

DIGITAL LITERACY COMPETENCIES AMONG ENGLISH TEACHERS OF NEPAL: ARE THEY READY FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION?

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ABSTRACT

Nepal's educational system has been face-to-face since the beginning of the formal schooling system. However, this mode of delivery was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to its outbreak, the government suspended the traditional classroom teaching system, encouraging the use of online teaching. English teachers need digital literacy skills for them to deliver online teaching effectively. Considering this situation, this study aimed to survey the digital literacy skills of the secondary school level English teachers of Nepal with the objective of checking their preparedness for online delivery of contents. An online questionnaire was designed using Google docs and distributed among English teachers via emails and messengers. This study found that secondary school level English teachers are ready for online mode of teaching and possess necessary digital literacy skills for online delivery.

Keywords: *EFL teachers, COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face teaching, technological knowledge, digital devices*

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected almost all aspects of life across the world and resulted physical distancing, mental stress, travel restrictions, unemployment, restricted services, suspension of face-to-face classes (Aliyyah et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020). This crisis has also brought a huge challenge to education systems worldwide, forcing many governments to order educational institutions to suspend classes and recommending them to shift to online platforms to facilitate distance learning (Daniel, 2020). The global spread of COVID-19 has caused the suspensions of face-to-face classes requiring online teaching and learning (Moorhouse, 2020). The fear of spread of coronavirus among students and teachers was the main reason for school closures. The main idea behind that was that social distancing can slow down the transmission of virus in schools and communities by breaking the chain of contamination (Abdulmir & Hafidh, 2020; Uscher-Pines et al., 2018). In this context, Dhawan (2020) argues that online learning can be a panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis.

As is the case in other education disciplines, the COVID-19 pandemic also forced English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers to go for online teaching as an alternative to previously used face-to-face classroom teaching. Many EFL teachers rarely used online mode of instruction before COVID-19, since the traditional

face to face methods were quite effective (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Having digital literacy is an essential prerequisite in online teaching contexts. There has been a growing interest in the use of communication and information technology (ICT) in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning context due to the widespread application of computers and technology in education (Dashtestani & Hojatpanah, 2020). Proper knowledge about computers and their applications enable EFL teachers and students to enhanced language teaching and learning (Azmi, 2017; Hsu, 2016). Therefore, EFL teachers and learners first need computer literacy for the successful use of online teaching and learning. Son et al. (2011) define computer literacy as “the development of knowledge and skills for using general computer applications, language-specific software programmes, and Internet tools confidently and competently” (p. 27) in relation to language teacher education. In the twenty-first century, computer skills are as important as language skills to both the teachers and learners for effective online teaching and learning. Computer literacy leads to acquiring digital literacy, which is defined as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills” (Digital Literacy Task Force, 2013, p. 2). Online teaching can be purposeful and effective when EFL teachers have digital literacy skills along with its proper application in teaching. The necessity of developing digital literacy has come abruptly due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 across the world. Since face-to-face teaching is not possible during the pandemic and since classes cannot be suspended for long locking learners at home, it is a must that EFL teachers acquire the skills of digital literacy so that distance mode of teaching can be conducted as the government has recommended for the same.

The Study Context

Nepal’s educational system has been traditional with face-to-face teaching and learning since the formal schooling system (Pangeni, 2016).. Only the highly infrastructured private schools in urban areas adopt Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to some extent only. The government-aided public schools rarely adopt CALL due to the lack of computer-based facilities and the lack of computer literacy in most teachers. However, COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the face-to-face classroom teaching and learning environment around the world including Nepal. Due to lockdown and the spread of COVID-19, the government of Nepal has totally stopped the traditional classroom teaching, and as an alternative, encouraged online teaching. In this context, most of the schools in urban areas have started online teaching for especially for those students who have internet access and other technological devices such as computers. However, for the students from remote rural areas, online teaching and learning has still remained a dream.

