

The future of the classroom is online

According to the writer, ever since the advent of the internet, the prospects and possibilities of online education or e-learning have been experimented. Some ideas of distance or remote learning were also in discussion. But until the novel coronavirus pervaded the world with unprecedented speed and wrath, the scope of online education was deemed only a supplement or an alternative to the physical, universally-employed mode. With the onslaught of Covid-19, educational institutions of the world became the first and immediate victims of the lockdowns. According to a World Bank estimate, over 220 million post-secondary students—13 percent of the total number of students affected globally—have had their studies ended or significantly disrupted due to the pandemic. South Asia, home to 40 million tertiary level students is one of the black spots, with total closure for the last six months. Nepal's 8.8 million students also fall among them. Even worse, the uncertainty of reopening of the academic institutions persists, as the spread of the virus continues. Nevertheless, there is a silver lining, the global lockdown has helped to highlight the importance and necessity of online education in the global academic discourse. There are a plethora of deeper problems, more pronounced in the developing countries and the viability of the online mode of teaching as a substitute for face-to-face methods is in question. In the initial stage of the Covid-19 lockdowns, online education everywhere was taken as a stopgap arrangement to engage students while everyone hoped for a quick return to normality. Online education saves from the loss of the entire academic year and graduation calendar. For this, online education, mainly internet platform-based virtual classes, is turning out to be the best alternative compared to several other forms of remote learning methods like teaching through the radio or television. The internet and digital skills, the greatest new challenge, lies in developing the entire ecosystem of the teaching-learning process that is comparable to the existing face-to-face system and equally fit to validate. For this to happen, the ecosystem must be able to incorporate every stage of the administrative processes in education—admission, class delivery, examination, and the awarding of the academic degree. Moreover, most of

the universities citing logistical impossibility were late to recognise the importance of online education and explore the possibility of implementing the same. It is true that structural barriers to online education in Nepal are relatively very high. The quality of connection that can stream video, required for online classes, is limited only to urban areas. Not only students but also teachers of all levels are far short of digital skills to use widely available learning management solutions. Many higher education institutions still do not provide personalized, institution-based email accounts. Despite such adversities, Kathmandu University (KU) has managed to seamlessly operationalise the entire 'ecosystem' of online education. The other educational institutions should also get inspired from the management. The next necessary step should be a coordinated national policy on the basis of the best practices that have so far produced desirable results in higher education. In conclusion, the online education system should be recognised and implemented properly as it is effective in many ways.