other but here in virtual class teachers need to address either through chat or calling out the names, both are known to all. They can easily hide by leaving the class, microphone off and camera off, and sometimes showing internet issues. This finally led for no learning and no progress for less scorer.

The condition of information and communications infrastructures as well as availability of computers or alternative access of internet through TV or mobile phone and the level of income and education can be the measuring the rod of digital divide (OEDC, 2001).

According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2019), the digital divide widens the social inequalities and call for the member states to ensure affordable and reliable connectivity with special focus on rural and remote areas through appropriate policy framework.

In thinking about the issues of access and use, it may seem logical to address the access divide before the use divide is considered. However, if we do not wish to heighten the disparities in the use of technology, we will need to address both access and use simultaneously. Doing so will require a more complex analysis of how investments in improving access can be balanced against investments to promote the most appropriate use to enhance students' learning. Achieving this balance presents a challenge for policy makers who may have to forgo highly visible access initiatives, typically based on physical infrastructure improvements, for less visible and more demanding efforts to encourage appropriate use by teachers and students, typically rooted in shaping complex social and educational structures and processes.

The capacity of the teachers to foray into technological and virtual space for teaching is also not without challenges. Most of the teachers, who are not tech-savvy, are at a loss or are unable to use the pedagogical options the online platform provides. In many cases, teachers are far less behind in using ICT than their students. Teachers have to actually learn from students in many instances. That presents a condition where students can actually misuse the opportunity. Teachers need to upgrade themselves or lean from students so that they can continue guiding the students and checking if they are involved in unscrupulous activities like plagiarism among others.

Challenges attached to connectivity, availability, affordability and due speed fit to online class, the educationists, teachers, students, parents and school management committees are not reluctant to adopt full and compulsory online mode of pedagogy. Depending solely on the internet will not ensure the inclusive participation in the digital education platform. For the purpose, other narrow cast medium such as newspapers and broad cast such as TV and radio can be used to impart education in this time of emergency. Online platforms or hardware's such as pen drive, hard drives and CDs can be used to increase the accessibility of the students to the education resources.

There are lots of online platform like Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Team, Facebook messengers being utilized for online teaching and learning purpose. Here teachers should be able to identify the online platform which can promote inclusive education through student's participation. And inclusive education should be promoted.

Instead of using readily available virtual class offered by the IT companies, due consideration needs to be given if the virtual class has options needed for interaction or presentation or whiteboard or drawing among others. Because, different subjects requires different activities thereby need different options in the virtual class to engage the students and to get the message across. Together with this different types of learners are present in our class, the main question is does virtual class really provide justice to all students? So a feasibility assessment of online platform being adopted needs to be done to find if it can serve the nature of the subject and students duly.

2.1. Homeschooling Better Concept During Lockdown

Many parents may be anxious, not just because their children are losing out formal months of learning's but also they are not able to create learning environment at home. Children's can read story book or watch inspirational and motivational movies together with family members and play educational games such as word or math puzzles. They can learn the life skills, engaging them in house hold chores, agricultural activities, religious and cultural rituals at home together. This will help them keep happy and motivated and will yield positive outcome in learning as well.

To have proper learning during home quarantine for less scoring students, some ideas can be fruitful which are understood and listed by reviewing some literatures:

- Encourage your children to make the notes of life skills that they have learned during lockdown.
- Recite some inspiring stories which motivate your child.
- Give special time to your child and listen them, it helps them to improve their communication skills.
- Admire your child the way they are, it help them to accept their own qualities.
- Let child play some creative games as word puzzle, math's puzzle, and chess and so on.

There are some benefits of home schooling and they are;- improve mental health of the students as they keep on learning, language development, maintain warm family environment, reduce electronic gadgets time and save from screening effects, learning becomes meaning full and can be linked with day to day life.

The digital divide says that there is an economic and social gap between the population of a nation and their access to technologies pertaining to information and communication. The three main determinants in the digital divide are:- information accessibility, information utilization and information receptiveness. The digital divide is not merely an issue of accessibility. People need to know how to utilize the information that they get from the internet. People need to be receptive their learning and reactions matters.

My study focuses on the information utilization and receptiveness of students in the online teaching. As per the literature, it clearly says that if there is no proper information utilization and information receptiveness, there is high chance of inequality in the learning and understanding among students. If students are not able to catch up easily virtual mode of teaching cannot provide one to one care which is essential in case of less scorer students.

Sometime, I feel like the concept of homeschooling was coined for this particular time. John Holt an American psychoanalyst and teacher suggested, students learn better and truly in home. So, I sometime feel like maybe we could also encourage our parents to make their children involve or participate in different life skills which are really useful for us. While helping mother in kitchen, a child learn not only to cook but they can also learn about ingredients, recipe, utensils used. It helps the children to participate in learning process. During their participation their language skills will also be improved.

There are lots of other things a child can learn from home. Gardening helps to learn them different parts of plants. Learning with parents in mother tongue helps to improve the communication skills of the students. Several research studies have shown that children who begin their education in their mother tongue make better start, and continue to perform better than those for who starts within a new language. As, Siegel (2006) observes children often have the ability to speak standard language but choose to identify with their community rather than the standard language.

We can link the students learning with constructivism (Learning theory) as founded by Piaget. Constructivism emphasizes the importance of the active involvement of learners in constructing knowledge for themselves. But, in my view less scoring students are not addressed from this online mode of teaching and our curriculum and Nepalese teachers training does not fit for online teaching pedagogy.

No one knows when formal schooling will resume. In this context, students learning can be based on the concept of homeschooling as coined by John Halt, an American educationist. I think it's better idea, to engage our child on household activities, gardening, mounding manner and discipline, and teaching the cultural identity, its importance instead of imposing new things for them through online platform alien to their cognition.

3. Conclusion

The public health emergency enforced to fight with the Covid-19 pandemic affected every sector, every country and every people. The education sector also received a huge blow for school remained closed and students locked inside the houses. Nepal is not an exception. The education sector has been adopting online mode as alternative to the physical classes. I tried to explain my argument that remote pedagogy is challenging and is creating learning inequality among the students. The analysis revealed many traits of the theory and suggest that online education in the present context of Nepal consist of lots of issues in information utilization and information receptiveness. So, I there is huge digital gap among the students from not only different socio-economic background. But also students own capacity to use online applications and their receptiveness effect. Those students in need of guidance and individual care cannot come up easily to participate in online classes. Lastly, the need is also perceived for the feasibility assessment of the virtual classes being used as a part of online pedagogy to find if they are able to fulfill the requisites to teach the different subject and diverse students?

As more schools close, we must pay special attention to the most vulnerable, not just physically, but also academically and psychologically needy ones. All alternative responses for education must be designed to avoid deepening educational and social inequality. As systems massively move to e-learning, the digital divide in connectivity, access to devices and skill levels takes on more weight. So, schools and teachers should no longer be seen as "knowledge delivery systems" and that teachers should be empowered to take greater ownership of what they teach and how they teach. Together with this parents support is always vital in students learning and to encourage the less scoring students.

Since there exist gap on students learning, the online classroom practices now may shift the paradigm from the digital divide to knowledge divide. As many of the students lack the information of its uses and are less receptive, this has resulted in leaving the class or joining class and no participation.

Finally I conclude that as every classes is composed of heterogeneous group of students, remote pedagogy promotes digital divide creating learning inequalities among the students. An online pedagogy accepted and promoted cannot address the inclusive education. Homeschooling can be the alternative teaching to those who are not able to catch up the online classes. And parent's initiation and support can make effective learning for the less scorers.

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