Many school courses including those for EFL had been designed for face-to-face mode of instruction hence EFL teachers need to adapt them for online learning. However, are the teachers ready for online mode of teaching? In this research, I examined the Nepalese EFL teachers’ digital literacy skills, which could be helpful to shift to online instruction. Due to the suspension of traditional face-to-face classroom instruction in schools, the courses had to be delivered through online mode exclusively. The success and effectiveness of this mode of delivery depends on the EFL teachers’ digital literacy skills and their proper utilisation. This study therefore aims to examine EFL teachers’ digital literacy competency levels as well as their preparedness for online teaching in the context of Nepal, especially during COVID-19. This study can be quite significant for EFL teachers to be prepared for online teaching as an alternative to traditional face-to-face classroom teaching. Nonetheless, technological knowledge has become a prerequisite for EFL teachers in the twenty-first century teacher knowledge along with pedagogical and content knowledge as depicted by the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) model of Mishra and Koehler (2006). This study surveyed EFL teachers from school levels who had computer application skills, internet access and facilities, as data was collected through online system.

There has been a number of research studies in digital literacy skills of English language teachers around the world. To review some, Son et al. (2011) reviewed the skills of Indonesian English language teachers and found that their frequency of using computer applications in the classroom was very limited despite the fact that they showed positive attitudes towards CALL. Mudra (2020) studied the benefits and

barriers of digital literacy through the EFL teachers and learners' perspectives, and found that there were both benefits and barriers of digital literacy for young learners in learning English. Similarly, Dashtestani and Hojatpanah (2020) studied digital literacy of EFL students in a junior high school in Iran and found that they had a low to moderate level of digital literacy. Moreover, various studies have been conducted on teachers' perceptions of literacy and use of technology in classroom practice (Lawrence & Calhoun, 2013), teachers' perceptions about the use of computers in EFL teaching and learning (Aydin, 2013), EFL teachers' use of the Internet in teaching language (Chen, 2008), perceptions of the level of digital literacy (Çam & Kiyici, 2017).

The crisis that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for readiness of EFL teachers to shift to online teaching for the continuation of the education system. The case study conducted by Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) in a private school in Georgia about the implementation for online education confirmed that the quick transition to the online form of education was successful. Atmojo and Nugroho's (2020) study in Indonesia showed that the online learning did not run well due to the lack of preparation and planning of it. Most of the studied have been on other issues rather than digital literacy such as language teachers' coping strategies during the COVID-19 shifting to online teaching (MacIntyre et al., 2020), perceptions of school teachers of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aliyyah et al., 2020), teaching activities and challenges during COVID-19 pandemic (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020), university students' readiness for online learning (Chung et al., 2020). As these studies show, little research has been done on digital literacy skills of the EFL teachers in the world. Although a few studies have been conducted on the use of ICT in relation to teaching language in Nepal (Acharya, 2014; Rana et al., 2018; Thapaliya, 2014), there have been no research on the issue of school level EFL teachers' digital literacy in Nepal. This study is therefore an attempt to fill this gap.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Model

This study was set out to examine the school level EFL teachers' digital literacy in Nepal and find out whether they were ready for online teaching. To achieve this objective, the study employed a quantitative survey research design. The survey tool was adapted from questionnaires created by Son et al. (2011), and Cote and Milliner (2018) making it suitable to examine the Nepalese school level EFL teachers' digital literacy which would help them to be ready for online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and other such crises (see Appendix).

Participants

All the English teachers teaching at secondary level were the target population for this study. However, a total of 426 Nepalese EFL teachers participated in the study. They were distributed a questionnaire via Google Docs form in order to collect data during the first lock down period in Nepal.

