

POST-COVID CONTEXT OF PEDAGOGY: EXPERIENCES OF PRIVATE
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN KATHMANDU

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Raju Rai* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership*, presented on 14 January 2026 entitled *Post-COVID Context of Pedagogy: Experiences of Private School Principals in Kathmandu*.

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Facing and experiencing the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic emerged the idea for the research topic “Post-Covid Context of Pedagogy: Experiences of Private School Principals in Kathmandu” as a working principal in a private school in Kathmandu. The pandemic disrupted traditional pedagogical practices, forcing schools to adopt online virtual teaching methods. The purpose of the study was to explore the private school principal’s experiences in creating a physically and psychologically conducive learning environment in the post-COVID-19 context. Using a narrative inquiry and adopting an interpretative paradigm, this research captures the lived experiences of four school principals, revealing how they have managed issues related to educational continuity, excelling ICT skills to teachers, and students’ readiness in online virtual classes through the participants’ narratives.

Through the lens of instructional leadership theory resilience theory, the study explores how principals facilitated the transition from traditional physical classrooms to virtual online and again in-person physical classes by equipping teachers with ICT skills and managing limited technological resources. It also highlights the adaptability of school principals in overcoming crises, addressing psychological readiness among students, and maintaining a conducive learning environment despite unprecedented disruptions in the perspective of resilience theory.

An abrupt shift from physical classrooms to online virtual classrooms during COVID-19 created chaos for private school principals to manage and lead their

schools. This transition made them educate themselves and train teachers to create ICT competency to run online virtual classes. It also affected the financial stability of private schools which caused them to adopt financial zoning of staff like partial salaries and cost reduction strategies. Though the private school principals adopted creative approaches to continue and maintain educational quality, parents claimed that the learning achievement by the students remained lesser than before the pandemic.

Similarly, the study highlighted inequities in access to technology like digital devices, uninterrupted internet, and continuous supply of electricity, which had played a crucial role in continuing education in emergency learning.

The finding further adds that principals faced a significant challenge in reopening schools after the COVID-19 pandemic to create a conducive learning environment. At first, students and parents were worried about the health protocols and procedures for the physical classes. Additionally, students were hyperactive and less attentive, which affected their learning, and the reason behind this was prolonged online virtual classes. Teachers also struggled to maintain classroom discipline as previously they did before the pandemic. Management of safety protocols to run schools was financially cost-bearing for the private schools. However, they need to be transformative and a change agent as per the time and context, like the COVID-19 pandemic, which has emphasized the need for hybrid approaches, combining online and offline learning to maximize flexibility and preparedness for future disruptions.

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14 January 2026

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शोधसार

शैक्षिक नेतृत्वमा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर उपाधिका लागि राजु राईको शोधप्रबन्धको शीर्षक “कोभिड-१९ पछिको शैक्षणिक पद्धतिको सन्दर्भ: काठमाडौंका निजी विद्यालयका प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको अनुभव” ३० पुष २०८२ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो

.....
सह प्रा. शेषकान्त पंगेनी, पीएचडी
शोध निर्देशक

काठमाडौंस्थित एक निजी विद्यालयमा कार्यरत प्रधानाध्यापकका रूपमा कोभिड-१९ महामारीले सिर्जना गरेका चुनौतीहरूको प्रत्यक्ष सामना तथा अनुभव गर्दै जाँदा “कोभिड-१९ पछिको शैक्षणिक पद्धतिको सन्दर्भ: काठमाडौंका निजी विद्यालयका प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको अनुभव” भन्ने अनुसन्धान विषयको अवधारणा विकसित भएको हो। महामारीले परम्परागत शिक्षणसिकाइ अभ्यासलाई अवरुद्ध गर्दै विद्यालयहरूलाई अनलाइन भर्चुअल शिक्षण पद्धति अपनाउन बाध्य बनायो। यस अध्ययनको उद्देश्य कोभिड-१९ पछिको सन्दर्भमा निजी विद्यालयका प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले शारीरिक तथा मनोवैज्ञानिक रूपमा अनुकूल सिकाइ वातावरण निर्माण गर्ने क्रममा प्राप्त गरेका अनुभवहरूको अन्वेषण गर्नु थियो। संकथन विधि तथा व्याख्यात्मक प्रतिमान (interpretative paradigm) अवलम्बन गरिएको यस अध्ययनले चार जना विद्यालय प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको जीवित अनुभवहरूलाई समेटेको छ। सहभागीहरूको कथनमार्फत शैक्षिक निरन्तरता कायम गर्ने प्रयास, शिक्षकहरूमा सूचना तथा सञ्चार प्रविधि सीप अभिवृद्धि गर्ने प्रक्रिया तथा अनलाइन भर्चुअल कक्षाका लागि विद्यार्थीहरूको तयारीसम्बन्धी विषयहरू उजागर गरिएका छन्।

निर्देशनात्मक नेतृत्व सिद्धान्त (Instructional Leadership Theory) तथा प्रत्यास्थता सिद्धान्त (Resilience Theory) को सैद्धान्तिक दृष्टिकोणमार्फत यस अध्ययनले प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले शिक्षकहरूलाई सूचना तथा सञ्चार प्रविधिसम्बन्धी सीप प्रदान गर्दै तथा सीमित प्राविधिक स्रोतसाधन व्यवस्थापन गर्दै परम्परागत भौतिक कक्षाकोठाबाट अनलाइन भर्चुअल शिक्षणतर्फ र पुनः प्रत्यक्ष भौतिक कक्षामा संक्रमणलाई कसरी सहजीकरण गरे भन्ने विषयको विश्लेषण गरेको छ। साथै, यसले संकट व्यवस्थापन, विद्यार्थीहरूको मनोवैज्ञानिक तयारी सम्बोधन तथा अभूतपूर्व अवरोधहरूको बीचमा पनि अनुकूल सिकाइ वातावरण कायम राख्न विद्यालय प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले प्रदर्शन गरेको अनुकूलन क्षमता र प्रत्यास्थतालाई पनि प्रकाशमा ल्याएको छ।

कोभिड-१९ को अवधिमा भौतिक कक्षाकोठाबाट अनलाइन भर्चुअल कक्षाकोठातर्फ भएको आकस्मिक परिवर्तनले निजी विद्यालयका प्रधानाध्यापकहरूलाई विद्यालय सञ्चालन तथा नेतृत्व

व्यवस्थापनमा जटिल अवस्था सिर्जना गर्‍यो। यस संक्रमणले उनीहरूलाई स्वयं प्रविधिमैत्री बन्न तथा शिक्षकहरूलाई अनलाइन कक्षा सञ्चालनका लागि आवश्यक सूचना तथा सञ्चार प्रविधि दक्षता प्रदान गर्न प्रेरित गर्‍यो। यसले निजी विद्यालयहरूको आर्थिक स्थायित्वमा समेत नकारात्मक प्रभाव पारेको थियो, जसका कारण उनीहरूले आंशिक तलब वितरण तथा खर्च कटौतीजस्ता वित्तीय व्यवस्थापनका उपायहरू अवलम्बन गर्नुपरेको थियो। निजी विद्यालयका प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले शैक्षिक गुणस्तर कायम राख्न सिर्जनात्मक उपायहरू अपनाए तापनि अभिभावकहरूले विद्यार्थीहरूको सिकाइ उपलब्धि महामारीपूर्व अवस्थाको तुलनामा कमजोर रहेको दाबी गरेका थिए।

त्यसैगरी, अध्ययनले डिजिटल उपकरणहरूको अभाव, अविरल इन्टरनेट पहुँचको कमी तथा विद्युत् आपूर्तिको अस्थिरताजस्ता प्रविधिमा पहुँचसम्बन्धी असमानताहरूले आपत्कालीन शिक्षण प्रक्रियालाई निरन्तरता दिन महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका खेलेको देखाएको छ। अध्ययनका निष्कर्षहरूले कोभिड-१९ महामारीपश्चात विद्यालय पुनः सञ्चालन गरी अनुकूल सिकाइ वातावरण निर्माण गर्नु प्रधानाध्यापकहरूका लागि ठूलो चुनौती बनेको पनि देखाएका छन्। प्रारम्भिक चरणमा विद्यार्थी तथा अभिभावकहरू भौतिक कक्षासँग सम्बन्धित स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा मापदण्ड तथा प्रक्रियाप्रति चिन्तित थिए। साथै, लामो समयसम्म अनलाइन कक्षामा सहभागी भएका कारण विद्यार्थीहरू अत्यधिक सक्रिय तथा कम ध्यान केन्द्रित गर्ने भएका थिए, जसले उनीहरूको सिकाइ प्रक्रियामा प्रभाव पारेको थियो। शिक्षकहरूलाई पनि महामारीपूर्व जस्तो कक्षाकोठीय अनुशासन कायम राख्न कठिनाई भएको देखियो। विद्यालय सञ्चालनका लागि आवश्यक सुरक्षा प्रोटोकलहरूको व्यवस्थापन निजी विद्यालयहरूका लागि आर्थिक रूपमा थप बोझपूर्ण थियो। तथापि, समय र सन्दर्भअनुसार, विशेषतः कोभिड-१९ महामारीजस्ता परिस्थितिमा, विद्यालय नेतृत्व परिवर्तनकारी तथा परिवर्तनका संवाहक बन्नुपर्ने आवश्यकता अध्ययनले औँल्याएको छ। भविष्यमा सम्भावित अवरोधहरूको तयारी तथा लचकता अभिवृद्धिका लागि अनलाइन र प्रत्यक्ष सिकाइलाई संयोजन गर्ने मिश्रित शिक्षण पद्धतिहरूको आवश्यकता पनि यस अध्ययनले विशेष रूपमा जोड दिएको छ।

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राजु राई
उपाधि उम्मेदवार

३० पुष २०८२

This dissertation entitled *Post-Covid Context of Pedagogy: Experiences of Private School Principals in Kathmandu* was presented by *Raju Rai* on 14 January 2026.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my wife and my Gurus of
KUSOED.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEHRD	Center for Education and Human Resources Development
DoE	Deartment of Education
GoN	Government of Nepal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MWU	Mid-Western University
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PABSON	Private and Boarding Schools' Organization, Nepal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter opens with a personal anecdote, providing context of my experiences. It is an overview of the scene setting, the problem statement, the study's purpose, and the research question. Furthermore, it explains the rationale for conducting the study and defines its scope, boundaries, and limitations.

Setting the Scene

More than two decades ago, I was a social studies teacher in a private school in Kathmandu, I had the opportunity to work with a colleague who shared his idea of establishing and running a private school. Since then, I have been in the role of founding principal. My daily responsibilities are developing and supporting teachers, creating a physically and psychologically conducive learning environment, managing and allocating resources, and establishing effective policies and systems for running a school smoothly. I am collaborating extensively with students, parents, teachers, and other school community members. During this time, the experience I had throughout COVID-19 running school remained remarkable in terms of creating a conducive learning environment for the students and developing teachers to cope with the situation and continue learning in the school.

An outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 from the Chinese city of Wuhan turned the entire world into chaos. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 as pandemic. This has substantially impacted education sector globally especially in school level.

In Nepal, particularly among private schools, the pandemic radically reshaped the traditional teaching and learning process. The majority of the private schools, especially the urban schools, adapted the change through the use of virtual learning platforms, but disparities in technological resources and access to the internet created barriers for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020) claims that the temporary school closures disrupted by the COVID-19 impacted nearly nine million school children in Nepal. The situation was unforeseen and unpredictable, posing complexity to the principals of the private schools. It has

resulted in unprecedented educational disruptions that led to the shift from physical face-to-face classes to digital online classes.

Running schools during COVID-19 was a new, challenging, and complex experience for every school principals. Though, online virtual classes for school children have also become one of the alternative modes of continuing education in urban and cities where internet connectivity and devcies for online virtual classes were available. Amid the uncertainty and complexity, private schools in Kathmandu started running online virtual classes through Zoom, Google Meet, and Teams.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the private schools initiated online virtual classes and charged fees to students. However, parents had their reservation on online virtual class. They claimed that it was less effective than a physical class. Some of the parents were not happy to pay school fees which was charged during the lockdown.

Google Meet, Zoom, and Teams became reliable tools for connecting virtually with students, parents, and teachers. Training and upgrading teachers for online virtual teaching were the initial challenges for every principal. The teachers were not digitally efficient and sufficiently equipped with devices and the internet. Assessing the accessibility of parents to the online virtual class and the affordability of supporting infrastructure such as laptops, desktops, or smartphones for their children were equally important for continuing education. The majority of the parent in our school were willing to start and continue virtual classes for their children.

Apart from the role of instructional leadership, I have experienced the role of the principal as a financial manager as well because of being a founder principal. Most private school principals have a financial stake in their schools as a founder or shareholder who expects a return on their investment. Similar to various aspects of social life, the COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the financial management of private schools. Salaries of the teaching and non-teaching members, house rent, bank installments, taxes, insurance premiums, and other overhead expenses were significant liabilities during the time, which had to be addressed by private school principals sooner or later. On the other hand, the student fees have been waived for a month, which has impacted the financial management of the schools. Though the government has compensation schemes for COVID-19 pandemic-affected industries, there was no specific policy for the private schools to survive and recover; instead, discounts and waivers, so virtual class fees were the issues throughout the academic

year during the COVID-19 pandemic. From its inception, parents' support and trust have been vital for private schools to run well. According to Caddell (2005), private schools in Nepal are popular due to higher student pass rates in national exams, consistent teacher attendance, and a smaller teacher-student ratio.

The framework of school reopening eased the situation and announced the academic year from June 2020, which has become a guideline for all schools in Nepal (MoEST, 2020). Despite the difficulties, COVID-19 quickly created opportunities to learn about online virtual classes, online AI tools, and applications to run schools.

Availability of the internet, digital devices like desktops, laptops, and smartphones, and continuous supply of electricity were mandatory for running online virtual classes, which were not available all over the country. According to Pandit (2020), only thirteen percent of schools might be able to run online classes in our country, creating a digital divide among school children. Private schools running in urban and cities started to run online classes during the COVID-19 as an alternative to educating children.

Post-COVID-19 Context of Pedagogy in Private Schools

The COVID-19 pandemic has global effect and the private schools in Nepal are the most affected educational institutions because their main source of income is student fees, which was partially disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The students in private schools predominantly have a higher rate of dropouts, whether due to academic challenges, financial constraints, or a combination of both during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was no choice except to switch teaching pedagogy from traditional physical methods to virtual online mode. The virtual online classes had become mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue education; similarly, hybrid and blended learning continued in post-pandemic for providing flexibility for those willing to learn remotely due to illness, quarantine, or emergencies. Schools became compelled to follow technology-driven pedagogy, such as learning management systems, digital resources, and educational applications. The school children's learning achievement has been noted less during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategic preparedness is essential to ensuring continuity of education during emergencies; a blended mode of education continuation is relevant in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context so that the teachers and schools keep updated on the pedagogies used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

The Coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 disrupted the normal education system worldwide causing the schools closed physically. During the closure of the schools for an extended and indefinite time, private schools had more difficulties than public schools. The students' learning has been stopped formally for an uncertain time, which impacted students learning in the long run. Along with students' learning, thousands of teachers in private schools were in a great dilemma. Private school principals experienced stress concerning the timeline and methods for reopening the schools.

The government of Nepal introduced the student learning facilitation guideline to continue education in June 2020, which became a guideline for private schools to connect with parents and students. Some private schools in urban and cities had already commenced online classes before the Nepal government issued guidelines. Mainly, the private schools in urban regions shifted their physical classes into online virtual mode, which was not easy and familiar to teachers, students, and parents. It was full of challenges, such as digital literacy for teachers, continuous supply of electricity, infrastructure such as desktops, laptops, smartphones, and broadband internet for teachers and students. However, private schools forcefully shifted physical teaching to online virtual teaching. The private schools become obligated to run online classes for survival and students' learning continuation. After the closures of the schools during the uncertain time, a financial crisis started in private schools because claiming student fees was impossible without conducting classes.

The house rent, salary of the teaching staff, and bank liabilities were accumulating. On the other hand, parents were unwilling to pay their wards' fees, claiming that their children were learning less and online virtual classes less effective. Dawadi et al. (2020) reported that technologically advanced countries have implemented virtual learning to mitigate students' learning loss. Nations such as ours, which lack adequate infrastructure and internet access, faced challenges in educating school-aged children. Pandit (2020) indicates that only thirteen percent of schools in Nepal are equipped to conduct online virtual classes, which shows a significant proportion of children cannot attend school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private schools started running an alternative mode of teaching students in April 2020 in their own effort with the support of PABSON, a professional organization for private schools in Nepal. The leadership role of education authority

in times of emergency has been felt poor during the COVID-19 pandemic in private schools. They seem indecisive not only about the teaching and learning of the school children but also passive regarding the fees of the private schools, which created more dilemmas for private schools and among the parents.

Most of the parents seemed worried about their children's education being interrupted. Similarly, school principals and other school stakeholders like teachers were serious about how and when schools reopen. We could not imagine stopping educating children for a long time. The Student Facilitation Guideline 2020 compensated for the situation to continue learning at the school level. Despite the limitations, children could access their schools using different online tools to continue their education.

The private schools are established and run under the Education Act and regulation, contributing to educating almost one-fourth of the school-going children in Nepal. They are treated unequally as public schools, though the students' achievement level is better than their counterpart community schools (Ashley et al., 2014). The education authority is less likely to involve private school teachers to enhance the online virtual classes, which were a must during COVID-19 to continue education in schools. The educational authorities did not address the financial issues that were created by the pandemic in private schools in Kathmandu.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the post-COVID-19 pedagogical context of private schools in Kathmandu that aligns with instructional strategies, financial challenges, and policy implications.

Research Question

1. How do private school principals in Kathmandu narrate their experiences of pedagogical context during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in continuing education?
2. How do school principals create a conducive learning environment in a post-COVID-19 context?

Rationale of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic was not experienced earlier by any school principals in Nepal. They were not prepared for the continuation of education during the emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. They were not trained to necessary tools to lead the rapid shift from the physical classroom to the virtual online education in

the school setting. Though they were expected to continue school education making urgent decision without formal institutional or governmental support (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Poudel, 2021). The situation has created a critical need for structured capacity building programs in educational leadership in emergencies.

