

## COVID 19 in Nepal and Blended Method of Learning in Higher Education Institutions

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### BACKGROUND

The world is facing unprecedented challenges in the face of a global Coronavirus pandemic from 2019 (COVID-19) to date, killed thousands of people worldwide (World Health Organization 2020). Now, with the emergence of new, highly infectious variants of the virus in some developed countries need immediate action to shore them up and threat for the coming days.

This health crisis which was in March 2020 has impacted not only frontline staff and clinical leaders but all systems and communities. During the time, Nepal government imposed lockdown led to a total closure of teaching learning and research activities in higher education institutions, and has disrupted the nursing educational institutions also faced with unique challenges related to student's learning and clinical experiences in the hospitals and sit in final examinations. The students were removed from clinical practicums concerned with safety who were directly involved in patient care potential for transmission of deadly virus.

In such a situation the nursing academic programs were conducted via virtual link, examination were postponed and under immense pressure to switch to online virtual classes to maintain the pre-scheduled academic calendars. Online mode of education is undoubtedly an attractive method of coaching the students. The teachers participation in different webinar, workshops and faculty development enhanced the learning experiences during covid 19 towards the blended learning with dimensions of flexibility in learning via online and study management. But it has its own challenges to *conceptualize, develop, connect and deliver the courses* in the classes or at home.

The University Grants Commission, Nepal (UGC) has provided the guidelines for facilitating the alternative mode of learning for effective implementation of virtual classes. UGC has also supported the institutions which has been utilized for *up gradation of Internet capacity, official email accounts for students and teachers, training to the teachers and students on how to run and enroll in online classes and on line examinations of those programme where the student's number were few*. Besides the UGC has joined hand with Nepal telecom for the "**Happy learning pack**" for the university and institution's students for online education and video conference to subscribe the data pack with some registration requirements of the students.

### Blended Learning (BL) an alternative solution:

The above educational activities carried out by the institutions were suitable pedagogies of teaching-learning that will prove to be sustainable with the global health crises. Blended learning is one of the models proposed by various educationalists and research scholars that appears to be a viable and best fit solution for few months' post-pandemic and upcoming days.

Blended learning (BL) is an integration of face-to-face and online instruction which was widely being adopted across educational institutions in many counties. BL reduces the physical attendance in favor of video conferencing so as to create smaller groups that allow for appropriate social distancing. BL is considered as a viable model for the future of education, where the online component can be delivered through both synchronous modes and asynchronous modes, the people learn in different locations at different times. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student with some elements of student control over time, place, path, or

pace: Blended learning is also used in professional development and training settings.

Blending can also happen at three levels – at an *institutional level*, at a *programme level* and at a *course level*. Whereas those practical and skills components can only be taught face-to-face, while others can be delivered either in blended or completely online mode. Hence the face to face practical training were able to learn only when the students and teachers have their own personal protective equipment (PPE) from different sources

**Constraints of BL** for many students and teachers for learning was a challenge, especially for those living *in remote areas with little or no connectivity of internet, lack of access to online educational assessment equipment and the unwillingness of teachers to move from traditional classroom teaching method to online environments by the means of zooming, online assignments, workshops etc.*

To conclude, it is quite uncertain that how long the Covid-19 condition will continue and from where the new variant virus appears while we are focused on vaccination drive against Covid-19 with the Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India with efficacy of 63.09 percent. The new variant virus is more contagious and lethal with risk of hospitalization and death. Hence, regular testing, contact tracing and whole-genome sequencing are basic, said the experts. The preventive measures should not be given up using mask and hand hygiene. It has been realized that we all need for developing a more effective alternative learning system in this new to normal life and for future. UGC has been suggested that the concept of a common integrated data center and its implementation in coordination and collaboration of all the higher education institutions. However, will require a large amount of investment.

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