The total number of participants was 426 EFL teachers teaching in different schools in Nepal from primary to secondary levels. In terms of sex, 336 participants were males while 90 were females. In terms of age groups, 239 were below 35 years of age while 13 participants were above 50. Regarding provinces, the majority of the participants were from Bagmati Province (N = 117). Regarding their degree, the majority of the participants (N = 322) were master's degree holders and 20 were M.Phil./PhD holders. None of the participants was undergraduates. Similarly, in terms of years of experience, 82 participants had less than five years of experience and 36 participants had more than twenty years of experience. In relation to working area, 227 participants were from rural areas whereas 119 from urban areas. The majority of the participants (N = 222) were permanent employees, working in the government sector (N = 319). This demographic information can be shown in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant Profile (N = 426)

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage %
Sex	Male	336	79%
	Female	90	21%
Age	below 35 years	239	56%
	35-40 years	111	26%
	41-45 years	41	10%
	46-50 years	22	5%
	above 50 years	13	3%
Province	Province 1	40	9%
	Province 2	26	6%
	Bagmati	117	27%
	Gandaki	28	7%
	Province 5	58	14%
	Karnali	45	11%
	Far Western	112	26%
Academic qualification	Plus two/Intermediate/PCL	0	0%
	Bachelor's	83	19%
	Master's	322	76%
	M.Phil./PhD	20	5%
Teaching experience	Less than five years	82	19%
	5-10 years	155	36%
	11-15 years	113	27%
	16-20 years	40	9%
Working area	More than 20 years	36	9%
	Urban	199	47%
	Rural	227	53%
Employment status	Permanent	222	52%
	Temporary	185	43%
	Part time	19	5%
Employment sector	Government	319	75%
	Private	107	25%

Data Collection Tool and Analysis Procedure

The survey questionnaire was administered via Google Docs between September 2 to 23, 2020. The survey was shared through personal email contacts and via social media networks asking the respondents to forward it to other school level EFL teachers they had known. After three weeks in the field, the web survey received 426 responses from all the seven provinces of Nepal. Data collected in this way was analysed in terms of the simple statistical method of percentage.

FINDINGS

This study aimed at examining the digital literacy of the Nepalese school level EFL teachers. The following sections present the results of the study collected through online survey system using Google Docs in terms of themes with statistical percentage.

Ownership of Digital Devices

All respondents have digital devices. As evidenced in Table 2, the majority of the teachers own a smartphone (70%). A high percentage possesses laptop (68%). Only 16 teachers own other devices.

Table 2. Digital Device Ownership (N = 424)

Device	Number	Percentage %
Desktop computer	79	19%
Laptop	289	68%
Tablet	39	9%
Smartphone	295	70%
Others	16	4%

Computer Skills of the EFL Teachers

EFL teachers were asked whether they could perform the tasks related to digital skills. Overall, they were very confident at completing the computer-related tasks. However, the tasks that involved installing a software programme, resizing photographs, and recording and editing sounds had the highest number of 'No' responses although they were below 50%.

Table 3. Computer Skill Related Questions

Questions	Yes %	No%
1. Can you properly turn on and shutdown a computer?	99%	1%
2. Can you start and exit a computer programme?	98%	2%
3. Can you scan a disk or file for viruses?	84%	16%
4. Can you create a basic Microsoft Word document?	92%	8%
5. Can you send and receive attachments through email messages?	97%	3%
6. Can you move a file from a hard drive to a USB drive?	92%	8%
7. Can you download and save files from the web?	97%	3%
8. Can you change the font style and size in a document?	94%	6%
9. Can you copy, cut and paste inside a document?	96%	4%
10. Can you make slides for presentation using PowerPoint?	88%	12%
11. Can you search for information using a web search engine?	94%	6%
12. Can you change monitor brightness and contrast?	89%	11%
13. Can you minimise, maximise and move windows on the desktop?	90%	10%
14. Can you perform file management including deleting and renaming files, etc.?	91%	9%
15. Can you install a software programme?	73%	27%
16. Can you write files onto a pendrive/CD?	82%	18%
17. Can you resize a photograph?	66%	34%
18. Can you use a video conferencing tool on the web?	79%	21%
19. Can you record and edit sounds?	64%	36%
20. Do you understand the basic functions of computer hardware components? (e.g. keyboard, CPU, hard disk)	92%	8%

Regarding level of digital skills on a scale of one to four, EFL teachers were asked to rate their digital skills and its application (Table 4). The majority of the participants rated that their computer literacy, digital literacy and typing skills as adequate and good.