Many of the private school principals in Kathmandu were investors or owners of the schools, where they have to balance educational leadership with the financial survival of their schools during the extended school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The existing research has not sufficiently examined how this combined responsibility influenced their leadership decisions, priorities, and actions in times of crisis (Kumar & Bano, 2022; Parajuli & Das, 2022). There is a significant gap in understanding that how private school in Kathmandu sustained financially, and transformed pedagogically during emergencies.

Teachers working in the private schools also suffered a lot during the COVID-19 pandemic. They faced a lot of challenges such as abrupt shift of face-to-face physical class teaching to online virtual teaching brought them ICT challenges. It created uncertainty of job. On the other hand reduced and delayed salaries troubled a lot to teachers mentally and financially as well. On the other hand private school principals were facing challenges to manage the teachers, yet few studies have been made that the specific strategies they employed, such as emotional support, flexible working schedules or sharing resources to run classes (Karani et al., 2022; Poudel, 2021).

One of the key challenges was to keep up teachers' morale. And even as teachers were faced with difficult conditions, they were also coping with heavy workloads, health challenges and emotional exhaustion. However, limited empirical evidence exists on how principals supported teachers' psychological well-being or enhanced their professional commitment during this time (Cahapay, 2021). This indicates an unacknowledged place in the literature when it comes to school climate, emotional resilience and staff wellbeing against a backdrop of prolonged crises. But principals aren't only instructional leaders in Nepal's private school structure. They, too, are often owners. That makes their walks through the post-COVID-19 education field particularly relevant. The obstacles they encountered moving from face-to-face classes to virtual online, educational experiences represent promising models for future educational crisis management. How they collaborated with their teaching staff to accommodate pedagogical transitions and implement online pedagogy effectively

is a major topic of investigation for this current study. Based on the experiences and views of private school principals working in Kathmandu, this research illustrates private school principals' use of available resources and teacher training in order to meet existing needs, balancing their budget and lack of tech background to meet the demands of instruction. Therefore, the research offers concrete implications for school promoters, administrators, teachers, and policy makers that are concerned about sustaining education in times of emergencies. What emerged as these principals' lived experiences of how they reacted, adapted, and recovered are part of an overall discourse on resilient educational leadership and may provide insights for how to resolve future disruptions.

Delimitation of the Study

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, various individuals around the world have faced different experiences of opportunities and challenges. However, my study was delimited to the experiences of private school principals in Kathmandu. The discourse of their experiences was delimited to the pedagogical context and how they have created physically and psychologically conducive learning environments for pedagogical practices in the post-COVID-19 context.

The administration of pedagogical strategies in an online educational setting involves managing and implementing instructional approaches, methods, and techniques to ensure continuing education. I delimited my study to what online tools, techniques, and technologies they practiced for continuing education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study through a personal narrative and situates it within the broader impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Nepal. It highlights key leadership roles including supporting teachers, managing resources, and maintaining a conducive learning environment during the crisis. The chapter explains how the pandemic disrupted traditional schooling and forced a rapid shift to online learning. In Nepal, particularly in private schools, this transition exposed significant challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, unequal access to technology, and lack of digital skills. Financial difficulties also emerged as a major concern as schools struggled to cover operational costs while facing reduced fees collection. In the post COVID-19 context, schools adopted blended learning approaches. Additionally, chapter outlines the research problem, purpose, and

questions focusing on principal's experience on managing pedagogical and financial challenges.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I have presented a comprehensive review of various research articles and dissertations. They are organized into three key sections: thematic, theoretical, and policy reviews. 'Reviewing relevant literature is a crucial component of the research process, serving to demonstrate the author's depth of understanding within a specific field' (Randolph, 2009, p. 13). The thematic overview concentrates specifically on private schools in Nepal, educating school children during the COVID-19, and private schools at same time, as a systematic review of emerging trends and issues in education. The theoretical review of the major instructional leadership and resilience theories have been conducted in combination with the work of several researchers. At the same time, recent policies relevant to the issue are included in the review, thereby bringing some results of the most recent research into its context.

Thematic Review

A thematic review is basically a deep exploration of what different scholars and writers have already said about a particular topic. Instead of looking at every piece of literature in general, it focuses on specific themes that are directly connected to the research. In this section, I have carefully read and reflected on various research articles that relate closely to my study. The main aim of reviewing these themes were to bring together ideas and findings from different sources, such as research papers, theoretical discussions, and practical experiences to form a clear understanding of the topic. Reviewing theme helped me to build strong foundations of my research. It also ensured that my study was informed by existing knowledge and guided by what previous researchers have already explored.

Private Schools in Nepal

The Education Act of Nepal defines private schools as those schools that operate without receiving any funding from the government. Private Schools are registered in the company registrars' office and liable to pay taxes, and they are further required to allocate 10 percent of the places as scholarships for students from poor and marginalized communities (Bhatta & Pherali, 2017, p. 22). Additionally, private schools are registered under the Education Development Coordination Unit,

formerly the District Education Office, for official documents and academic records. Most private schools are established and run in urban towns and cities. Being a capital city of the country, Kathmandu has one of the highest numbers of private schools across the country. 'Within the Kathmandu Valley, around 68 percent of all schools in the Kathmandu and Lalitpur districts are private, and 66 percent of all students attend these schools' (Bhatta & Pherali, 2017, p. 16). The Education Act 2028 and the Education Regulation 2059 classify schools into three categories. They are public schools, private schools, and religious schools. 'They are financially invested, operated, and owned by individuals, and they do not get any grants from the government' (Adhikari & Dahal, 2018, p. 15). The Education Act and regulations have provisions to operate private schools where government intervention is less regarding the structure of fees as these schools are funded by the parents and the trustees (Adhikari, 2019). According to sub-rule (1) of Rule 145 of the Education Rule 2002, private schools are categorized based on physical facilities, management of teachers, number of students, academic performance of students, school budget, and school calendar. They are categorized into A, B, C, and D based on the facilities they provide. Private schools are criticized for being expensive and focused on urban areas. Lee and Smith (1997) claim that private schools have smaller classes, qualified teachers, greater parental involvement in their children's education, effective management practices, and better overall academic performance.

As per the constitution of Nepal 2015, basic and secondary education is free and compulsory; even then, there are more than six thousand private schools in Nepal. Kiteav (1999) claims that private schools came into existence due to the underperformance of public schools or the inability to fulfill parents' expectations. These schools sustain through tuition fees paid by their students. Parents pay fees in private schools because of the quality of the education they provide to their students.

Chitrakar (2007) states that the primary source of running private schools is the fees paid by the students, which often results in the problem of high fee structure during the beginning of the session every year or when fees are increased in Nepal.

The classification of schools varies according to the fees of students. According to Pokharel (2008), the classification of private schools has faced criticism for being excessively costly, turning the education sector into a commercial enterprise, and failing to be accountable to the public. In my opinion, the quality of education is a determining factor in joining a public or private school for a parent. My

experience also says that private schools' existence, survival, and future solely depend on the quality they provide to students. Figlio and Stone (2000) mentioned that private school students perform routinely well at school. They are more likely to graduate from school and attend college than their public school counterpart. In our context, the SLC/SEE graduate's pass-out rate from private schools was almost ninety percent, whereas public schools had forty percent.

School Education During the COVID-19

According to Zhao et al. (2020), in late 2019, the first case of COVID-19, also called the Novel Coronavirus was detected in Wuhan China. It later impacted the entire world by temporarily closing educational institutions. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 as a pandemic (WHO, 2020); as a result, educational institutions were closed for an extended and indefinite time. It influenced the education sector all over the world by affecting the learning of 1.6 billion children and young learners in 200 countries (UNESCO, 2020). There was a belief that school-aged children had the potential to rapidly transmit coronavirus due to their proximity and regular contact with friends in schools (Hens et al., 2009). So, Nepal was no exception. The Nepal government also declared the lock down on 24 March 2020 which continued for about six months (Basnet et al., 2021). This lockdown affected educational institutions to adopt alternative means to continue education. Due to the worldwide lockdown, education has undergone online virtual mode. Schools faced unprecedented challenges, from limited access to technology to the unpreparedness of educators for remote teaching (Dhawan, 2020). The internet has become vital for continuing to teach at the school level. According to Harris (2020), the technology-based online virtual class gave students no physical involvement or contact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nepal appears to be lacking adequate strategies to tackle the educational challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandit (2020) claims that the indefinite and long time closing of schools felt need of changes in the education system to make sure of continuity of learning, leading to a significant rise in e-learning through the internet, television, and radio. The closures of schools interrupted the learning of students and assessment as well. 'It has directly affected the teaching-learning activities of nearly 8,796,624 students belonging to pre-primary (11%), primary (28%), secondary (39%), and tertiary (5%) levels nationwide, as estimated by UNESCO' (Dawadi et al., 2020, p. 4). The nation wide lockdown affected all the

annual examinations from pre-schools to the university level. In addition, the scheduled semester examinations of many universities have been postponed.

In countries like the United States, schools were forced to close and were required to provide online learning (Singh & Thurman, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized students, worsening disparities in access to quality education which contributed widespread learning loss (U.S. Department of Education [US DoE], 2021; Dorn et al., 2021). However, school principals were not prepared for the quick turn around of transitioning from traditional physical classroom learning to online virtual learning (Brock et al., 2021). Simpson (2020) claims that online learning was not new in higher education in the US, but the schools were not equipped with the necessary resources, such as technology, to provide online classes even if technology was not an issue, school principals, as instructional leaders, were not tasked with training their teachers on how to effectively teach students in an online setting.

According to Mid-Western University (MWU) (2020), due to the lack of proper planning and clear educational guidelines for online teaching and learning, most of the schools could not run online virtual classes initially. Some private schools in urban areas started online classes to continue teaching independently without any guidelines and directives from the education authority. As stated by Pandit (2020), only thirteen percent of schools in Nepal could conduct virtual classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a digital divide among the country's students. Most urban students can access stable internet and ICT infrastructure for online classes.

According to (Manandhar & Koirala, 2021), the effectiveness of an online class is only 25% because of severe problems such as poor economic conditions and lack of different factors such as electricity, internet, learning devices, and awareness among private schools. So, the private school principals' experiences were also varied due to the stratification of parents' socio-economy and education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected teachers' economic situation as well. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in teachers in private schools is greater than those in community schools. Most private school teachers have not been paid since March, when the government-imposed lockdown and the schools were closed. More than 70% of the teachers in private schools have not received their regular salary since then. This is mainly because the financial situation of private schools is largely

dependent on students' fees. Around 50% of teachers from all the institutions said that their extra income (e.g., from checking answer sheets of national level exams and student tutoring) has been disrupted by the pandemic. In addition, the study shows that around 30% of teachers from all institutions have to spend extra money to buy electronic devices, such as laptops and mobile and around 50% of teachers have invested in internet facilities at home like Wi-Fi and data pack. (Khanal et al., 2022, p. 105)

It created a digital divide among the students and parents. Parents were not willing to pay fees of the online classes claiming that student learning achievement were very less. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has provided us an opportunity to pave the way ahead in introducing digital learning (Dhawan, 2020).

Private Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic affected more than 1.57 billion children (90% of the world-wide student population) across 190 countries due to the schools closures for the indefinite time (UNESCO, 2020). It was never been observed in human history which created emergency in education and other aspect of life. The government of Nepal decided to lock down nationwide to break spreading corona virus in March 24, 2020.

During the initial days of the lockdown, formal teaching-learning was discontinued by government directives. However, by late April 2020, private schools initiated online classes. Though they faced lot challenges to run schools. This has resulted in staff cuts and, at worst, permanent closures (Education International, 2022).

Mostly the private schools in urban area initiated online virtual classes as a transistional remedy to the educational crisis. On 31 May 2020 the Ministry of Education also issued guidelines to help students learn in other ways (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020). Those regulations helped schools run classes over radio, television, computers and the internet, as per the needs of the students. It became mandatory to shift physical traditional face-to-face teaching to virtual and remote online teaching. It forced school principals to rework and respond quickly (Manandhar & Koirala, 2021). The guidelines advocated for a flexible, multi-platform approach toward continuing education in a crisis.

Most of the private schools started internet-based online teaching utilizing free platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet as an online tool extending online classes

in school level. Initiating and running classes online for the first time was not easy and convenient, so private schools organized training sessions for teachers on ICT to develop teachers' competency in running online classes, often conducted online, to familiarize them with video conferencing tools like Zoom and Google Meet, registration processes to parents, and digital lesson delivery to teachers.

While running online virtual classes, there was a digital inequalities since not all students had access to the necessary gadgets and internet connection, which made their education different (Manandhar & Koirala, 2021). Parents were enthusiastic about how well the sudden changeover to online teaching would work. They were especially worried about how well teachers would be ready and how well parents and students would be able to use technology for the online virtual class. During the pandemic, online virtual classes grew popular all across the world. It worked better for college students rather than school children (Bao, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020). In our country, some of the universities had hybrid model of teaching in online virtual mode but, schools had not practiced.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a pedagogical shift in teaching. The instructional pedagogy took the turn toward a digital online virtual learning classes from the physical face to face classes, it showed how a flexible and innovative approach is crucial (Bao, 2020). Technology in pedagogy became indispensable to continuing education of private schools as well. It was very important for making sure that teaching and learning worked well by focusing on things like putting the curriculum into action, managing the classroom, and training staff at the same speed. Ornopia et al. (2022) argued that it required an additional investment in teacher training and integration with digital technologies to cater for virtual learning for the private schools. Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers in private schools said that they had more work to do than before. They were worried about their jobs, and were having mental health problems. Gumarang (2021) said that teachers had to deal with both the stress of learning new teaching tools and the emotional and mental health needs of their students as well as their own.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only disrupted teaching and learning, but it also created financial challenges to private school principals to manage fund to run school smoothly. Private schools depended only on tuition fees, and many parents had trouble paying their children's fees on time because of the economy hit by the

COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, schools had to close or cut staff pay to stay open (Cato Institute, 2021).

The pedagogical shift in teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in private schools reflected that the teachers were stressed which resulted struggling to retain teachers (Jandrić et al., 2021). This affected morale and quality of instruction, which has become an issue for parents who claim that online teaching was less effective. The private school teachers were also in a dilemma. Their thought was whether to “optout” from online teaching as they were not mentally prepared to take up this responsibility nor were they equipped with the technological skills required for the task. The dilemma was “quitting” or “learning and surviving”, which was painful.

The physical and digital resources of all the private schools in Kathmandu were not the same. They were often put into groups based on physical infrastructure, digital competency and digitally trained teachers they had. Because of this, not all private schools were able to switch to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This made it even harder for students to learn and made the digital divide even bigger, which made already existing educational inequalities worse (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

In addition to technological inefficiencies in schools, online virtual class was only successful when parents helped and supported their children at home. However, not all parents were able to support digital learning because they didn't have enough time and knowledge about the online virtual classes. Additionally, some of the parents didn't have stable internet connection along with good computers. These challenges from the either side made it even harder for school principals to keep the school run smoothly.

Education in Emergencies/Crisis

Education is an essential human right which must be developed individually and collectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic the situation was far more difficult to receive quality education globally. Education in emergencies means giving children and young people education in areas that have been devastated by a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, so that they can continue learning and feel safe in times of trouble. Education in emergencies has become a significant area of education practice and educational policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNESCO (2022) says that 78 million school childrens were not in school because of the educational crisis around the countries of the world caused by the war,

natural disaster and pandemic like COVID-19, and more than 222 million children were in educational crisis and needed help to continue their education. There are many important reasons to keep schools open during emergencies. First, it protects school children by giving them safety and mental health support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in Nepal most of the public schools were served as quarantine centers. Second, education helps people being strong and recover in the long term by giving them the knowledge, skills, and values they need to rebuild societies (Mendenhall, 2017). Finally, access to education protects the right to learn, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4).

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the biggest interruption to education around the world in modern history. UNESCO (2020) says that school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic affected more than 1.6 billion students. Schools in many low resource countries like Nepal had a hard time moving to online platforms. School principals had dealt with new types of online virtual learning without any help from the system or any previous experience during the time.

Theoretical Review

This study critically examines and creates established theories, models, and frameworks related to the research topic or question. It comprehends the theoretical foundations of the research topic. Through the theoretical review, researchers lay solid foundation for their work. It helps researchers to understand the main ideas in their field, see what has already been learnt and find new areas to explore.

Instructional Leadership Theory

Instructional leadership is an approach that focuses on improving the quality of instruction in schools through teachers guidance, support and development. It is a leadership model focused on improving teaching and learning process within the educational institutions. It emphasizes role of school leaders, especially school principals in guiding curriculum implementation. Hallinger and Murphy(1985) add that:

Instructional leadership as the principal's engagement in behaviours that set clear instructional goals, coordinate curriculum, and monitor lesson plans while evaluating and developing teachers to promote students learning.

Instructional leadership is not a magic bullet, but it is a part of principal's

efficiency in developing a school context in which teachers and students are successful. (p. 221)

According to Shepard (1996), there are narrow and broad concepts of instructional leadership theory. The initial concept is closely tied to teaching and learning. It involves activities like conducting classroom observations. The second is a broad view of instructional leadership, which deals with student learning, such as culture and time tabling procedures. Robinson et al. (2008) claimed that :

Instructional leadership directly influences teaching quality and students' outcomes through the active involvement in curriculum decisions, teacher development and resource allocation. It recognizes that teachers are the key to improving students' learning and that effective leadership can facilitate teacher growth and development. An effective instructional leader must provide necessary resources to teachers. (p. 661)

Strong instructional leadership has a relation with classroom activities that increases the student achievement by a collaborative learning environment (Leithwood et al., 2004). Effective instructional leaders prioritize teaching quality and work closely with teachers to refine pedagogical strategies. It includes setting clear instructional goals, giving feedback and coaching, and creating a culture of continuous improvement. Instructional leaders also work to make a positive school culture that supports student learning. The theory emphasizes the importance of empowering teachers.

Moreover, among the different leadership models that have been studied, Robinson et al. (2008) claimed that instructional leadership has demonstrated the most consistent positive effects on learning. From the perspective of instructional leadership theory, private school principals' main responsibilities were to manage resources for effective teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue education in their schools.

Resilience Theory

Resilience theory emphasizes the capacity to adapt and recover from the adversity (Gu & Day, 2007). This theory is originally introduced in the 17th century and later developed across disciplines including psychology and education as well. It has been conceptualized as a dynamic process of bouncing back from challenges and adversities.

The resilient theory focuses the role of a leader in maintaining performance, their adaptation capacity to change and achieving organizational goals in unpredictable situations. As Greene (2006) noted, resilient leadership involves not only innovative problem solving but also focus on well being and long term sustainability. As Ledesma (2014) and Watkins et al. (2017) argue that in times of uncertainty, resilient leaders must demonstrate continuous learning, proactive thinking and ability to build supportive communities. This becomes particularly relevant in the education sector where school principals frequently face interconnected challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed one of the greatest educational disruptions in modern time. Almost every country closed schools around the world to control the virus's spread. This educational disruption had great effect in the schools' academic year as well. In our country, all the school level exams had been differed. SEE exam which is the national level examination was also postponed with uncertainty. All these caused a great dilemma to private schools. New students enrollment had become uncertain.

Despite these uncertainty, private schools started running online virtual classes. Dhawan (2020) claimed that within the uncertainty and chaos, school principals were compelled to explore alternative means of running classes. They immediately shifted their physical face to face class to online virtual class to continue education. They got trained themselves and trained their teachers for teaching online. The private school principals demonstrated remarkable resilience in this difficult situation during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue education. During the time, short trainings on digital technology were conducted to enhance school principals and teachers to earn digital competency to run online classes. Ramos and Johnson (2021), claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic brought an unexpected change for teachers pedagogical enhancement digitally and flexibility in mindset.

School principals, in particular, took on multifaceted roles not only as instructional leaders but also as institutional investors, balancing educational priorities with financial survival. They supported teachers by providing digital resources and trainings for making them competent to run online classes. Their efforts reflect the elements of resilient leadership (Cahapay, 2021; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). These experiences illustrate the vital role of resilient leadership in sustaining education continuation during the COVID-19 pandemic. School principals were able address the immediate concerns and develop long term strategies to continue schools. It was an

opportunity for testing themselves for being an educational leader in an adverse situation to continue education. It tested their resilient leadership in education in private schools. Their capacity to adapt the unexpected change into teaching pedagogy, financial management and teachers management as well. Additionally, their experiences provide valuable lesson for the future in educational leadership.

Policy Review

Nepal has substantially progressed in formal education system over the past few years. Basic level schools have notably established across the country. In the present day over eight million school children are enrolled in more than thirty five thousand basic and secondary schools nationwide (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology [MoEST], 2022). According to the Educational Statistics of 2022 approximately 74.85 percent of children enrolled in Grade One have one year or more of early childhood education and development (ECED) experience. The Net Enrolment (NER) at the lower basic level (Grade 1-5) stands at 96.9 percent, indicating that education at this level is widely accessible to nearly all children (CEHRD, 2022). Furthermore, CEHRD (2022) mentions that the NER for basic education (Grades 1–8), which the state mandates as compulsory and free has reached 95.11 percent. At the secondary education (Grade 9-12), the NER has risen to 54.0 percent in recent years. Though, the learning achievement during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic has been claimed less than before. All the school children did not have access to online virtual learning as well due to the digital infrastructure needed for the online class.

According to the Nepal Economic Forum (2020), the Nepalese government did not adequately prepare the infrastructure for virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since virtual learning was not thought of as a necessity, ICT was the must and alternative tool to continue education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government of Nepal, along with the Ministry of Education, failed to put an immediate strategy in place for the continuation of education in emergencies.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education continuation globally. To ease the situation, the government of Nepal (GoN) introduced a comprehensive and detailed strategy for running schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in Nepal (MoEST) developed multiple plans and policies to tackle the difficulties arising in the education sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan guided to initiate virtual learning activities formally

in Nepali schools. The Ministry implemented the COVID-19 Education Cluster Contingency Plan 2020 (MoEST, 2020), which emphasized the collaboration among central, provincial, and local governments to address the pandemic's impact on education. The pandemic worsened after March 2020 so chances of opening of the school physically was less. The Central Government conducted consultation with education experts and implemented the alternative learning facilitation guidelines.

Alternative Learning Facilitation Guidelines (2020) ensured the continuity of education when traditional physical classroom teaching was not possible. It aimed to facilitate learning through alternative methods during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency Action Plan for School Education, 2020 (MoEST, 2020) seemed more ambitious, but it became difficult to implement. Providing free mobile data to students is an example of this. Internet access became a must to run schools in an alternative mode of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban and cities with an uninterrupted supply.

Reopening and operating schools during the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant challenge for policymakers. In response, the Nepal government developed and implemented the *School Reopening Framework 2020* to address these difficulties. This framework played a key role in facilitating online virtual classes and enabling schools at all levels, including private schools, to resume school operation nationwide. It provided clear guidelines on essential activities required for reopening and established methods, systems. And process for managing examinations and other critical educational arrangements during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic began at the end of the academic year in Nepal, which impacted the end-year exams and board exams of educational institutions. SEE, the Secondary Education Examination, was postponed due to the pandemic. Secondary Education Examination's Student Assessment Regulations prepared to regulate and carry out responsibility for evaluating Grade 10 students' final examination, which was postponed due to the COVID-19 overseeing process.

Similarly, considering the prolonged school closure and the need for alternative teaching methodologies, the school level curriculum adjustment framework 2020 (MoEST, 2020) was developed to guide the schools and local governments in implementing a condensed curriculum. This framework also allowed for adjustments in students evaluation process, ensuring flexibility in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the Education Related Emergency Guideline, 2020 (MoEST, 2020) Covid Related School Operation Guidelines, 2020 (MoEST, 2020) were developed by the government to continue education during the COVID-19 pandemic. These documents have a list of activities to manage schools, a process to complete the activities, and a timeline to accomplish them.

As part of the plan, Student Learning Facilitation Guideline 2020 (MoEST, 2020) has proposed keeping student records and grouping them into five categories based on their access to resources for alternative learning. The categories for the students are as follows: a) those with no access to any resources, b) those with access to radio/FM, c) those with access to television, d) those with computers but without internet access, and e) those with access to all types of resources. This plan aimed to deal with the pandemic via a collaborative approach with parents and other stakeholders.

The policies prepared during the COVID-19 pandemic to sustain education at the school level have focused on ensuring the continuity of learning for school children. However, there was considerable confusion regarding how schools could collect the necessary materials during the lockdown. Genuine data was necessary for making policies for the government and policymakers. For example, categorizing students into five groups based on their access to technology for virtual classes proved challenging since most schools had not previously maintained such data (Badri & Ahmed Bushra, 2024). Even private schools had not previously collected data on which students owned laptops, making it difficult to ensure the continuation of online classes. Before the pandemic, schools were not expected to track whether students owned laptops or internet-enabled devices, as virtual learning was not a common practice.

Moreover, while health safety norms became mandatory to run classes in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, the GoN prepared the School Health Safety and Sanitation Guidelines 2020 for physical class initiation, involving significant costs for school management, particularly for private institutions. Maintaining safety protocols with physical distancing, sanitization of classrooms, and hand washing was financially cost-bearing for the private schools. Ezema-Kalu (2024) cites that private schools, which depend heavily on tuition fees, faced widespread dissatisfaction and

debates from parents regarding fee payments during lockdowns and virtual class sessions.

Review of Related Studies

As a measure to control and break the chain of the COVID-19 coronavirus, the Nepalese government declared a nationwide lockdown on March 24, 2020, by closing all schools. The COVID-19 pandemic had an unexpected global impact. It impacted 1.57 billion school children from attending regular school (UNESCO, 2020). In Nepal, private schools in urban and cities have initiated online classes as an alternative approach of continuing school education in late April 2020. On May 31, 2020 the Ministry of Education approved the guideline to facilitate learning through alternative system. Following the approval of the Facilitation Guideline 2020, the private schools shifted traditional physical face to face class to online internet based virtual class (Khanal, 2020). However, teachers were unprepared for shifting these physical classes to online mode. Abrupt change led uncertainty and stress to private school teachers (Sigdel et al., 2024).

While both public and private school teachers in Nepal faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, their responses varied significantly due to differences in resources availability and institutional flexibility. Private schools particularly in urban like Kathmandu were often quicker in starting online virtual classes. Many of them had existing digital infrastructure and trained teachers who were able to start online class soon. Their need to maintain competitiveness and retain fees paying students also pushed them to switch their school innovatively through digital means (Pokhrel & Chettri, 2021; Poudel, 2021).

In contrast, public schools struggled more with the shift of digital learning. Public schools often lacked reliable internet connectivity and necessary equipment such as laptops, desktops or gadgets for running online classes. They also lacked autonomy to make quick administrative decisions of pedagogical changes they needed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The public school teachers generally had less experience with online teaching and were slower to receive professional development related to ICT integration. Additionally, public schools had to wait for government directives and policies, which delayed their response time.

Furthermore, the accountability structures differed. Private school principals, many of whom are also owners, had a direct financial incentive to keep education running. They coordinated with parents, managed online tools, and took personal

responsibility for school continuity. Private school teachers were compelled to learn ICT skills to run classes through online platforms like Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom which were not familiar to school teachers earlier before the pandemic. Private schools trained their teachers with digital competence to run online virtual classes. Due to the challenging transition, some teachers left teaching due to the work load and difficulties in managing ICT online teaching (Kaden, 2020).

For the public school teachers, the availability of workshops and digital infrastructure such as laptops and internet connectivity have eased their transition. In contrast, private school teachers faced greater pressure to self prepare or risk replacement (Ghimire, 2024). The private school teachers not only had to shift the teaching pedagogy from traditional physical classes to online virtual classes but also had to manage digital infrastructure despite the uncertainty of regular salary payment.

A survey conducted by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development(OECD) (2020) found that 8.7% of respondents reported had difficulty accessing or managing technology of virtual classes. However, the percentage of technology related challenges in Nepal is believed to be higher. The private school teachers lacked personal laptops and internet connectivity to conduct the online virtual classes (Manadhar & Koirala, 2021). Anxiety, fear and the pressure created by the COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the difficulties faced by the teachers. Khanal (2020) claimed in his phenomenological study that psychological stress was a significant factor for influencing teachers' performance. The study highlights that the pandemic created a critical scenario where teachers had to either adapt to virtual teaching or leave their profession. Khanal et al. (2022) add that:

Teachers have said that they 'regret choosing teaching as a profession' as they are not sure about the continuity of their job. A teacher's well-being has become a critical issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, as reported in different news, teachers are not only unpaid but also lose their jobs, particularly in private schools. In addition, teachers have to teach online classes without the necessary infrastructure and sufficient skills. Teachers from different regions of the country did not have access to reliable internet connectivity or other ICT devices such as laptops and smartphones. Teachers who work in remote village schools do not have the internet, TVs, or smartphones to run virtual online classes. On the other hand, teachers felt an increased social pressure to continue teaching and contact their students amid

fear and uncertainty. Teachers in private schools are affected more seriously by this pandemic than those who work in community schools. (p. 106)

Despite efforts to implement online learning in schools, infrastructure challenges such as inadequate access to digital gadgets like computers, unreliable internet, and limited power supply continued. The installation and management of learning management systems (LMS) remained additional obstacles for many school principals, impacting the efficiency of online education (Sigdel et al., 2024). Furthermore, student readiness and learning outcomes were often unnoticed in the urgency to transition to online teaching, resulting in potential disparities in academic achievement (Kaden, 2020).

Research Gap

While reviewing the literature concerning the research title, the experiences of private school principals in the post-COVID-19 context of pedagogy, I perceived that the Nepal government did not have established policies on how to sustain private schools during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Though they are funded and run by individuals or groups whose financial liabilities are limited to founders and promoters, they faced significant financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Private schools in Nepal did not get support from the government neither in training teachers or any financial aspects. (Khanal, 2021; Pandit, 2020). Additionally, there is a lack of scholarly articles and research exploring how private schools sustained and managed their finances during the pandemic.

The education authorities were passive in protecting private school teachers' financial and job security during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adhikari (2019) claims that private school and college teachers have not been paid for the last two or three months; however, they have not given up hope. Many teachers went unpaid for several months, but their struggles and the impact on their morale and retention went largely unnoticed.

Though most of the private schools in the urban shifted physical classes to online virtual but many of the schools in remote couldnot run due to the inefficiency of teachers and unavailability of infrastructure. There is limited research on how school principals handled the digital divide, trained teachers in ICT, and ensured continued learning in contexts where internet access and devices were not easily available.

Private schools in Nepal during the COVID-19 pandemic were highly impacted financially. Their main source of fund to run school were student fees which had become uncertain during the time. According to Bhattarai & Devkota (2021), approximately seventy percentage of such schools faced extreme financial difficulties. Some of the private schools in the remote closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. They failed to manage teachers salaries and regular expense on time due to the pandemic. On the otherhand, public schools were able to receive regular budget to support teachers and staff for the continuation of school operation.

Private schools in urban like Kathmndu were technologically well equipped and teachers in the urban and cities were more trained technologically, so they initiated online virtual classes. Schools with better infrastructure and fee-paying students were able to adopt platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Google Classroom relatively quickly (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The unexpected transitional experience brought by the COVID-19 pandemic was not uniform to all private schools in Nepal. Many private schools could not manage to run online virtul classes due to lack of resources and ICT trained teachers which created a digital divide among the school children even in private schools (Parajuli & Das, 2022).

On the otherhand, public schools were not prepared for the online virtual classes. According to the government report, only 12% of the public children had access to the online learning during the first lockdown (MoEST, 2020). The transition to online virtual learning needed rapid adaptation in teaching pedagogies which was totally based on information, communication and technology. Teachers were expected to deliver their class through online means. They had to be digitally competent in online peadagogy. To cope the situation private school principals organized inhouse trainings to bridge the gap (Poudel, 2021). In contrast, public school teachers had to wait for the government instruction and directives which delayed the starting of online virtual classes.

The interplay between financial constraints, technological readiness, and pedagogical adaptation is especially visible in private schools. The private schools were solely deperdent on the students' fees as their regular financial sources to run schools. By analyzing these differentiated responses, it becomes clear that private school principals operated under unique leadership conditions, balancing eductional goals with institutional survival. This study, therefore, focuses on the lived experiences of private school principals.

Chapter Summary

The chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature related to private school education in Nepal during the COVID-19 pandemic through thematic, theoretical, and policy perspectives. The thematic review examines the structure and role of private schools in Nepal, emphasizing their dependence on tuition fees, urban concentration, and perceived quality of education. It also explores how the pandemic disrupted schooling worldwide and forced schools to shift rapidly from face to face teaching to online learning. In Nepal, private schools responded more quickly than public schools, but they faced serious challenges, including digital inequalities, teacher preparedness, parental dissatisfaction and financial instability. The theoretical reviews is guided by instructional leadership theory and resilience theory. Instructional leadership theory highlights the principal's role in supporting teaching, curriculum and teacher development during the COVID-19 pandemic while resilience theory explains how school leaders adapted to uncertainty and maintained school continuity during crisis. The policy review analyzes government strategies developed during the pandemic to continue education including alternative learning guidelines, school reopening frameworks.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the philosophical orientations (ontological, epistemological, and axiological stances) and methodological considerations that shaped the inquiry into the experiences of principals in continuing education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research paradigm adopted for the study is also discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, it delves into using narrative inquiry as the chosen methodology for analyzing information obtained from the participating principals. Finally, the chapter outlines the ethical considerations that have been considered throughout the research process.

Philosophical Foundation

This study is based on a constructivist ontological perspective that claims reality as socially constructed. It is subjective and diverse in nature. In the context of this research, it suggests that the lived experiences of private school principals during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are not regarded as singular and objective truth. Instead, they are seen as different realities which are shaped by the principal's unique experiences, views and institutional setting.

The varied experiences of private school principals in the post COVID-19 context can be attributed to multiple factors such as the digital competency of teachers, students' access to online learning, and the availability of technological infrastructure within schools and among the parents. Consequently, each school principals' perception of reality during the pandemic is influenced by these contextual elements. This ontological stance directly informs the research approach by supporting the use of qualitative narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is an appropriate method for capturing subjective and context specific experience of school principals where constructivism values in individual meaning making. The study aims to understand how school principals interpreted and responded to the crisis within their own school environment. Here, as per the constructivist view point that the knowledge is co-constructed through the interaction between researcher and participants and shaped by their understanding within specific social context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemology is the study of how knowledge is acquired. It involves the nature of knowledge and its generation within a given context (Al- Saadi, 2014). From constructivist epistemological point of view, knowledge is not passively acquired but actively built through experience, interaction and reflection.

In the context of this study, the sharing of experiences by private school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed as a form of knowledge generation. As private school principals in Kathmandu, how they had dealt with problems that had never occurred before in their schools which has abruptly shifted the mode of teaching learning contributed practical and adaptive forms of knowledge in school leadership. They came up with and tried different techniques that worked in specific situations. These experiences helped school principals to develop useful and flexible forms of knowledge.

For example, shifting from physical to virtual online class required not only learning new technological abilities but also rethinking how to teach students. Using online technologies like Google Classroom, Zoom, and Viber group became very important for keeping teaching and learning continue. School principals also had to balance their duties as leaders who made decisions about the school and as leaders who cared about feelings of their teaching and non-teaching members and parents at the time of uncertainty.

These lived experiences shared by the school principals are more than just stories. They are epistemic acts that create knowledge by solving problems and coming up with new ideas in real time. After the COVID-19 pandemic, this knowledge developed in educational institutions to enhance hybrid teaching methodologies.

This research has adopted the narrative inquiry approach which corresponds with epistemological perspective by recognizing human narratives as valid sources of information. It recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed and created by human experience and interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research explores not only the actions of principals but also their comprehension, interpretation and dissemination of their responses during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Their thoughts, plans, and changes to sustain during the pandemic can help shaping future education policies.

Axiology in research refers to the study of values and their role in the process of knowledge generation. It concerns the beliefs, ethical commitments, and personal

assumptions that influence how a researcher understands the world and conducts inquiry. Qualitative research recognizes that inquiry is never entirely value free. Researchers inevitably bring their own perspectives, experiences, and moral positions into the research process, and these values shape the selection of the topic, framing of research questions, interpretation of findings, and the presentation of knowledge.

In qualitative inquiry, the role of axiology is specially significant because the researcher is often deeply involved in the data collection and interpretation. Within the constructivist paradigm, axiology takes on even greater importance because knowledge is viewed as socially constructed through interaction between the researcher and participant. Constructivism assumes that reality is not fixed or singular but shaped by human experience, culture, and interpretation. It also emphasizes that knowledge is shaped by human values. It helps explain how relationships, ethics, and interpretation are interconnected in the creation of meaningful understanding.