Table 4. EFL teachers' Self-Assessment of Digital Skills

What is your level of digital skills and its application?	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Adequate (2)	Poor (1)
Computer literacy	12%	57%	30%	1%
Digital literacy	8%	54%	36%	2%
Current typing skills	14%	48%	37%	1%

When asked to rate their level of knowledge about the use of computer/digital skills, many EFL teachers self-assessed themselves to have basic or intermediate skills (Table 5). Only a few had lower application skills while some were advanced.

Table 5. Level of Knowledge about the Use of Digital Skills

How would you rate your knowledge about the use of computer/digital skills?	None (1)	Basic (2)	Intermediate (3)	Advanced (4)
Word processing	3%	51%	33%	13%
Internet	1%	42%	40%	17%
Email	2%	38%	38%	22%
Presentation applications	8%	42%	37%	13%
Web search engines	7%	43%	34%	16%
Downloading and installing programmes	5%	40%	36%	19%
Online presentation and discussion	8%	42%	36%	14%
Online chat	1%	32%	39%	28%
Multimedia applications	6%	46%	34%	14%

Table 6 summarises EFL teachers' responses to the question *Who taught you how to use a computer in the first place?* Although they learned from a range of sources, the majority of them learned from formal training (41%). Informal self-learning seems to be typical as 34% respondents recognised learning by themselves.

Table 6. Learning Source (N = 426)

Who taught you how to use a computer in the first place?	Number	Percentage %
Trainer/Teacher	176	41%
Family	20	5%
Books	2	1%
Colleagues	24	6%
Friends	36	8%
YouTube videos	21	5%
Self/Yourself	147	34%

EFL Teachers' Readiness for Online Teaching

EFL teachers need access to the Internet along with a digital device. Table 7 reflects that the majority of the respondents have computers/laptop to facilitate online teaching with their email accounts and the Internet access.

Table 7. Computer Access and Usage Related Questions

Question	Yes %	No %
10. Do you have a personal computer or a laptop to facilitate online teaching?	80%	20%
15. Do you have an email account?	99%	1%
17. Do you have a computer/laptop with an access to the Internet at home?	75%	25%

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled schools to implement online teaching as far as possible. On the question on whether schools had made provisions for online learning, the majority of the respondents (54%) responded that their schools had not made any provision for online teaching (Table 8). Although 78% participants responded that they were not involved in online teaching before this pandemic, they have been involved in it at this period. Most of the EFL teachers in Nepal think that online teaching is not a burden for them.

Table 8. Online Teaching Related Questions

Question	Yes %	No %
16. Has your school made the provision for online teaching?	46%	54%
18. Are you involved in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic period?	62%	38%
23. Were you involved in online teaching before COVID-19?	78%	22%
26. Do you think online teaching is a burden for the EFL teachers?	17%	83%

When asked whether the EFL teachers were ready or not for online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic and other such crises, most of the respondents (88%) replied 'Yes' (Table 9).

Table 9. EFL Teachers' Readiness for Online Teaching

Question	Yes %	Maybe %	No %
19. Are you ready for online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic and other such crises?	88%	11%	1%

EFL Teachers' Involvement in Online Teaching

Regarding the use of a digital device for online teaching, EFL teachers have one or more devices as Table 10 shows. The majority of them (68%) use laptop.

Table 10. Digital Device Used for Online Teaching

Which device do you use for online teaching?	Number	Percentage %
Desktop computer	41	10%
Laptop	286	68%
Smartphone	259	61%
None	16	4%

In response to the question *What type of communication tool do you use in online teaching activities?*, the majority of EFL teachers responded that they use Zoom (91%) although they also use other tools (Table 11).

Table 11. *Communication Tool Used In Online Teaching*

What type of communication tool do you use in online teaching activities?	Number	Percentage %
Zoom	382	91%
Microsoft Teams	92	22%
Google Meet	150	36%
Messenger	190	45%
Other	16	3%

Online Teaching in Nepal

Regarding the necessity of online teaching in Nepal, the majority of the respondents replied that it is the demand of the digital age (65%) while some of them had mixed responses (Table 12). In relation to the future of online teaching system in Nepal, most of them (76%) responded that it was just an alternative to continue the education system during pandemic or similar crises although some responded both options (Table 13).

Table 12. *Necessity of Online Teaching In Nepal*

What do you think about online teaching in Nepal?	Number	Percentage %
Necessity	149	35%
Compulsion	82	19%
Demand of the digital age	275	65%

Table 13. *Future of Online Teaching System In Nepal*

What do you think about the use of online teaching system in Nepal?	Number	Percentage %
Replacement of the traditional face-to-face classroom teaching	127	30%
Just an alternative to continue the education system during pandemic or similar crises	323	76%

The majority of the respondents doubt (49%) whether online teaching can be relevant and effective in the context of Nepal (Table 14).

Table 14. *Effectiveness of Online Teaching In Nepal*

Question	Yes %	Maybe %	No %
28. Can online teaching be relevant and effective in the context of Nepal?	33%	49%	18%

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that school level EFL teachers in Nepal possess adequate digital literacy skills for online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic and other such crises. They have prepared themselves and are ready for online mode of instruction. One interesting thing is that 53% respondents were from rural areas of Nepal. Most of them possess laptop and/or smartphone as the digital devices useful for online delivery. They have good computer skills with the basic application of tools. Although most of them took training to learn computer skills, some of them self-learned during lockdown and pandemic periods.

EFL teachers in Nepal are ready for online mode of teaching if they have digital devices and the Internet access although they were not involved in online teaching before COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic made them ready for online instruction and they got trained during the lock down period making them mentally and technologically ready for online delivery of contents. However, most of them reported that their schools had not made any provision for online teaching. It might be the weakness of the school management system and administration while some schools have started online instruction in the areas where there is access to the Internet with the facility of electricity and digital devices for learning.

Those EFL teachers who were involved in online delivery of content mostly used Zoom as a communication tool for teaching-learning activities, while some used messenger. Teachers have mixed opinions regarding the necessity of online teaching system in Nepal, most of them responding that it is the

demand of the digital age in the 21st century. Since Nepal has been adopting the traditional face-to-face mode of teaching, online mode can just be an alternative to continue the education system during pandemic or similar crises as responded by the majority of the participants.

The majority of them had doubt that online mode could be relevant and effective in the context of Nepal. Their doubt is as expected because Nepal is a country with mountain, hill and plain areas, where there is still no access of electricity, telephone network and the Internet in most of the remote and rural regions.

This study had some limitations, too. Firstly, data was collected through snowball sampling, which could not be as representative as it should have been so as to cover the target population. Secondly, responses were received only from those EFL teachers who had access to the Internet and who were younger (56%), below 25 years of age groups. Thirdly, as this questionnaire adopted a digital Google Docs format for the survey inviting teachers to respond via email and Google form mode, it required them some degree of digital literacy to respond and submit the questionnaire.

CONCLUSION

This study has surveyed the Nepalese EFL teachers' digital literacy skills necessary for online teaching at school level education. Due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, face-to-face classes have been suspended, compelling teachers to be prepared for online mode of teaching. As online instruction requires the basic computer skills and digital knowledge, EFL teachers have to prepare themselves with these skills so that face-to-face classes can be run through distance mode of teaching using the technology.

This study found that majority of the school level English teachers had prepared themselves for online instruction with necessary technological skills. They were ready for online mode of instruction although most of the schools had no provision for this mode of teaching. It is essential that school administration should make a provision for online mode of teaching until the corona virus pandemic is controlled. Schools cannot be closed and teaching learning activities cannot be suspended for long affecting children's learning.

The implication of this study is that all the teachers in general and English teachers in particular need to be prepared with digital literacy and skills for the online mode of teaching. Their readiness for online teaching can open the door for running teaching-learning activities, compelling the government and the schools go to this mode of instruction with necessary infrastructures and management. The effectiveness of online teaching in rural Nepal can be a further direction of research.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Secondary Level English Teachers

Dear Sir/Madam,

This survey questionnaire has been prepared in order to accomplish a research work entitled "Digital literacy competencies among English teachers of Nepal: Are they ready for online instruction?". I would like to request you to participate in the study by responding to this questionnaire. I would like to assure you that the information provided in this study will exclusively be used for this research purpose and nothing else. Please answer all questions as accurately as you can.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this research!