Sultana (2020) claims that axiology often adopts an atic-emic approach which is that the researcher must balance two perspectives. The etic is outsider and objective observer where as emic is insider and subjective participant. It also introduces the possibility of value laden interpretations. I avoided imposing my own experiences or emotions on the data to maintain ethical integrity. I made a conscious decision to refrain from sharing personal views, or professional anecdotes during the interviews. This bracketing allowed participants to express their own experiences more freely without being influenced or guide by my professional background. At the same time, I acknowledged that my background could serve as a valuable analytical lens. During the interpretation phase, I reflected on my positionality carefully between understanding participants' perspectives from within(emic) and evaluating them critically from the outside (etic).

Research Paradigm and Design

The interpretive paradigm focuses on understanding the subjective meanings that individual assign to their experiences within the specific social and cultural context. It assumes that reality is not one thing but many things and that are made through interaction, perception, and reflection (Taylor & Medina, 2011). This paradigm is especially suitable for exploring the varied and complex experiences of private school principals during and post COVID-19 pandemic context. Following to the qualitative method, I primarily have face to face interview to collect narrative

data. During these interviews, I paid close attention not only to the participants' verbal responses but also their facial expressions, tone of voice and even the body language. These verbal cues provided me deeper insight into their emotional and cognitive responses. I recorded all the interviews with their informed consent supplementing with memo writing.

The interpretive approach values conversation, understanding and respect between the researcher and participant. Taylor and Medina (2011), assert that the interpretive paradigm acknowledges the potential for various interpretations of a singular event. The interpretation of single event may differ as per time, background and the social context. This study does not regard the experiences of private school principals during and after the COVID-19 pandemic as an objective fact. Rather, they are considered individual realities.

Consequently, the research data is fundamentally subjective. It is multifaceted and contextual as well. The study recognizes that each principals' narrative represents a distinctive view point influenced by their values, their leadership approach and institutional environment. The objective is not generalized but to comprehend how this private school principals interpreted the situation of emergency in education during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue education in schools. Additionally, how they managed their schools financially and guided their teachers to run classes during the time generating new knowledge. This interpretive method supports narrative inquiry by facilitating the expressions of private school principals; experiences in their own terms and social contexts. The result shows how rich individual stories can be by giving us a glimpse into how leadership, resilience, and decision making happened in real time in different schools.

The research design is a plan for the whole research process. It helps the researcher make smart choices about what to study, whom to study, and how to study the chosen issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of a research problem is frequently determined by a confluence of factors, encompassing established theoretical frameworks, the researcher's personal and professional experiences, and the practical relevance of the issue within its real-world context. My experience of more than 20 years as a private school founder and principal in Kathmandu during both normal and crisis times gave me a strong reason and context to look into how private school principals dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. Haydon and Van Der Riet (2017) describe eight principal categories of qualitative research design: case

study, clinical research, ethnography, grounded theory, historical process, narrative inquiry, participatory action research, and social phenomenology. Out of these I felt, narrative inquiry is the best way to understand the complicated, real-life experiences of people, which is why I have chosen as the method for this study.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that studies human experiences through stories. It assumes that people make sense of their lives by telling narratives about events, relationships, struggles, and turning points. In narrative inquiry, it is believed that stories are strong and powerful carriers of meaning. As Clandinin (2006) explains narrative inquiry enables researchers to engage deeply with participants' experiences. Interpretations of their stories are rich sources of insights into human thought and identity. This type of study is especially useful in education researches. It helps us to understand leadership and decision making by looking at the context. It is methodologically and philosophically suitable to adopt narrative design of the study. I started my research by reading a lot of books, research articles on crisis leadership, post pandemic pedagogy, and resilient school management. The informal discussions with teachers, colleagues, and private school principals also helped me a lot to make my research questions better and learn more about the context.

Narrative inquiry allowed me to capture the voices of private school principals in Kathmandu. It gave them the space to share their personal stories about how they led their schools amid the adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic within uncertainty, complexity, and full of chaos. One of the unique strength of narrative inquiry is its ability to access both the external events and internal reflections of participants. Through story telling, principals were able to articulate not only what they did but why and how they did it. Their stories covered diverse themes such as leadership dilemma, teacher motivation, parental communication, technological adaptation, and institutional financial sustainability.

I found narrative inquiry is more than a data collection. It is a reflective human process which helped me to connect with the principals, understand them better and appreciate their real life experiences. It gave participants a platform to make sense of their own experiences, and it allowed me, as a researcher, to engage with their stories in a way that is ethically respectful and intellectually insightful.

Research Site and Participant Selection

This study has aimed to explore the experiences of the private school principals in Kathmandu in the post Covid-19 context of pedagogy. Dahal (2014)

claims that qualitative research typically focuses on small group of participants but carefully selects the case and effectively addresses the research question. There are 35,055 schools in Nepal; 27,728 are public, 6,206 are private, and 1,121 are religious schools (Department of Education [DoE], 2018). Being a capital city of the country, Kathmandu has more private schools in numbers comparing to the other cities. I have selected Kathmandu for my research site.

Private schools in Nepal have been categorized in four categories by the government of Nepal as per the Education Rule 2059. I purposively chose one school from each category to collect data through purposive sampling in Kathmandu. It is a widely used technique in qualitative research, allowing researchers to purposefully select participants who can provide rich and relevant information (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants for this study were all founder principals and had worked for more than fifteen years in schools. While selecting them, I kept in mind their educational qualifications, ethnicity, and gender as well.

Additionally, I have selected a participant with their land and building, another with a building built in a lease for 20 years, next with a school building constructed by the land owner in rent, and the last research participant with a short-term old rental building, which could help to explore the multiple realities related to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic for the financial management as a school principal.

School A:

I selected a private secondary school, referred to as “School A” located in Baneswor Kathmandu, which was established in 1996 AD. This school has 600 students in the present day. Though it is running for the three decades, the whole school physical infrastructure is on rent. School building appears very old but the school administration has tried to keep updated and welcoming environment. The classrooms seemed clean and organized which can keep students engaged. It has spacious play ground equipped with plenty of play materials for the students. Overall school environment and physical resources was the combination of a supportive learning for the students’ holistic development. Despite a rented school building, School A seemed to be working for providing quality education.

School B:

The second study area, known as School "B" is located in Chabahil, Kathmandu. This school is educating children for twenty years. This school is on rent. One of the school buildings have been constructed by school on lease basis for twenty

years. It is a relatively new practice among private schools. The school building is purposefully designed to provide a safe learning environment for children, which has a cozy classroom and a child-friendly learning environment. This school is educating approximately 700 students in play group to grade XII. More than 80 teaching and non-teaching staff are working here. Play ground is well managed for the basketball, volleyball and other outdoor activities which shows that the school has commitment to supporting physical growth of the school children.

School C:

School "C" is a pioneering educational institution located at Koteshwor, Kathmandu. This school has its land and building, and the school is proud of well-designed classrooms equipped with ICT tools to support modern teaching and learning methods. With a commitment to providing high-quality education since its establishment, the school has created an excellent academic environment to nurture the physical and mental growth of students. More than 1000 students are studying in the current academic year with comprehensive knowledge experience and ICT skill development. The school has a long history of having 24 batches of SEE pass out with excellent results. The school has more than 120 dedicated teaching and non-teaching experienced professionals, including founding members who continue to play an active role in administration. The school is situated a little bit away from the main road, it has benefits as well such as quiet and peaceful environment which is needful to the academic institution with plenty of play ground for the school children.

School D:

The fourth school, School "D" is located in Saraswati Nagar, Kathmandu, and was established in 1991 A. D. This school is under the leadership of a single individual and their family members. Although the school building is rented, it was purposefully built by the property owner to run the school, so classrooms are ideally designed to meet the school's needs. The schools feel proud to have spacious playground and futsal ground, which are essential features of private schools today. With ample space for extracurricular and co-curricular activities, the school has focused on the holistic development of students. Leading by a strong determination to deliver quality education, school "D" takes pride in being recognized as one of the best schools in Kathmandu. This school has more than 500 students studying in the current academic year.

Participant 1: Yesu

Yesu is a 50 year old lady principal. She was born and educated in Hong Kong. Her father was a British Army Officer, so she got a primary education in Hong Kong. She studied up to Grade I at Gallipoli School in Hong Kong. After her father retired, her family came back to Nepal. In Nepal, she continued her studies at Ghopa Camp Primary School, Dharan, and later completed her SLC at Secondary Boarding School, Bijyapur Dharan.

Yesu completed her intermediate in Arts from Mahendra Multiple College, Dharan. She moved to Pakhribas after her marriage where she stayed for eight years with her family. She had two children by that time. In 2058 BS, she moved to Kathmandu for further studies, enrolling in Sanothimi Campus, where she completed her B. Ed, took a two-year gap, and then earned her M. Ed. From Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. Yesu started her teaching career at Milan Vidya Mandir, Anamnagr, Kathmandu, in 2060 BS, where she worked as a Primary English Teacher for five years. She had keen interest in education so why, she started a school herself and became a founder principal in 2066 BS. She now has 16 years of school leadership as a founder principal of her own school. She is very happy with her profession.

She had experienced and accepted that school leadership in a private school is full of challenges ahead. Inconsistencies in government policies regarding private school in Nepal by the local government is always unstable. However she is optimistic and accepts the challenges ahead in the future.

Participant 2: Prabal

A fair-skinned, tall, 47-year-old Prabal was born in Rajbiraj, and he was brought up in Bhojpur-Dawa, where his father was in civil service. His family migrated to Chandragadhi, Jhapa, when he was around 6 or 7 years old, where he spent his formative years. He began his early schooling at Birendra Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Chandragadhi, where he completed his SLC in 2048 BS. He continued his education at Mechi Campus, where he completed his IA and BA in English/Maths and Economics. In 2054 BS, he moved to Kathmandu to pursue his master's degree and started working at the same time. He completed his MA in English in 2058/59 BS. Since passing his SLC, he has accumulated extensive teaching experience, beginning in 2050 BS at Chandragadhi, Bhadrapur, where he taught at Bibhuti Vidya Mandir, a private school, until 2054 BS. After moving to Kathmandu in 2054 BS, he briefly

returned to Jhapa to work for a year before resuming his studies in Kathmandu. Prabal was an English Teacher at the beginning in 2060 BS when he started teaching career. Later he taught Social Studies in one of the schools of Bhaktapur. He developed himself and got coordinator role in the same school in Bhaktapur. Hard work with dedication promoted him to the vice principal where he worked for two years.

In 2066 BS, he himself started a school being a founder Principal in Kathmandu. Since then his journey being a founder Principal had been 16 regular years. By the time he had completed M. A. and MPhil in English. His journey in school leadership has inspired him to lead his higher degree to PhD in educational leadership which he is planning to pursue. He recalls his past that the early years of school establishment was not smooth. Maintaining academic as well as administrative task being a principal was always hectic and full of challenges. But he says, commitment to parents and passion for educating children helped him establish a reputed private schools in Kathmandu.

Participant 3: Ram Kumar

Ram Kumar, who is 59 years old founder principal is another research participant of my research study. He is from Merla, Khotang Rural Municipality. He started working as principal since 2050BS. Ram Kumar began his education at Chautare Primary School in Merla and later joined Grade IV at Bhagawati Secondary School in Khotang Bazar, where he completed his SLC in 2042 BS. Following his graduation, he moved to Kathmandu to further study. He completed his IA with major in English, although it took him five years due to strikes and frequent disturbances that delayed exams by the universities. Ram Kumar went on to complete his BA from Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus in Pradarshani Marg and later earned a Master's degree in Public Administration and an MPhil.

Ram Kumar started teaching as an English Teacher in 2045 BS while he was pursuing his studies in intermediate level. He taught there for continuous seven years. He then moved to another school as a vice principal, working there for three years. Again he came back to the previous school as the English Department Head. While working the department head, he made a long term plan to start own school which he successfully started in Magh 2050 BS. Since then he is working as the founder principal in his own school.

Teaching was not his initial career choice but the circumstance made him a founder Principal. His father also had been a public school principal who faced

operational challenge which was closed later so why Ram Kumar has no interest in teaching. Ram tried to find other jobs before joining teaching. He was not happy and satisfied with other jobs so he continued teaching. Being a student of English and language training from the American Language Center he excelled in English which pushed him for teaching English in the school.

By this 31 years of school leadership experience, he is satisfied with the profession. Students' success and social recognition makes him more satisfied to his profession. Though there are numerous challenges ahead and faced a lot, he claims teaching is a respected profession. He feels proud of his contributions himself. Ram Kumar claims that he has given an opportunity work for 127 members in his school which is a direct contribution to the country as well.

Participant 4: Chitra

Chitra was born in Ilam, eastern Nepal. He is fifty two years old with MPhil degree in education. Chitra obtained his primary school education from Jaharsing Primary School. He completed SLC in 2046 from Kharpok Secondary School Ilam. Chitra came to Kathmandu for higher studies in 2047 BS. He joined Shankar Dev Campus. He completed a Bachelor in Commerce and a Masters in Business Administration from the same college. Chitra started teaching in 2048 when he was doing his intermediate level in a lower secondary level in Kathmandu. He has experience in teaching at a pre-school level as well. He has been continuously working in a school since then. Hardly six months to one year break, otherwise continuously teaching since then. Mr. Chitra started teaching in the Plus Two colleges while he was pursuing a Master's Degree. Chitra got an opportunity to invest in a school along with his friends while he was doing his master's degree. He started to work in his school in 2062 BS as a founder principal. Unfortunately, all of his friends left the school, so he has been continuously dedicating himself to this profession since then. Chitra had not planned and decided to be a principal when he was young, but now, he is enjoying being a principal. He recalls his childhood and says, "I wanted to be a teacher when I was a child". Chitra has been leading a private school in Kathmandu for more than two decades with joy and satisfaction. Being a school leader of a private school in Kathmandu for decades it's challenging, though this profession has taught him a lot. Professional discipline, sincerity, and continuity are major professional characteristics that make him happy as a founder principal.

Process of Information Collection

With approval from the Research Committee of Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED), I formally began data collection. I purposively selected four private school principals in Kathmandu, ensuring a range of school contexts which was categorized by the local government in as per the Education Rule 2059.

The different category schools are chosen to maintain the validity and richness of data so that more diverse understanding of post COVID-19 school leadership experience is captured.

I telephoned my research participants to get verbal consent and arranged interview schedule personally. To conduct interviews, the questionnaires were prepared, reviewed and approved by my thesis supervisor Associate Professor Shesha Kanta Pangei, PhD. Being a narrative inquiry researcher, my research study was grounded in the interpretive paradigm following a qualitative approach. In this method, human experiences, values and personal stories of research participants constructs a meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I took their interviews in their own comfortable place and time. Being a school leaders, they used to seem busy on their duty. While taking an interview, I was aware of non verbal cues, their tone of voice, body language and facial expression as well. I took memos too, while interviewing my research participants which helped me to enrich and support data interpretation and interview transcription. Every interviews were taken for about 45 minutes. I visited more than twice to every research participant to ensure that the data I had collected has richness and they are saturated point where no new information emerges (Guest et al., 2006).

I got consent of every research participant to record their interview along with detail notes. I took interview privately and individually to maintain research participants' privacy and confidentiality. It also helped to create comfort and openness with research participants. As I was professionally familiar and known to some of the research participants, the interviews were like open story telling than a formal data collection. I returned summaries of interviews to research participants for reviewing which ensured the credibility of my data as member checking in the research process.

As myself a private school principal, there was a potential of researcher bias while interpreting the data. To address this, I have exercised reflexivity by keeping note book to write down my thoughts and feelings. To make the results more reliable and less subjective, I also had an outside coder help with the thematic coding step for

triangulation purposes. I got help from outside coder to classify themes to make my research trustworthy. The outside coder compared across interpretations and reduced the risk of bias while identifying patterns and themes. My thesis supervisor Assistant Professor Dr. Shehsa Kanta Pangei taught me to work with ATLAS.ti 24. I was not aware of this software, after getting idea on it I worked with ATLAS.ti 24, a software for qualitative data analysis. It was a qualitative data analysis software designed to help researchers organize, code and interpret non numerical data. By the help of it I generated code from the interview data.

Additionally, although my familiarity with participants enhanced trust and openness, it also posed challenges in maintaining complete objectivity. In summary, the narrative inquiry approach is a practical and meaningful method for narrating complex and emotional experiences of private school principals of Kathmandu during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Narrative Interpretation and Meaning-Making

I have selected a narrative inquiry methodology to explore the experiences of private school principals in Kathmandu during the COVID-19 pandemic in context of pedagogy in this study. I have chosen this approach because, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that narrative inquiry emphasizes personal narratives to extract meaning from experiences especially suitable for documenting the subjective realities and emotional reactions of private school principals in Kathmandu during the COVID-19 pandemic. I purposively chose four private school principals in Kathmandu from different background so that I could capture variety of perspectives. I conducted interview physically to collect data. Interviews were not less than 45 minutes to each research participants.

As suggested by Guest et al.(2006), I conducted follow up interviews to make sure that I had enough data. During the interviews, I also paid attention to non-verbal clues including facial expressions, tone, gestures, and pauses during the interviews. With the participants' permission, all of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed word for word to keep the participants' voices true and honest. The data were in Nepali, so I translated myself to code and analyze in English. To reduce the chance of losing meaning during translation, I went back to the original recordings and the translated texts and, when necessary, explained idiomatic terms and phrases that were culturally specific. To keep semantic trustworthiness, any unclear

interpretations were looked over with the help of multilingual coworkers who were familiar with qualitative research.

As an interpretive researcher, I went thoroughly with the participants' narratives by repeatedly listening to and closely analyzing the transcripts. The continuous interaction with narrative data is essential for identifying significant patterns (Riessman, 2008). I used thematic analysis following Bogdan and Biklen (1997). I divided the stories into smaller pieces. Labeled the repeated ideas with codes, and grouped them in similar codes to form themes. I paid attention not only to what the participants said but also to their tone, pauses, and emotions during the interview. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) claim that these details are crucial in narrative research which helped strengthen my analysis.

I shared interpretations with my research participants to make them more credible and accurate that they had provided in the interview time. I collected their feed back and used to make descriptions and interpretations better.

Narrative inquiry approach is suitable to explore the experiences of private school principals in Kathmandu during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in context of pedagogy. It is particularly appropriate for capturing the subjective realities and emotional responses (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I purposively selected four private school principals to represent diverse background of the private school in Kathmandu. These included variations in gender, academic qualifications, leadership experience, and school ownership structures (such as rented, leased, and self-owned premises).

I interviewed research participants physically given more 45 minutes to each. Additionally, I conducted follow up interviews to saturate the data as guided by Guest et al. (2006). While interviewing, I was paying attention on their facial expression, tone of voice and body language as well which Seidman (2019) considers essential for uncovering deeper meanings in qualitative inquiry.

Being an interpretive researcher with following narrative inquiry, I spent a lot of time to listen research participants' stories and carefully read transcripts time and again. Staying closely connected to narrative data helps researcher to find important patterns (Riessman, 2008). Using thematic analysis from Bogdan and Biklen (1997), I broke the stories into smaller parts, gave codes to repeated ideas, and grouped those codes to form themes. Throughout this process, I focused not only on what participants said but also on how they said it. Their tone of voice, pauses, and

emotions during the interviews make analysis richer and more meaningful (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

For the credibility and accuracy of the research, I shared interpretation to my research participants. The feedback I got from member checking is incorporated in refining descriptions and interpretations of the emerging theme.

Additionally, to improve analytical rigor and reduce subjectivity, I sought the assistance of an external coder who reviewed selected transcripts independently which helped me check the codes and themes from different angles to make analysis more reliable.

The final interpretation of the themes were guided by two theoretical frameworks: Instructional Leadership Theory and Resilience Theory. Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) provided a frame for understanding how school principals supported teacher development and effective curriculum implementation in the classroom during the adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile the Resilience Theory (Gu & Day, 2007) assert how these private school principals adapted the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. There were plenty of challenges like limited internet access to teachers and students as well. Additionally, being the school principals they had financial crunches too. So how they had bounced back will be studied through the lens of resilience theory.

The research emphasizes the significance of educational leadership through the use of narrative inquiry, thematic analysis, and established theoretical framework. It also focuses on private school principals' adaptability and resilience in leading schools during the adversity.

Quality Standards of the Study

Credibility is established by collecting rich and detailed stories from participants using multiple data sources and making sure that the analysis is grounded in the data. It emphasizes the quality of personal stories and lived experiences as research data. People don't judge the quality of narrative inquiry by how well it fits with statistics (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Instead they look at things like credibility, coherence, and ethical representation.

Temporality

During my research process, I was aware of the concept of the temporality and its crucial role in narrative inquiry. Temporality is about how time and timing influence the participants' experiences. As a researcher I understood that time is not

only an backdrop of human experience; it is an active dimension that shapes how individual make sense of their lives across past, present, and future (Connelly & Calndinin, 2006).

I found that each participant's narrative was grounded in their changing experiences of over a time. Their experinces of pedagogical practices during the COVID-19 pandemic were not isolated incidents but were informed by the historical backgrounds, present realities, and anticipated future. Riessman (2008) asserts that participant's narratives are temporally organized with meaning arising from the sequencing and interpretation of events over time in narrative reserch.

I conducted interviews in several times to honour temporal dimension. The research participants were allowed to reflect on how their experiences influenced their current pedagogical decisions and future aspirations.

Moreovr, I was conscious of temporal sensitivity in my questioning. I interviewd in a way that encouraged reflection across time, for example, by asking participants to recount their initial reactions at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, their adaptive strategies during online virtual learning and their visions for the future strategies for the survival of schools.

This approach supported what Saldaña (2016) emphasizes that temporal insights add richness and coherence to qualitative research by helping to trace developmental trajectories in human behavior and meaning-making.

Temporality is an active component of meaning making but not a pasive context in this study. By foregrounding time in my inquiry, I was better able to understand how private school principals in Kathmandu made sense of, responded to, and projected forward from the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sociality

While conducting narrative inquiry, I knew that the participants' stories were not isolated or purely individual expressions which were deeply embedded in social, cultural, and relational contexts. As a researcher, I realized that the person cannot be separated from the society and that each narrative was shaped by the participants' interactions with others, their values, and their place within their communities. As Clandinin et al. (2007), state that researchers should focus on what participants, feel, hope and believe along with the social situations and relationship that shape their experiences.

The purpose of engaging with participants in the field was to explore their thoughts, emotions, and responses within the greater social world. I listened to what was said and paid attention to the values and cultural beliefs that were included in those narratives. Additionally, I got to know how interactions with students, teachers, parents and the education system had shaped their professional decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bruner (1991), claims that human experiences gain meaning through cultural narratives. I worked to establish a sense rapport and relational trust with participant to make their story telling more authentic. I found that when participants felt emotionally safe and respected they were more willing to open up on their reflections on the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was also aware of my own role in shaping research relationship. As Josselson (2013) claims, narrative researcher must remain aware of their own influence in co-constructing meaning from dialogue. I thought about how my role as a principal might have influenced on them during our conversation. By showing empathy and being aware of cultural differences, I was able to understand why they kept silent since silence and hesitation can often reveal (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

In each meeting for the interview, I found my participants connected to their students, teachers, and parents while providing informations. According to Ellis (2007) ethical research requires deep respect for the complexities of participants' lives and their social context. I was able to understand through this process that how personal experiences and social contexts are closely linked. This understanding helped me interpret their stories more meaningfully and honouring their voices.

Spatiality

In my research, I became very aware of how important space and setting are in shaping people's stories and experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) claim that spatiality isn't just about the physical place where something happens but it also includes the emotional, cultural and social aspects that affect how people connect with and experiences their surroundings. The space in which a story is told and lived a participant is never neutral. It carries symbolic, historical, and relational meanings. As Lefebvre (1991) asserts, space is socially produced and shaped by power, history, and lived interactions. This means that the places where participants work, lead, teach, and where I interview them can strongly influence how openly they speak and how comfortable they feel sharing their experiences.

Being mindful of this, I made priority to select interview settings that were familiar, comfortable and emotionally safe for the participants. In most cases, I chose their own work places as an interview sites. Their schools and own offices were places where they felt sense of ownership and ease to narrate their experiences openly without fear and judgement. This approach aligns with the suggestion of Gubrium and Holstein (2003), who point out that interview environments influence the construction and delivery of narratives.

I also noticed that the physical arrangement of space whether we sat in a private room, a busy office, or an open courtyard has affected the flow of the conversation and the tone of the storytelling. When participants were in spaces where they felt respected and undisturbed, their reflections were deeper and more personal.

According to Massey (2005), the space is relational and shaped through interactions that hold power to shape identity and belonging. Additionally, I was attentive to how participants described their own spatial contexts such as school building, classroom or virtual spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their stories were deeply connected in these environments, and I realized that their leadership decisions often shaped by their physical and structural realities of these spaces. As Soja (1996) claims that spatiality and social action are closely linked and understanding one requires attention to the other.

Being sensitive to spatiality, I was able to gain a fuller understanding of how the place and context in which participants live and lead influence the way they think, feel, and act.

Reflexivity

I was aware of my own background, beliefs, and position that I hold can influence research process. I realized early on that I was not a neutral observer, instead I was an active participant in shaping how data was collected, interpreted, and presented. Berger (2015), asserts that researchers bring their lenses to research and be mindful of how these lenses affect their understanding of participants' stories.

As a private school principal myself, I shared certain professional experiences with my participants which helped me to build a rapport with research participants during the data collection. However, I was also aware of that this shared identity could lead me to make assumptions or unintentionally influence the direction of conversation. To avoid this, I used to take steps to reflect on my biases preconceptions, and positionality. I regularly wrote memos and journal to track how

my interpretations evolved and to remain transparent about how I was making meaning of the narratives. This process helped me stay grounded and open to alternative interpretations which is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to minimize distortion (Finlay, 2002).

Stories do not emerge in isolation rather they are shaped through the interaction between researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I found my presence, questions, and even facial expressions sometimes influenced how participants framed their experiences. Recognizing this helped becoming more ethical and empathetic listener. I also thought carefully about the power dynamics between me and the participant. Even though, I tried to speak with humility and respect. I knew they might still see me differently because I was the researcher. I wanted to get findings that were true and reliable as well as moral and respectful of the participants. I believe that practicing reflexivity throughout this research journey helped me represent participants' voice accurately.

Ethical Considerations

After the submission of my research proposal to the university research committee, I got permission to do the field work. I got a formal letter of approval that authorized me to collect data from the field. Understanding that ethical responsibility goes beyond institutional approval, I took additional steps to ensure that all research activities were respectful and protective of participants' rights. I formally requested permission from each school principal to conduct the study on their premises, making sure that the interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient and comfortable for both the school and the participants.

Ethics in research were very important to me during the whole journey of research process. I had both verbal and written consent from all the research participants who took part in my research study. I made sure that each research participant understood the objective of the research. I was aware that my ethical duty went beyond the getting permission from the research participants. Parahoo (1997) claimed that ethical considerations begins even before data collection. I additionally asked the school principals who were my research participants and made sure that the interviews were planned at their comfortable time and place.

During these consent processes, I clearly explained the purpose, goals, and procedures of the study to each individual. I also emphasized that their participation

was entirely voluntary and they had the right to decline or withdraw from the study at any point without needing to give a reason.

My attention was always on dignity and autonomy of research participants, which Cohen et al. (2007) describe as central to ethical research involving human subjects.

I used pseudonyms to protect my research participants' privacy and confidentiality who have helped me to provide data in my research study. I got explicit consent from them to record their interviews through ensuring that the recording process was fully transparent and that participants remained in control of their stories. As recommended by Wiles et al. (2008), I also stored all recorded and written data securely to maintain confidentiality and throughout the analysis and writing stage.

Maintaining ethical practice was not a checklist but it was a relational and ongoing responsibility as a researcher. I continuously reflected on how my presence, questions, and decisions could affect participants and took step to protect their emotional and professional well being throughout the study which aligned to relational ethics in qualitative research (Ellis, 2007).

In summary, I grounded my study in ethical principals that prioritized informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for all research participants involved in my study. This ethical considerations helped me creating trust, oneness among the research participants and credibility in me research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explains the research methodology used to explore the experiences of private school principals in Kathmandu who continued education during and after ti COVID-19 pandemic. The study is grounded in aconstructivist philosophical foundation, which views reality as multiple and socially constructed and shaped by individual experiences. Ontologically, the research reconizes that each principal experienced the pandemic differently according to school context, leadership style and available resources. Epistemologically, the study sees knowlwdge as created through experience, reflection and interaction, while axiology emphasizes the researcher's ethical responsibility and awareness of personal values throughout the inquiry. The study follows an interpretive paradigm and sues narrative inquiry as the research methodology because it allows participants to share their lived experiences in their own voices. Four founder principals from different categories of private schools

in Kathamndu were purposively selected to provide diverse perspectives. Data were collected through in depth face to face interviews, follow up converstaions, memo writing, and audio recordings. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and meanings in the narratives. Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation and respectful engagement were maintained throughout the research.

CHAPTER IV

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE IN ADCERSITY

In this chapter, I have developed range of themes to present the stories and lived experiences of my research participants. I explored how private school principals in Kathmandu experienced the unexpected change from the traditional face to face class to online virtual platforms for continuing education in schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This unexpected change brought significant psychological stress among school principals, teachers, students and parents exposing technological limitations.

As I listened to the narratives of my participants, I found that each private school principals demonstrated a unique form of leadership in the face of adversity (Heifetz et al., 2009). Their experiences explain that how they have managed the overwhelming technological challenges. Without a prior competent knowledge in ICT they had to shift classes to the digital online mode was real challenge to every school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chapter also shows how the participants managed financial problems when many of the parents couldn't pay school fees on time. Because of the uncertainty of the school fees many school principals had to make difficult choices like delayed salaries, cutting down salaries and reducing other regular expenses.

Furthermore, I explored how school principals worked to maintain students' well being as well. During the transitional time, school children were not psychologically prepared of online learning. I came to understand from the participant that involving parents, encouraging students, and providing emotional support to teachers were very important (Dawadi & Simkhada, 2020).

Additionally, this chapter talks about online learning outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic varied significantly. They were influenced by the students' home environment, digital access like laptop, desktop or internet availability. The parents' involvement and students' psychological readiness played a vital role in online learning (Garbe et al., 2020; Khanal et al., 2022). Through this narrative based and thematic exploration, it interpreted school principals' resilience, leadership growth, systemic gaps that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they faced during a global educational crisis.

Adaptive Leadership in Educational Disruption

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences were unexpected and not experienced earlier which disrupted education system worldwide. UNESCO says, at the peak of the pandemic in April 2020, more than 1.6 billion school children in more than 190 countries were away from the schools. It covered almost 94% of the school children around the globe who were affected by the school closures physically.

Private school principals in Kathmandu were no exception to this chaos. One of my research participants, Prabal, mentions that *“As a principal, it was challenging to prepare students, parents, and teachers for the continuation of education online.”* From the statements of Prabal, I drew the point that it was a situation of chaos and uncertainty for them which was challenging for running the school during the COVID-19 pandemic. They had to act quickly without adequate ICT training, ICT resources, or guidelines. They had psychological stress and burnout during the time because they had to continue school with online mode as well as they had to manage financials of the schools. Multiple issues had to be addressed by the school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue schools (Karakose et al., 2020). It was challenging that not all the students and teachers had access to online devices, stable internet and electricity. Additionally, parents may have lacked the knowledge or time to support online learning for their children.

Prabal pointed out that *technological readiness was emergent to cope with the situation, which was beyond the plan of school leadership.* Before the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were not practicing and experiencing online or virtual classes. They had a little knowledge about online tools. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was mandatory to run classes. Ram Kumar shares his experiences like:

We were not well equipped and aware of online technology, though it was mandatory. Technology adoption was the toughest for me. I was not very familiar with ICT, though I had to lead the whole school. I had to learn at first. I tried to learn from my colleagues. I learned from teachers. That was a situation I felt the toughest because I had to visit all the classes as physical classes through virtual means. It was difficult because I had to observe and visit through Zoom, a technology that I used. I had to learn myself and teach the whole school in preparation for the online classes.

It was a challenge for school principals that they were not competent in ICT, and teachers' lack of awareness was another major hindrance to running online

classes. Kaur (2023) argues that such a lack of ICT awareness in teachers is a serious obstacle in the education system. Though the school principals were the change agents in schools who had to be capable to transform schools, Ram Kumar's experience continuing school during the pandemic was horrifying. He had been working for the last three decades as a founder principal in the school. The COVID-19 pandemic made it mandatory to learn ICT skills to continue education in his school. It demanded different alternative tools like blended learning as a way of addressing equity issues for learners (Nuryadin et al., 2023). However, due to the inexperience and incompetency of ICT, few teachers even had to leave teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a challenge for principals in managing teachers.

Generally, ICT skill enhancement became a must for every school principal so that they could continue teaching learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the school principals were competent in ICT, though they were experienced in running online virtual classes. Despite the difficulties, it was an opportunity to learn ICT skills. Ahmad et al. (2020) claimed that school principals played a key role in making teach from home which shown a flexible leadership. For private school principals, learning to use ICT became essential to keep their schools running during the COVID-19 pandemic. They had to act not only as administrative heads but as a visionary change agent for continuing education in emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Many school principals, like Ram Kumar, despite decades of experience, were compelled to rapidly develop digital skills to ensure continuity in education in their schools.

Ram Kumar adds here that it was not only a challenge, *“It was a horror situation for the school management as a founder principal. We have crossed the most difficult situation, and now we are comfortable. However, the impact of COVID-19 is still there with students psychologically and financially in schools.”*

Here, Ram Kumar's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to run school as a principal is terrifying. Financial management as a school principal was another challenge for him due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, approaching the situation with an open and positive mindset and collaborating with others, he paved the way for potential solutions. Aggarwal et al. (2020) also emphasized the importance of leadership competency and strategic collaboration in addressing educational and financial hurdles during the pandemic.

Another research participant, Chitra, mentioned that,
As a leader, I had to do right from the beginning, which was a challenge for me. I learned all the online tools that we used during COVID-19 to run school. First, I learned all of those, and then I could guide my team on the pros and cons of the online tools.

While going through the stories of all research participants, I came to conclusion that none of the school principals were ready technically, especially ICT, for the alternative mode of teaching for continuation of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. But they were obliged to run the school at any cost by learning themselves and equipping their teachers as well within a short period of time. Callo and Yazon (2020) highlight the challenges faced by school principals and faculty, emphasizing the abrupt learning curve and the necessity to quickly adopt ICT tools to ensure the continuity of education that principals have experienced.

Sustaining Education Amid Financial Constraints

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the financial management of private schools. The private schools in Nepal faced financial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kunwar, 2021). Schools had difficulties to manage staff salaries, house rent like regular expenses. Meanwhile, the waiver of student fees for a month, which was appealed by the government and decided by the PABSON, further stranded the financial management of these schools. Coping with all these, the participants have different experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in managing finances in their schools. Yesu, one of my research participants, shares her experience,

Obviously, yeah, we had budgetary limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic because parents also were suffering from COVID-19, so we didn't have the income sources at that time. It was very difficult to manage income sources at the time. To cope with this situation, we provided 50% of the salary during the COVID-19. Survival was major at that time; in some cases, we were not able to pay more than 25% of the salary to our teachers.

As per Yesu's experience, private schools did not have a sustainable long-term financial strategy for school operations, which was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though they practically prepared a short-term strategy for financial survival. Gautam (2020) identifies financial strategies for private schools during emergencies in Nepal, emphasizing cost reduction, renegotiation of fixed expenses

(e.g., rent and other utilities), and seeking local government support. Less and late salary payments were their strategies to survive during that time.

Prabal, another research participant, has a different experience and has another kind of approach to running the school during that time, and he says:

In this regard, I have two perspectives. The budget was decreased. It means that we could not claim and collect hundred percent fees from the students. Because we are private schools we could not. At the same time, the expenses also have decreased in some of the areas such as transport, hostel expenses, and canteen expenses. But the salary part for the teachers has differences as it has to be paid regularly. Some of the parents did not send their children to school, it was not a huge percentage, though the income has been reduced, and the expenses also have reduced in comparison to the physical mode before COVID-19 in my school. We ran with our source of funds. We had OD from the bank to issue salaries for the teachers. We provided around 80% of the salary to teachers. After 3-4 months we got support from the parents as monthly fees. It smoothly went well.

Despite the difficulties, private school principals have varied experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have opted for different strategies for coping with financial management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prabal did not seek any financial assistance or borrow any loan from the banks, though there was a soft loan financial assistance program from the bank to pay the salaries of the employees (Malakar, 2024). He already had financial liabilities to the banks, so they did not take out loans.