Researcher

A. Demographic Information

1. Sex

- a. Male b. Female

2. Age

- a. below 35 years b. 35-40 years c. 41-45 years d. 46-50 years e. Above 50 years

3. Province

- a. Province 1 b. Province 1 c. Bagmati d. Gandaki e. Province 5
- f. Karnali g. Far West

4. Academic qualification

- a. Plus two/Intermediate/PCL b. Bachelor c. Master's d. M.Phil./PhD

5. Teaching experience

- a. Less than five years b. 5-10 years c. 11-15 years d. 16-20 years e. More than 20 years

6. Working area

- a. Urban b. Rural

7. Employment status

- a. Permanent b. Temporary c. Part time

8. Employment sector

- a. Government b. Private

B. Digital literacy related questionnaire

9. Which digital device do you have?

- a. Desktop computer b. Laptop c. Tablet d. Smartphone

10. Do you have a personal computer or a laptop to facilitate online teaching?

- a. Yes b. No

11. Please respond to each of the following computer-related questions by ticking in the right box.

Question	Yes	No
Can you properly turn on and shutdown a computer?		
Can you start and exit a computer programme?		
Can you scan a disk or file for viruses?		
Can you create a basic Microsoft Word document?		
Can you send and receive attachments through email messages?		
Can you move a file from a hard drive to a USB drive?		
Can you download and save files from the web?		
Can you change the font style and size in a document?		
Can you copy, cut and paste inside a document?		
Can you make slides for presentation using PowerPoint?		
Can you search for information using a web search engine?		
Can you change monitor brightness and contrast?		

- Can you minimise, maximise and move windows on the desktop?
- Can you perform file management including deleting and renaming files, etc.?
- Can you install a software programme?
- Can you write files onto a pendrive/CD?
- Can you resize a photograph?
- Can you use a video conferencing tool on the web?
- Can you record and edit sounds?
- Do you understand the basic functions of computer hardware components? (e.g. keyboard, CPU, hard disk)

12. What is your level of digital skills and its application?

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
Computer literacy				
Digital literacy				
Current typing skills				

13. How would you rate your knowledge about the use of computer/digital skills?

Please click in the box at the appropriate spot: 'None', 'Basic', 'Intermediate' or 'Advanced'.

	None	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
Word processing				
Internet				
E-mail				
Presentation applications				
Web search engines				
Downloading and installing programmes				
Online presentation and discussion				
Online chat				
Multimedia applications				

14. Who taught you how to use a computer in the first place?

- a. Trainer/Teacher
- b. Family
- c. Books
- d. Colleagues
- e. Friends
- f. YouTube videos
- g. Self/Yourself

15. Do you have an email account?

- a. Yes b. No

16. Has your school made the provision for online teaching?

- a. Yes b. No

17. Do you have a computer/laptop with an access to the Internet at home?

- a. Yes b. No

18. Are you involved in online teaching at this pandemic period?

- a. Yes b. No

19. Are you ready for online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic and other such crises?

- a. Yes b. No c. Maybe

20. Which device do you use for online teaching?

- a. Desktop computer b. Laptop c. Smartphone d. None

21. What type of communication tool do you use in online teaching activities?

- a. Zoom b. Microsoft Teams c. Google Meet d. Messenger e. Other.....

22. Were you involved in online teaching before COVID-19?

- a. Yes b. No

23. What do you think about online teaching in Nepal?

a. Necessity b. Compulsion c. Demand of the digital age

24. Do you think online teaching is a burden for the EFL teachers?

a. Yes b. No

25. What do you think about the use of online teaching system in Nepal?

a. replacement of the traditional face-to-face classroom teaching

b. just an alternative to continue the education system during pandemic or similar crises

26. Can online teaching be relevant and effective in the context of Nepal?

a. Yes b. No c. Maybe