Ram Kumar, one of my research participants, mentions that he had financial difficulties in 2077 BS in the first wave of COVID-19 to run school, but in the second wave of the pandemic, he says:

We paid a full salary after the school resumed physically. We managed internally. We had zoning with teachers and staff for salary purposes. We had three zones: green zone, yellow zone, and red zone. As per the zoning system, we have categorized them as whoever has a home nearby or in the Kathmandu valley or has alternative sources for livelihood. They belong to the green, and the next is yellow, which reflects that they have partial sources for survival another is the red zone, which is solely dependent on the school only who is staying in rent, and no member of the family is supporting him or her and no

other income sources. We paid full salary to our staff and teachers who were in the red zone.

From the expressions of Ram Kumar, I came to the point that each of the school principals had their ideology and perspective on dealing with financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ram Kumar had a zoning system for his school teachers and staff regarding salary payment. He categorized them as per their need but paid full salary since he resumed school physically in between the COVID-19 pandemic. This also compensated in terms of financial management in the short term (Batra et al., 2021).

To break the uncertainty and chaos created by the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative learning was mandatory to continue education. As noted by Chimbi (2024), resource limitations in certain regions necessitated innovative approaches, such as radio lessons, to accommodate alternative learning. However, online or virtual classes for school-level children were new to everyone. The availability of digital devices, the accessibility of the internet, and the continuous supply of electricity played a vital role in continuing private school education. Ram Kumar shares his experiences of how he had prepared as a school principal in this way:

We had to convince our parents a lot to register students at the beginning. We requested parents to register their kids for the online class. And pay nominal registration fees for their wards. So that we could manage and register that they were our students. We provided the bank account for the registration of their wards. Some of them deposited in the bank as the registration of their wards. In the later phase, by following the health protocol we called parents to the school as well to pay their fees with time allocation to minimize the crowd. Parents also accepted our request to register their wards and came to school for the same purpose. We had to sustain school at any cost so we requested parents to pay fees as little as possible. Parents helped a lot with our request so that we could sustain our school in the adverse situation. Some of them came to school physically. In this way, we collected and managed the financial resources that supported us to sustain our teachers and continue education during COVID-19.

Not only Ram Kumar, but every school principal had the same experience regarding the student's registration for the online class at the beginning. The nationwide lockdown started between the end of the academic year and the beginning

of it, which caused trouble in registering students for further upgraded classes in schools. Most preschool children did not register or attend online classes throughout the year (Flack et al., 2021). All of them agreed that their revenue had decreased, though they opted for different strategies financially. The number of students has impacted the revenue of the private schools. Chitra, another research participant, says:

Overall, student numbers decreased because of the COVID-19's impact. 15 percent of students did not attend school during the COVID-19. Overall, 5-10 percent of students decreased. Still, we are not at the number that we had before COVID-19. We could not recover the dues that were due to COVID-19. We could not take 30-50 lakhs as a big amount for the institution.

Chitra also experienced similar to other private school principals. Because of the declining number of students due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the revenues of the private schools declined. Chitra, shares that 15 percent of his school students did not join during the pandemic. The pandemic has globally impacted businesses, and the income of parents might have been affected (Alam & Tiwari, 2021). As a consequence of this, around ten percent of students left school because of COVID-19. Payment delays and defaults in fees were other financial issues for the schools, which hampered the smooth operation financially. It was a critical challenge for private school principals to run schools smoothly financially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ICT Adaptation During the COVID-19

School leader's efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic refers to their perceived ability and effectiveness in addressing the challenges created by the global health crisis within the educational context. People around the world were worried about the spread of COVID-19, despite the health issues all were aware of continuing education. In the context of private schools in Nepal, principals were more concerned to continue school-level education and were solely dependent financially upon the tuition fees of students. Here, Dawadi and Simkhada (2020) explain those aspects related to the resilience and adaptive strategies used by school principals aiming to continuation of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School principals were the key people in deciding how they could run the schools in difficult situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Prabal shares that *"As we are in the 21st century and technologically advanced society, we have to be technologically sound to cope with difficult situations in continuing education. We*

have to upgrade ourselves. For example, we used one app earlier, and now we are upgrading it.” Though Prabal was used for some of the applications for digital learning, it was not mandatorily used as a teaching-learning tool. Their ICT competency has played a vital role in continuing education during this time (Shrestha et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic compelled him to opt for the app to continue education in his school as an educational leader. He additionally learned that everyone has to be ready for an adverse situation of any kind, which is not sometimes predictable. Competency in ICT has contributed a lot to continuing education during emergencies, even in -school-level teaching and learning. He again says, *“If we learn new technology and skills, we will be able to overcome COVID-19 like a pandemic for continuing the in the future to some extent we can run schools and make teaching learning.”* But Ram Kumar, another research participant, has a different kind of experience in running the schools during the COVID-19 he says *“We were teaching through whiteboard and marker before the COVID-19 pandemic, but all of a sudden we were compelled to adopt the digital version of teaching which was challenging to every one of us”*. Within Kathmandu, we find varied approaches of schools to ICT.

Prabal was familiar with ICT, so Prabal did not find difficulties as compared to Ram Kumar. Because Ram Kumar was less competent in ICT and ICT tools were not familiar to his school. Similarly, Patowary et al. (2022) discuss the challenges faced by educators during the transition from traditional teaching methods to digital platforms. So, it seems that shifting a version from physical whiteboard teaching to digital online and virtual teaching is equally challenging as well. Principals had to learn themselves and train teachers to continue education in their schools. Ram Kumar again shares, *“As a founder principal, I tried my best to train teachers to keep them updated on the technology needed for running online classes.”* As founder principals, organizing the ICT training for the teachers and regular online meetings with teachers and other support staff to make online teaching effective were always part of learning them.

Preparing Children for Learning During Educational Crises

Psychological preparedness for young children during the COVID-19 pandemic was a crucial aspect of helping them to continue their education. Online education for school-level children was not experienced earlier by schools in Nepal. Dawadi et al. (2020) highlighted some key challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in Nepal. In this difficult time, only the means to

continue education during the COVID-19 pandemic was online. For the private schools in Kathmandu, running classes online became a lifeline to sustain schools. It was not an easy job to run online classes for private schools, and it was equally challenging for parents. Yesu narrates her experience as a founder principal and says:

Yeah. Especially, online education was a very new technology for students and ourselves during COVID-19. So, especially for primary school students, those who were good at studying also had problems because they did not have a habit of staying in front of a screen for long hours for classes. So, like that, for those who were weak at studies, we had convinced the parents and parents were sitting with students in primary grades. And that is the main thing that students and parents learned more things from the class. We have to keep the students in front of the screen, and gradually, the students and parents become familiar with the screen. And later, it became used to. Screen was a school at that time.

The technology adopted by online classes was new to teachers, students, and parents as well, which was challenging too. Despite these challenges, there was no alternative to online classes during this time (Dawadi et al., 2020). The students were not psychologically ready for the online classes, but the school, with the support of parents, started online teaching through Zoom, teams, or Google Meet during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the junior children, parents were obliged to support their children to stay with their children in an online class. Staying in an online class for long hours on a screen had brought school children into a panic. They were not motivated for the learning, but there was no alternative to the online classes.

Here, one of the research participants, Prabal, says that classes run during COVID-19 were effective, though student achievement or learning was less because they were not motivated and ready for the classes. As he narrates his experience this way:

It was a challenge to bring the school children from the fearful panic of COVID-19 psychology to teaching-learning. Another challenge was how to teach because schools were shut down. It was not possible to bring in the school because of the lockdown. From the students' perspectives, they were not taking classes as real as they used to be in the physical mode. They were used to physically and academically controlled environments before COVID-

19, and the situation was vice versa later during COVID-19. Teachers were not able to follow up like they were in physical mode. So, students were less likely to study in online mode. They were not serious about their study, which was a challenge to the teachers and school principal. Mainly three main challenges I noticed. The first is technology for every one of us. The second is that students were not psychologically motivated for the class, the third is parents' readiness.

From the point of view of Prabal, addressing students' psychology and running online classes applying the technology were equally challenging as a school principal. Readiness for the online class from the parents' end was also additionally challenging to make learning effective during and after COVID-19 as a school principal. Here, Khanal et al. (2022) claimed that the educators in Nepal had faced similar difficulties which were the lack of readiness by parents and students. The school principals' inefficiency in technology, students' less interest in online classes and parents' less supports were challenges during the pandemic to continue education for the private school.

Though, the private school principals played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue education. They created an environment for teaching students virtually by adopting technology within a short span of time. They trained teachers for the same to continue virtual online classes. They convinced their parents for the online classes to ensure continuity of education like the COVID-19 pandemic (Jawaid et al., 2024).

Prabal experienced difficulty in creating a physically and psychologically conducive learning environment for both the teacher and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Loera et al. (2024) emphasized that addressing psychological well-being and creating an inclusive and supportive atmosphere is essential to ensuring effective learning, though it was challenging. Ram Kumar has a similar experience to Prabal and says:

When we started online classes, most of the students were not ready for it. The situation was compelling. Though they were in online classes, their interest and concentration were less in learning. They were pretending. Used to complain that they had an electricity problem, some of them had a device problem, some of them had a microphone problem in the laptop, or a gadget,

and some of them used, a camera problem. Most of the time, and these were to escape from the online classroom.

In Ram Kumar's experience comparing in classes before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, he found that the classes were less effective in online virtual mode. Students in online virtual classes used to complain about internet connectivity and device issue during the class time. They were the main issues to remain irregular and absent in online virtual classes. Management of technological barriers and engaging students for learning was always a challenge to the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mthembu, 2024).

The teacher could not do well and focus much on teaching because the environment was not favorable; rather, it was chaos and worrying about health. There was uncertainty and chaos. Students were not psychologically motivated for online learning. They were less interested in online classes. Schmitt-Cerna et al. (2024) claimed that the challenges students faced in adapting to virtual learning environments, noting the critical role of psychological motivation and parental support. Additionally, from the parents' perspective, education was not the primary, but health was primary during COVID-19. Another participant, Chitra, says, *“At first, none of us were ready for the online classes. Neither the students, parents, and the teachers. After three months, everyone realized that there was no way than to continue education.”*

Chitra's version is contingent over here. From his experience, I drew the point that school principal needs to be ready for the future at any time. Though online virtual classes were new to everyone, by the next few weeks, it became mandatory and normal for all teachers and principals to continue education in their schools. School principals played a critical role in adapting changes and supporting teacher for online learning practices during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shoaib et al., 2024).

COVID-19 proved that health always comes first. Health keeps a person comforted; that is the reason it brings them to think about education. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved to the world that 'Health comes first.' During COVID-19, health came first, whereas when COVID initially attacked, nobody cared about education but health. When life came in handy, everything seemed fine. However, we figured that health was not only about having food in the belly and air to breathe, but it also related to our academic survival. Hong (2024) argues that early emphasis on health over education eventually gave way to innovative adaptations in online learning to

sustain education during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has, in turn, brought parents, schools, and teachers to seek out new avenues to keep up with the learning processes without traditional classrooms, moving onto virtual classes even though students are not psychologically prepared for such a concept.

Addressing Student Achievement Challenges

Student learning achievement have been globally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. School shifted mode of teaching learning from physical face to face to online virtual using different means of emergency remote instruction. Google Meet, Teams and Zoom were used as means of online classes without adequate training to teachers. The lack of efficiency in using these tools created gaps in instructional quality and student engagement (Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

Key interventions to support student learning during this period included increased reliance on digital gadgets like computers, laptops, the internet, adaptive learning methods, and AI-enhanced tools. Despite the psychological readiness of the school children, online classes were started to continue education in schools. The younger children were more negatively affected in their learning than older children. Because they were seeking more help from their parents in real-time virtual online classes. Dong et al. (2020) highlighted the reliance of younger children on parental assistance and the challenges this posed, especially as parents themselves faced difficulties adapting to the online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here, Prabal shares his experience as a school principal during the COVID-19 pandemic and says:

Digital teaching was not as effective as it has been. However, middle school and secondary school students have less learning achievement if they are not self-conscious about online classes. There was less consistency in learning in these grades. We are doubtful with a hundred percent learning. For self-motivated students, online class learning achievement was fine, but the students who neglect class and teachers have issues learning through online classes.

Online teaching was the only option to continue education during the pandemic, though one of my research participants, Prabal also agrees that online teaching was not as effective as it has to be. The consequence of this is less achievement by the students. Classroom effectivity has a direct relation with student

achievement. Freeman et al. (2014) cite that active learning involves methods that engage students directly in the learning process through discussions, problem-solving, case studies, and other hands-on tasks rather than passively absorbing information from lectures. Students with self-motivation and consciousness learned comparatively more than other students during the online classes.

Another participant, Ram Kumar, says:

Around 35-40 percent of higher-class students could not do well in learning because they were independent of their parents. They were not closely observed by the parents. In some cases, students cannot write properly. Writing is difficult work in the learning process, and COVID-19 has impacted students in writing because of less learning achievement during COVID-19. Some of the students in the junior classes don't want to write. However, the students who were genuinely connected through ZOOM and honestly willing to learn had good learning achievements. However, it was not compared to a physical class. It was better than not learning anything. Though the students who were willing to learn had learning achievement, those who were compelled had less learning achievement. The impact still prevails among the students. Still, there is a gap with students. We were compelled to run schools.

Here, from Ram Kumar's narration, he has a different experience than Prabal. He claims that learning achievement was low during COVID-19 because of the less support from the parents. Students who were closely seeking support could not get the expected support, which was a must during the time. Additionally, he says online classes were comparatively less effective than physical classes. Hossain and Kawar (2024) assert that online education faced many challenges, such as low student participation and lack of proper support. Because of this, virtual online learning often wasn't as effective as learning in traditional physical classroom. However, some of the students did better than physically as they presented in international programs online. But Ram Kumar feels that it was better than nothing. As per Ram Kumar, writing became an issue for almost all of the students during the online class. This is because the prolonged school closures curtailed opportunities for guided writing practice and teacher feedback (Graham & Harris, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Writing practice was less during the online classes, which caused the students to be poor at writing. However, some of the students who were sincere in online learning and getting enough support from their parents had good learning achievements.

Here, Chitra has the same experience as Ram Kumar and says that parents' support and students' readiness to online classes determined the learning achievement of the students. He adds that 60-70% of students benefited through online classes. Few of the students from his school had the opportunity to be exposed internationally. Here, Churiyah et al. (2020) highlight how parental involvement and readiness for distance learning were crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing opportunities for students to connect beyond traditional learning environments. These were all possible because of the online classes. He shares as a school leader this way:

I don't say that one hundred percent of learning took place during COVID-19. It depends on parents also. Whoever parents supported the children to manage necessary devices on time, and children's readiness for the online classes learned a lot. The students with curiosity in learning had improved a lot; they seemed confident in speaking in mass through the video. However, some of the students did learn less because they did not get devices and access to strong and reliable internet facilities. I don't claim about others, but in our school, 60-70 percent of students benefit through online classes. There were 20-30 percent of students who were paying less attention and were lazy for learning whose learning achievement seems very less. Regularly staying at home in a room and taking online classes were monotonous; to avoid it, we did some game classes online. If you could create such a situation where students feel joy, learning automatically takes place. They developed themselves to present at an international seminar for the school level because of ICT. They had developed a lot, like making PowerPoint presentations and presenting online.

All of these research participants have similar experiences on student achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic. They agreed that students' sincerity and parents' support played a vital role in students' achievement. Garbe et al. (2020) noted that parental involvement was crucial during remote education, particularly for younger students, to sustain engagement and learning. Students with self-motivation had done better than physical classes in some of the areas. They have gotten plenty of opportunities to be confident and expose themselves through online tools. They learned to use ICT tools. Additionally, those students whose parents were able to support them and were not willing to learn themselves had less learning achievement during the online classes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an in-depth narration of how private school principals come across the complicated challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It discussed about what strategies school principals practiced during the COVID-19 pandemic to financially sustain and run the schools. Their experience on difficulties in financial management created by the pandemic has been narrated thoroughly. Additionally, this chapter has elaborated the impacts on students in academic achievement and their psychology during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also talked about the complexity of continuing education in adversities analyzing the various themes. The chapter provided a valuable qualitative insights of lived experiences of school principal during the COVID-19 pandemic on how they had continue education in schools.

CHAPTER V

Post-COVID-19 Learning Environment: Pedagogy and Well-being

This chapter elaborates on the pedagogical shifts focusing on students' well-being and learning outcomes. It additionally discusses critical lessons learned by the private school principals in Kathmandu during the COVID-19 pandemic on how they sustained teaching learning in schools. The COVID-19 pandemic displaced traditional teaching methodology and established online virtual pedagogy during the time, which changed the role of teachers as facilitators. Information communication and technology became an integral part of teachers for delivering classes virtually in online mode through ZOOM, GOOGLE MEET, and TEAMS. Not only teaching learning purposes but the administrative activities of schools also have shifted to digital virtual mode during that time. The technology was a life line to every one during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chapter explores how challenging it was during the COVID-19 pandemic for the students to face and adapt to a new learning environment. The high dependency on gadgets and their impact on learning achievement is highlighted in this chapter. Difficulty in transitioning back to physical classes in the post-COVID-19 context is also discussed here. The chapter discusses on how the traditional evaluation system proved inadequate during the pandemic and needs to be revisited and redesigned evaluation practices to better reflect students' knowledge and capabilities in the 21st-century digital age. This chapter additionally narrates the importance of financial management and flexible learning structures that principals had adopted. It talks about collaborative efforts between school and parents which ensured education continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shift in Pedagogy and Digital Integration

The teaching pedagogy has been abruptly changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. The shift of traditional face to face physical class to online virtual class has made compelled to rethink of teaching pedagogy. It has made us aware to think for the future strategies in teaching as well.

Ebersole and Wicks (2022) highlight that resilient pedagogy as a strategy for managing educational challenges during times of crisis. The experiences of students and the role of teachers have fundamentally changed in the post-pandemic context.

Teachers in the present day are to be taken as facilitator for the students who provide vast amount of informations through the means of internet.

One of my research participants, Chitra, says, *"Teachers are still important, of course, but now students view them more as facilitators or guides who help them navigate through the vast amount of information available."* He says the teacher's role has been minimized or shifted from the source of knowledge to the facilitator. He says the advancement of technology, mostly the internet, has changed teachers' profession as one of the 'authoritative mentors' from 'authority of knowledge' (Gentile et al., 2023). This way, teachers have to change their role as the facilitator or bridge of knowledge source. ICT in education was prevalent in the western world, but due to COVID-19, it became mandatory at the school level in our context as well.

Contrary to earlier research, participant Ram Kumar noted, *"We had to reintroduce traditional classroom discipline and focus on activities that helped them regain their ability to concentrate and engage in long-term learning."* Despite online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ram Kumar highlighted the need for classroom discipline for the high achievement of the students. He added that traditional classroom teaching had to be reintroduced after the COVID-19 pandemic. In virtual settings, teachers faced difficulties in providing immediate, hands-on supervision and maintaining strict discipline due to the lack of physical proximity and real-time feedback (Dhawan, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). Discipline and drilling are possible from the traditional classroom teaching, which was lacking throughout the online teaching of the students.

The most important lesson from the the COVID-19 pandemic, the school principals got is that they need to be prepared with flexible learning modalities for future crises. As founder principals, they need able take financial liabilities as well all the time. They needed to adopt flexible strategies and practices to address the evolving demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring continuity of education and support for students (Okilwa & Barnett, 2021).

One of my participants, Yesu, says, *"We've already made plans, such as creating financial back-up and preparing for any future emergencies."* As an instructional leader, Yesu has realized backup plans to tackle a situation like COVID-19. Another participant, Ram Kumar, pointed out: *"We need to be prepared for the unexpected and ensure that we have the tools and strategies in place to keep education going, no matter the circumstances."*

While narrating the stories of my research participants, I learned that a shift in pedagogy through technology was mandatory for continuing school during the pandemic. Here, Ahmed and Opoku (2022) add how technology-supported learning provided critical solutions for continuing education during the crisis, emphasizing the role of innovative pedagogical approaches. They additionally shared that technology had impacted the way of working in another sphere of life. Working from home and blended learning modules are examples of changes brought by COVID-19 to general people. Trainings and meetings were held online, which started right with the pandemic as an alternative mode of continuing work. My research respondent, Prabal, says:

There was no alternative of onlie virtual class during the pandemic. This shift fundamentally changed how teaching and learning were conducted. But after the pandemic, the changes that has brought by the pandemic prevailed. Workshops, meetings and other day to day administrative task are still in the virtual mode.

Álvarez-Arregui et al. (2021) explain how school principals played a crucial role in navigating the teaching-learning processes during COVID-19, emphasizing the importance of adapting to new methods like virtual meetings and teacher-parent sessions. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought change to their day-to-day office schedule, too. The meeting module has been run in blended mode. Focusing on training teachers and parents to better support the students has become compulsory for the pedagogical transformation and readiness for the future as well. At the same, it was not easy to bring back online classes to physical mode, one of my research participants, Yeshu, says:

We've conducted workshops and counseling sessions for both students and parents. We have also shifted back to physical face-to-face learning and are gradually reducing dependency on gadgets. It was actually hard time to students to spend two year in home depending upon online virtual education.

It's not just about recovering from the pandemic; it's about building an education system that can thrive in the face of any challenge. The ICT tools used during the COVID-19 and the post-COVID-19 context have reduced somewhat. However, the shift that occurred during the pandemic has permanently changed how we teach, and we continue to benefit from those technological advancements. Nabaasa and Natumanya (2024) claimed that the techolgy has contributed to continue

education even in the situation of the COVID-19m pandemic. It was a mixed experience for teachers in terms of students' learning or achievement. She additionally says:

Many were used to the comfort of online teaching. Yes, students became restless, and it was difficult to engage them in two-way communication. It was difficult to interact in online class like physical class. After COVID, some students continued to struggle with focus in the classroom, as they had gotten used to the virtual format.

Another research participant, Prabal, says that due to online classes, the students' attention span has decreased. *"It was clear that their willpower to learn had decreased significantly",*

Hung (2024) points out that these changes have brought significant decline in emotional connection in students. We could not revert back to the pre-pandemic mode of teaching learning. The pandemic forced us to adapt to digital tools. Such adjustments continued even after schools reopened as hybride model.

Although the pandemic created many challenges in the education sector especially in school level, but it has affected other areas as well. El-Soussi (2025) emphasizes that school principals played a pivotal role in adapting to the demands of the pandemic, driving significant shifts in educational practices and teacher identities. Their experience in ICT utilization was not limited to classroom activities or teaching-learning activities. Regarding the change, my participant Chitra shares his experience this way:

I digitized my school management system. I became able to conduct administrative meetings and run online classes. We introduced AI tools aswell to conduct classes remotely. Additionally, we prepared both teachers and students with right tools and skills to overcome education disruption.

This expression shows the importance of technical skills and equipment for the teaching and learning process. The principals' concentration on such commitment to fulfill the need to transform the educational dimension is an important effort. However, there is a risk in maintaining and changing students' behavioral engagements with gadgets and learning, as another research participant, Chitra, has experienced. There is literature that suggests that enhancing technical skills with recent technology and providing learning opportunities to learners is essential. Dhawan (2020) highlighted the necessity for continual updating of digital and

pedagogical competencies to keep pace with 21st-century skills. From the perspective of Chitra, equipping and transforming the school through the online and digital system also represents a shift in pedagogy and integration of technology during the pandemic. This is how the pandemic has transformed everyone personally, professionally, and institutionally as well. It was a kind of lesson to school principals that they either have to transform or quit. However, they have updated their technical skills for the 21st century.

Assessment in school education is always a landmark for ensuring quality education. In this regard, the participants came in such a situation to rethink and revisit assessment practices as a compulsion of the COVID-19 situation. It has emphasized the need for more resilient and flexible evaluation strategies, aligning with the broader goal of ensuring educational continuity in times of crisis (Soliman , 2024). Here, my research participant Chitra says,

However, I do think that our evaluation system is outdated. It doesn't fully capture the knowledge students have gained, especially in a world where information is more fluid and easily accessible. For instance, a student might know a lot about a subject but fail to write it down effectively in an exam. Our system is too focused on traditional methods, and it doesn't allow for more practical, hands-on evaluations.

As a traditional evaluation system in SEE, students normally attempt to write a paper of seventy-five marks on each subject to evaluate themselves in the examination. This is a traditional system to evaluate students by checking a paper that has been written for three hours. During the pandemic, there were no physical writing examinations, most of the examinations were held online using technology and a continuous evaluation system. Gurajala (2024) highlights that online assessment tools played a significant role in maintaining educational continuity during this period. Chitra claimed they worked well. They were tested through virtual tools. They couldn't conduct standard set exams like SEE and other board exams during the pandemic. Even though, students were evaluated and promoted to higher grades. So, revising the evaluation system is needed in the future, as it was done during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing Student Well-being and Bridging Learning

Two academic years were run in a blended mode during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this, the impact on the school children has been noticed tangibly in

the post-COVID-19 context when they physically joined the classes. Even students who were once active seemed lost and less attentive when they returned to school physically. Wang et al. (2021) found similar trends, noticing significant psychosocial and behavioral challenges among children in the early stages of school reopening after the pandemic. They had a habit of staying on screen for longer hours as class time. My research participant Ram Kumar says, “*It wasn't just about academics anymore; it became about the holistic well-being of the student*”. The learning achievement by the students in the post-COVID-19 context has been a challenge to the schools. The students' learning achievement levels had been degraded. Yeshu has narrated her experience like this:

Even the results show that children are not performing as well as before. We didn't get good marks or performance from the students in the post-COVID-19 context. Yes, we've seen similar trends. Many students struggled during COVID-19, and it was clear in the results. For example, class 10 results showed a large percentage of students not performing well. The pandemic created a huge challenge for us in terms of academic achievement.

Additionally, teachers faced the challenge of dealing with students who have gaps in their learning, especially in core subjects like math and science. Some of the students had gaps during the pandemic because of the inconsistency of the internet and digital devices. Similarly, some of the students had escaped the classes knowingly by engaging in social media and gaming with friends which led to a decline in learning. Dawadi et al. (2020) assert that the lack of reliable internet and digital devices significantly disrupted the learning process and widened educational inequalities during the pandemic. Long hour screen time and gadgets use has become a social problem during the time. Which was even among the school children.

The use of gadgets was lower before COVID-19, but during the pandemic, it became mandatory for school children to continue online classes virtually. Frequent gadget use has a lot of issues like loss of attention span, eye strain, obesity, social isolation, and even fear of missing out in some cases, which has become a psychosocial problem. In some cases, the overuse of gadgets has led to procrastination and decreased performance in school work by the school children. While sharing the stories of the dependency on gadgets as one of the learning challenges, one of my research participants Chitra, says:

Yes, that's another important change we've noticed. Students have become more dependent on gadgets, and they spend a lot more time on screens than they did before. This shift has affected not only their academic habits but also their physical well-being. Before COVID-19, students rarely used ICT tools for learning, but during the pandemic, using these tools became mandatory. It was the only way to continue education. Now, students are more accustomed to using tablets and reading digital books instead of physical ones.

Ram Kumar says that,

It was difficult to engage student in online classes.. He had to stop classes in the middle of the class due to power cut and internet issues. It was not only running classes, it was continuing learning by the students too.

Students have become more dependent on mobile phones and digital gadgets. During the pandemic, they were glued to their digital devices, whether for online classes or personal use. This prolonged screen time caused them to miss out an important social activities like playing with friends and interacting with family during the lockdown. This has caused teachers find difficult to maintain discipline in the physical classroom. These students often appear lazier and less motivated for learning. Keikha et al. (2024) claimed that long screen time to the school children during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the unhealthy habit and decreased motivation in students.

In this regard, one of my research participants, Prabal, says: *"The students didn't seem as focused, and their ability to concentrate on tasks had significantly decreased."* Students have also undergone significant changes in their approach to learning. Before COVID-19, students primarily relied on their teachers and textbooks for knowledge. But now, they've become much more independent, in the sense that they can collect ideas and knowledge from other sources as well mostly from the internet. Because of all these, students' learning achievement has decreased. Miranda et al. (2024) observed that while digital tools enabled independent learning, the heavy reliance on internet-assisted platforms during the pandemic often resulted in a decline in traditional learning achievements.

In terms of confidence, students are more comfortable organizing and participating in activities, both inside and outside the classroom, if they are self-motivated for learning, which is self-support to the students. They're more independent, and this independence has translated into better problem-solving skills.

In many ways, they've developed a more advanced critical mindset than they had before the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, students who were not self-motivated for the learning, seemingly lazy in learning, and needed close support from the teachers had become poor in learning. Unstable internet and lack of digital devices also interrupted learning process of the school children (Luaran & Jain, 2024)

Yeshu, here, says that technology does not always support learning. She additionally says:

We used to talk about integrating technology, but after the pandemic, we felt children's learning had weakened. Now, post-pandemic, many children are still not fully connected to their textbooks. The overuse of mobile phones has impacted their learning outcomes.

Because of the over using and depending on the gadgets, students lost concentration on learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They used to seem less serious on their studies. Osiesi and Arogundabe (2022) claimed similar findings that the shift to online learning disrupted traditional study patterns which reduced students' ability to focus. It also contributed to a decline in learning discipline and long-term academic engagement.

The evaluation pattern and practice had an impact on them. The students who lacked self-discipline often ended up distracted and less focused, even when attending online classes. The continuous exposure to screen was mentally exhausting. According to Pardhan et al. (2022), students' long screen hours negatively impacted on their ability to focus and complete tasks. School children got eye strain because of the long screen hours. They additionally, got health issues like obesity.

Initiatives of School Principals for Post-Covid Learning Environment

The COVID-19 pandemic was chaos and uncertainty in education sector especially in school level, but at the same time, private school principals in Kathmandu had an opportunity to learn several key lessons in the post-COVID-19 context, impacting how they approach education, technology, and community support in education in emergencies. They experienced the need for a long-term strategy to integrate technology, not just as a backup but as a part of everyday learning. They transformed themselves as a change agent and highlighted the need for flexible learning structures, which they adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. They saw the importance of maintaining flexibility in learning. They learned that focusing on students' psychological needs is crucial in learning achievement, along with creating a

physically conducive learning environment. The physical face to face classes shifted to online virtual has been an experience for every school teachers and principals. They started training for teachers to make them digitally able to teach in online virtual mode. Many of the school principals were unprepared for the pandemic's sudden impact, so principals are now focusing on creating preparedness plans. Here, my research participant, Chitra, shares his experience:

The pandemic taught us that we need to be mentally and organizationally prepared for any crisis. We can't assume that things will always run smoothly. As a leader and manager, I've realized the importance of adaptability. If another crisis occurs, we need to be ready to manage it without falling into chaos. This involves not only adjusting our teaching methods but also being prepared to safeguard the institution itself.

Chitra here focused on adaptability and resilience as a school principal during the pandemic. As a school principal, he has developed confidence that if a similar crisis occurs again, he will not panic to continue education. Reimers et al. (2022) explain that the pandemic showed how important it is for school principals to have strong leadership and clear plans to handle crises. Ram Kumar also has a similar experience and learning regarding the COVID-19 pandemic as a school principal. Cost control, and cost-cutting was his strategy to survive, so he left the rented building to manage the finances smoothly. Both of their experience regarding raising funds was not an alternative; rather, they tried to manage with different alternatives such as zoning the staff for the salary. Future preparedness in terms of finance is also a lesson learned. Here, Ram Kumar says:

COVID-19 had impacted financially. We left rented building to cut the expenditure. We can't always rely on fundraising, but we have made plans to secure financial back-ups and continue our operations smoothly.

Whereas Prabal has another perspective as a school principal, he gave less priority to financial management; rather, continuation of the classes was a major concern to him. He kept on working for the quality of teaching by managing training for teachers they needed in online teaching. Koduah (2024) highlighted these diverse approaches, explaining that schools adopted strategies based on their unique challenges and resources. It shows that all schools and principals have their strategies to cope with difficulties. Some school principals have taken financial issues as a major, but some who are financially strong have given less priority to financial

management and given priority to teaching learning as instructional leaders. Prabal says:

I found three major changes in students. The pandemic has warned every one of us and it has forced to rethink in our future strategies. Financially, it was a challenge to keep the school running when fees couldn't be collected, but we were determined to continue teaching. We've also become more confident in running schools online, and the Learning Management Systems (LMS) we adopted during COVID-19 have made it easier to transition during emergencies. Looking ahead, we are prepared for any future disruptions and have created policies to ensure the continuity of education. Despite these challenges, we are working on teacher training and support systems to help them adapt to the new realities of education.

Prabal is more confident in his leadership. He became more equipped with technology and trained teachers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which will help in the future as well. He has developed a contingency plan for future emergencies in education.

The financial strain on schools was significant. Ram Kumar shares his experience in this way:

The pandemic threw us into an unprecedented situation. Schools were closed, and we lacked a backup plan. Online education became the default, but we didn't have prior experience on such a large scale. I believe that schools must adopt a flexible approach to education. The pandemic taught us the importance of being prepared for any disruption.

Regarding Ram Kumar, he didn't have any contingency plan, which is a must on how one could bounce back in difficulties like COVID-19 to continue schools as a principal. But he realized that there is a need for adaptability and resilience, not just among teachers but also at the administrative level. Though the future is always unpredictable, school principals should have a backup plan for the future. They realized that these approaches not only ensured the continuity of education but also prepared schools to handle future emergencies effectively (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). In this context, a flexible approach to teaching and learning has become a valuable experience for the future on how one could be able to continue education at the school level in emergencies.

Creating Engaging and Safe Learning Spaces

This topic discusses the need of making schools safe and comfortable for children after the COVID-19 pandemic when schools started running physically. Schools had to take care of physical and mental health of both students and teachers. Ram Kumar, who took part in my research, said that it was hard to restart the schools following the COVID-19 outbreak. He explains that when we initially opened school in person, we started with the upper grades, such as eighth, ninth, and tenth grader children, following the COVID-19 health policy for running schools that the government of Nepal had introduced.

He says that:

While opening school physically, we first started with higher classes like grades eight, nine, and ten, following the COVID-19 health protocol for running educational institutions prepared by the government of Nepal. We sanitized all the classes every day as per the health protocol and similarly maintained social distancing for the students. Gradually, we started junior classes as well from the second week of Mangshir 2077. Again, the second wave of COVID-19 started from the Falgun 2077. Additionally, the physical and psychological environment was not favorable for learning for some of the students. The lockdown had confined every one of us within the room. We could not keep students disciplined as we used to do in the physical class. Even the parents were obliged to cope with the situation. The classes were like that. There is a proverb in Nepali: "Nahunu mama bhanda....ab ke mama chain niko, ramro.

Schools were opened physically by following the Framework of School Reopening 2020, but it was difficult to follow all the protocols. It was like something is better than nothing. Online classes were claimed to be unproductive in some cases (Shrestha & Gnawali, 2021). Sanitizing classes every day, frequent hand washing, and social distancing were tough to manage in school by the principal. Bender (2020) says that schools had a hard time implementing COVID-19 safety measures into practice. Regular sanitization, establishing handwashing stations, and enforcing social distancing were critical and resource-intensive steps to ensure safety in schools.

Additionally, parents were not ready to send their children to school. It took time to cope with the situation by the time the second lockdown started from Falgun, 2077. It was a chaotic and challenging time for school leaders to open the school and

create a conducive psychological learning environment. Children were confined in a room for a longer time during the COVID-19. They were used to stay in their comfort at home. Elementary-level students were more used to digital platforms, which was mandatory during virtual classes. At some point, online classes were unproductive.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed pedagogical shifts in schools. It acted as a transformative force, compelling schools to adopt the more flexible, technology-integrated approach in education, which is from traditional physical classroom teaching to online virtual classroom teaching. It emphasized the challenges and transformations in teaching, learning, and school leadership that arose from the pandemic and their implications for future readiness. Additionally, the chapter captured the complexities of the pandemic's impact on education, particularly the balance between embracing technological advancement and addressing the social and behavioral challenges they introduce. The research participants' narratives provided valuable firsthand insights into the challenges of transitioning between online virtual and traditional physical classrooms after the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter further explored student engagement and learning achievement. It emphasized the need for innovative assessment methods that were used during the pandemic to assess the students.

CHAPTER VI

KEY INSIGHTS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I begin by highlighting the key insights in two layers: thematic and methodological insights. It follows with the conclusions drawn from the research study. I also provide the possible implications to teachers, school leaders, parents, and education policy makers. I conclude this chapter with my reflection on my research journey.

Key Insights

The research study concentrated on the lived experiences of the school principals whose innovative practices and situational responses in pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic have brought different insights for school principals. The first insight is about understanding the accessibility of different learning resources to teachers and students during the pandemic and the difficulties of starting in-person classes in the post-COVID-19 context. The integration of ICT in education became mandatory during the pandemic for teachers and school principals as well. Online platforms became standard tools for teaching, training teachers, holding meetings, and blended learning, indicating a lasting change in school management practices. Learning Management Systems (LMS) and AI were incorporated into teaching and administration in the future, too.

The study shows that the ‘digital divide’ is the main concern for providing equitable access to resources like reliable internet and digital devices to every student and parent, which impacted their learning later. Though there was no alternative to online classes during the pandemic, at the same time, it was claimed that online classes weakened classroom disciplines, focus and concentration in learning, and student engagement as they used to do during the physical classes before the pandemic. The classes were found to be less concentrated and reduced attention span by the students, decreased motivation, and more reliance on gadgets, which caused post-COVID-19 learning challenges. It has been noticed that the student's academic performance declined, with gaps in foundational knowledge in subjects like math and science. On the other hand, online teaching created an opportunity for school principals, teachers, and students to expand their ICT skills and intellectual well-being. Despite adversities, online teaching was a pathway for professional

development and excellence for school principals and teachers to foster continuous learning.

The second insight could be highlighted as teachers' roles in facilitating and assisting the students by emphasizing flexibility and critical thinking rather than rote learning. During COVID-19, we accessed huge resources of knowledge through the internet; teachers have been challenged to change from primary knowledge providers to facilitators using ICT tools, guiding students through digital tools like Zoom and Google Meet during the pandemic. Therefore, school principals need to update themselves in current ICT, arrange and provide the necessary training to teachers and create physically and psychologically conducive learning environments for students, incorporating mental health support and adapting to students' social and emotional needs, both in online and in-person settings.

Similarly, after listening to and narrating research participants' experiences, insight from the research study could be the issue of students', teachers', and parents' readiness to adopt technology during COVID-19, along with their psychological state for continuing education during the pandemic. It comes under the school principal's farsightedness, not only by managing technological resources but also by focusing on pedagogical skills with innovative instructional design, keeping in mind the student's psychological readiness. There was an influence on student behavior; the online classes that created independence and critical thinking in some, while others faced challenges with screen irritation, poor concentration, and reduced motivation for learning was another insight of the research study.

School principals had valuable lessons in adaptability and resilience in terms of financial management to continue school. Adopting a zoning approach to teachers' salary payment by categorizing them into need-based strategies is one of the financial strategies to survive in a crisis financially. Additionally, they applied cost-cutting strategies to human resource and rental expenditure by downsizing human resources and discontinuing the rental buildings to sustain schools during disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They recognized the need for mental, psychological, and technological preparedness for future crises. School principals have realized the importance of formulating strategies such as digitizing management, diversifying evaluation methods, and ensuring continuity in education during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion

I analyzed the private school principals' stories and identified nine main themes. They are 1) Adaptive Leadership in Education Disruption, 2) Sustaining Education Amid Financial Constraints, 3) ICT Adaptation during the COVID-19, 4) Preparing Children for Learning during Educational Crises, 5) Addressing Students' Achievement Challenges, 6) Shift in Pedagogy and Digital Integration, 7) Addressing Students Well-being and Bridging Learning, 8) Initiatives of School Principals for Post Covid Learning Environment, and 9) Creating Engaging and Safe Learning Spaces.

The Adaptive Leadership in Education disruption is a one of the findings of this study which focuses on how school principals responded proactively to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected crisis to continue education, though it was mandatory as well. The pandemic was a test to every school principal whether to continue education or leave them as failed leadership as a school principal. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the leaders' capacity on how capable they were to respond new challenges in terms of switching the physical face to face class to virtual online class adopting resilience, flexibility and innovation (Harris, 2020).

Applying this framework to the transformations in education during and after COVID-19 pandemic reveals how the pandemic has shifted in pedagogy, leadership, and the holistic functioning of private schools in Kathmandu. Joshi et al. (2023) observe changes in teaching strategies and classroom management practices of teachers in Nepalese schools concerning mediating digital devices across the pre-COVID, COVID-19, and post-COVID contexts. It has indicated the shift in pedagogical approaches and the focus on strategies toward resilience for continuity in education during unprecedented challenges. Hodges et al. (2020), argue that the forced adoption of technology in teaching learning was a global phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic context of pedagogy.

Research participants, Chitra and Ram Kumar experienced a lot about change in teaching style, which fits with resilience theory's focus on being flexible and adapting. Yeshu and Prabal, two of the participants, said that school principals also had to accept a lot of changes as more and more schools were digitized management, introduced technology, and became ready for future crises (Karakaya & Ay, 2021; Kaur et al., 2024; OECD, 2020).

Chitra and Ram Kumar had cost cutting strategies to sustain their schools. They had long term financial plan. They developed teachers development plan in terms of digital enhancement of teacher to sustain during the crisis. The financial difficulties were globally existed. The World bank (2020) and UNESCO (2021) also talked about how schools and the governments planned their budget during the COVID-19 to make sure that the education was continuing smoothly. School principals have recognized the importance of balancing technology integration with traditional practices to address students learning gap.

Instructional leadership theory focuses on how school principals had played significant role in helping to create a culture of teaching and learning. Their support to teachers, and ensuring that students did well in school (Hallinger, 2005). Using this paradigm to look at the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic shows how school principals changed the way they did things to deal with the problems caused by the pandemic.

Prabal and Chitra gave more priority for starting and continuing education during the COVID-19 pandemic. They focused on maintaining learning standards through the integration of ICT and developing hybrid models. Carvalho (2024) highlights the potential of hybrid learning environments to maintain engagement and creativity, even in remote or blended settings. The combination of digital pedagogy with conventional teaching strategies, the framework ensures that students not only acquire narrative skills but also develop critical thinking and collaboration abilities in a dynamic, interactive manner. By introducing policies like financial backups and technological preparedness, school principals have demonstrated a commitment to sustaining educational objectives even in the face of disruptions. Schulla and Leal-Filho (2023) argue that there was a need of combining education policy guideline and financial plan to make sure that important services like continuing education throughout during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Training on digital technology and blended learning was a must to continue education which made it possible to use adaptive technology and made teaching effective. Simon and Zeng (2024) claimed that use of adaptive technology blended learning approach were the tools to make teachers competent to successfully meet the needs of students.

This study has explored many obstacles faced by school children. Their attention span has been decreased. The excessive use of digital gadgets and over

reliance upon technology has created psychosocial issues. Andayani et al. (2022) argue that these issues increased during the pandemic and needed to effectively address those impacts on students.

Ram Kumar and Chitra had to work again for creating a conducive learning environment in their school after resuming in the post pandemic context. They digitized their school management and prepared long term financial plans as well. It showed that they had strategically aligned the sources to achieve instructional goals during and after pandemic. They collaborated with parents to support students at home. They organized regular workshops involving parents to strengthen the home school relation which is a key to instructional theory. Sanders (2014) argue that principals who can work and build strong partnership with parent and communities are successful for improving education. They laid the ground for a resilient in schools by setting clear goals. They supported teachers, strategically managed resources to address the pandemic's impact on student learning.

In the context of instructional leadership theory, private school principals demonstrated adaptive leadership in a difficult situation like the COVID-19 pandemic. Haron et al. (2022) highlight how these leaders effectively dealt with the crisis by adapting their strategies to meet evolving demands and maintaining a focus on instructional goals. They experienced and struggled with an unprecedented pedagogical shift to online learning from traditional physical classroom teaching. A quick upgrade themselves in ICT to run classes were a crucial need of time. Nisha and Nabolaniwaqa (2024) argue that educators adapted these challenges emphasizing importance of digital skill development and teacher training to ensure continuity in education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there was a demanded of technological awareness as well as the capacity to maintain a supportive psychological environment for students. Hong (2024) asserts that educators faced dual challenges during the pandemic, requiring them to adapt to technology while also creating a positive and emotionally supportive learning atmosphere in the school. It was difficult to maintain classroom discipline and implement effective classroom strategies in online virtual setting. It was clear that how important was schedule to help students learning where Ferri et al. (2020) emphasized that structured approaches were crucial for overcoming the challenges of online virtual learning.

Along with difficulties in the management of teaching-learning in the online virtual mode, private school principals faced severe financial crises. Mukherjee and

Kuri (2021) explain how these issues created stress for schools and school principals. Despite these obstacles, school principals, as instructional leaders, actively collaborated with parents, encouraging their engagement to support children's attendance and improve learning outcomes. Private school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic had to look over not only academic management but also financial management was equally important for them. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) highlighted innovative strategies during the pandemic, such as salary zoning for teachers and managing digital platforms to support parents and students.

Instructional leadership is to involve teachers and working together for buiding teachers' skills and planning strategically to better student achievement. These actions were essential for tackling the crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic in context of pedagogy and getting ready for future disruptions.

Lazkani (2024) claimed that keeping students engaged and maintaining discipline in virtual classrooms was a challenge. Upon returning to physical classes, principals found it difficult to restore focus and address learning gaps created by lockdowns. Teachers needed to work for making classes innovative to engage students and support their academic recovery (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021).

Overall, the pandemic prompted instructional leaders to embrace innovation, develop blended learning structures, and build resilience, ultimately shaping a more flexible, well-rounded educational environment.

From the perspective of resilience theory, school principals showed a strong ability to adapt and recover during the COVID-19 pandemic. They faced many challenges like cash management for providing salaries to teachers and run training on ICT management to equip their teachers (Pozo-Rico & Gilar-Corbí, 2020). A lot of students were stressed out and not inspired. But they came up with creative solutions, like setting up pay zones and working closely with parents.

Maintaining classroom discipline without face-to-face supervision was tough, so principals introduced new methods like fun activities and flexible schedules to help students continue the education in crisis.

The idea behind resilience is that when things get hard we can get stronger and better. School principals in this situation not only learned how to run schools in emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, but they also got better at what they did and how they did it. When school principals were open to new ideas and worked with teachers and parents, they turned a problem into a chance to move forward.

Private school principals' experiences showed how resilient they were to adapt themselves and continue education in the adverse situation like the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows how resilience can guide principals to turn difficulties into opportunities, paving the way for better learning experiences in the future (Pastor et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The study intended to narrate the experiences of private school principals in Kathmandu during and post-COVID-19 context, focusing on creating physically and psychologically conducive learning environments in schools. The participants shared their experiences on how they lead schools to continue education in emergencies. The research study uses qualitative methods and interpretive paradigms to analyze private school principals' experiences during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped the educational landscape globally. It has become a turning point in the education sector. Transforming physical classes to online classes became a mandatory alternative for school principals. Technology integration in teaching and learning became indispensable for ensuring educational continuity during that time. ICT skills to school principals, teachers, and students become compelling, along with ICT infrastructure for everyone. ICT infrastructure management from the parents' side was also important for continuing education. The COVID-19 pandemic shifted the role of authoritative teachers to virtual facilitators. Students got plenty of access to knowledge through the internet for self-motivated learners. However, effective engagement in virtual online classes, classroom discipline, and assignment completion and submission remained challenging for the teachers, which later resulted in less learning achievement compared to the pre-COVID-19 pandemic. This also brought challenges such as decreased student motivation, learning gaps, and over-reliance on gadgets. Additionally, students, while resuming in-person physical class, found themselves restless and less interested in learning.

Flexible(blended) and technology-driven pedagogical approaches were found to be effective during the time. They found themselves not only managing the immediate challenges to continue school but also redefining their role as a change agent in schools. It made the school leaders feel the vulnerabilities of conventional educational models. They reinforced the importance of a holistic approach that considers students' academic, emotional, and social well-being. Issues like decreased

attention spans and psychosocial effects needed interventions such as counseling and parent engagement in the post-COVID-19 context in physical classes.

Financial management was equally important and challenging for private school principals to continue private schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. So, planning for resilience, adaptability, and sustainable solutions was the main task for private school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the pandemic emphasized the need to equip both teachers and students with digital skills while addressing gaps in accessibility and ICT infrastructure as school principals to communicate and convince parents. The school fees paid by the parents were the main financial source for private schools. The financial strain on private schools was another significant challenge for private school principals during the pandemic. While schools were physically closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, regular fee payments also have issues. So far, the main source has been disrupted, and the private school principals have had cost-cutting measures to survive in their schools. The cost-cutting strategies might not have supported the creation of a psychologically conducive learning environment for students. However, private school principals worked to balance technological integration in pedagogy and training teachers to continue meaningful learning experiences and achieve long-term educational goals.

Looking forward, the private school principals experienced and gained lessons from them during and post-COVID-19 pandemic. They faced unprecedented disruption that created havoc in education. They realized a need for a proactive, crisis-ready approach to overcome the situation, which became evident during the time of education in an emergency. A private school principal has to have a strong contingency plan, flexible learning systems integrated with ICT, and a commitment to innovation and quality to continue school in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implications

I believe this study's findings will be useful to many stakeholders in the education field, particularly school leaders, teachers, parents, and education policymakers, in times of contingency or emergency.

Implications for School Leaders

This study will help to understand how a founder principal of a private school in Kathmandu survived institutionally during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies they followed to continue education in emergencies. Academic leadership was their main job as a principal, though they had a financial liability to run the

school during the time as a founder principal. Effective financial management can support operational continuity. Diversifying income sources and creating financial backup plan is a must to mitigate financial risks during prolonged disruptions like the COVID-10 pandemic.

The findings of this study have narrated how school leaders coped with difficult situations in both academic and financial matters. The transformation process of school leaders during the pandemic was indispensable, mostly in the ICT. Being competent in ICT, training the teachers, and continuing classes online was not an easy experience for them. Traditional physical classes were shifted to online virtual classes through the internet. It was a paradigm shift in education in terms of pedagogy compelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. School leaders worked as the key change agents for preparing and continuing online virtual classes. They had a critical role during the pandemic. Their resilience and adaptability to run the school during the COVID-19 pandemic was commendable. The study findings can help school leaders in the future to set contingency plans on how one can continue school without chaos in emergencies. The future is always unpredictable, and no one knows that a pandemic may reoccur. The school leaders have explained how they had bounced back through a series of lockdown/school closures physically and reopened with safety protocols. It has provided a framework for understanding the role of school leadership in emergencies, offering lessons that can shape future education systems to be more adaptable and resilient.

Implications for Teachers

The study finding provides information on the shifting paradigm of teaching pedagogy and students' change in their behavior in the post-COVID-19 context. During the COVID-19 pandemic, competency in ICT has become a challenge to teachers. This has impacted teaching pedagogy from the pre-school to the university level. Online virtual teaching was the only alternative for continuing education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some teachers have switched teaching due to the inefficiency in ICT during the COVID-19 pandemic. Later, after the COVID-19 pandemic, students' psychology became an issue for every teacher while resuming school physically. The advancement of technology and the new generation of students are always challenges for school teachers in terms of teaching and learning. ICT has given everyone access to ample sources of knowledge through the internet. Students are not limited and dependent on teachers nowadays. Self-learning motivated students

have taken teachers as a secondary source of learning. This suggests teachers upgrade and update and always accept the change to being a twenty-first-century teacher.

Implications for Parents

The findings and insights of the study show a clear picture of how parents experienced during and post-COVID-19 context to create a physically and psychologically conducive learning environment at home by the parents through the principal's narration. Along with the school leaders, parents also took an active role in continuing education in emergencies for their children's learning, particularly in managing devices, internet connectivity, monitoring, and guiding online virtual classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates parents must adapt to changes in teaching methodologies in the future. Traditional physical classroom teaching had shifted to virtual online classes that required a lot of support from the parents. It may occur in the future as well. Effective communication and collaboration between parents and schools are essential for creating a psychologically conducive learning environment at home. Since students were at home throughout the lockdown, parents were teachers to make schedules during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding and addressing students' academic and emotional needs in the new educational landscape, like the COVID-19 pandemic and the twenty-first-century context by the parents, is vital. They should encourage self-motivation and resilience in children to cope with uncertainties in education and prepare them for independent learning.

The study findings highlight that parents need to familiarize themselves with educational technologies and tools to assist their children. Digital or ICT competency has become important to every parent. Teaching and learning have been embedded with technology, especially with the internet. Teachers and parents have become a secondary source of information and knowledge to self-learning motivated students. The study findings show that parents need to be aware of the proper utilization of ICT as a school child. They should have a critical role in assessing and scrutinizing the use of ICT by their children.

Implication for Policy Makers

The study highlights the dilemma among school leaders regarding how they could run schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Nepal government did not have any contingency policies on how education continues in a pandemic like COVID-19. The decision of the government to close the school during the uncertain time was to break the chain of spreading coronavirus, but it was chaos and uncertain

for the private school principals. This shows a lack of policies to overcome continued education in emergencies at the school level. There was no way to continue education virtually, but it had a “digital divide” experience among the school children. There is a strong need for government support and policy reforms to equitable access to digital learning and availability of gadgets for twenty-first-century learners, even in normal learning, which is to be kept in the mind of policymakers. The findings in the study shared by the teachers, parents, and students through school leaders can help policymakers to work for the future.

Therefore, policymakers can review policies using the knowledge gathered from this research. In the current context, policymakers include various agencies and the municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

Reflection on My Research Journey

I am a private school founder principal in Kathmandu, and I have been working since 1996 AD. Running a school effectively is my main task on a normal day. The spread of coronavirus, COVID-19, has disrupted my daily task. The government declared a nationwide lockdown, and schools were shut down for an indefinite time to break the chain of spreading coronavirus. It created panic for the private school principals in Kathmandu as well. So, starting and continuing education in an alternative mode was indispensable to any educational institution, from the school level to the university level. Thus, being a private school principal, I was curious to know how other private school principals continued their school during the COVID-19 and resumed in between COVID-19 first wave and so on.

It was just after the COVID-19 pandemic, so I could not get research or literature regarding the experiences of private schools in Kathmandu. However, plenty of literature has been found on how a school leaders led schools and teachers taught through online virtual classes. Then, the study continued by exploring related studies and reviewing various related literature to expand my knowledge of how they have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. I felt that researching the private school principals' experiences would be an opportunity for me to compare the experiences of other school principals during times of emergencies in education, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

After defending the thesis proposal, with the consent and guidance of my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Sheshakanta Pageni, I developed questions for an interview with my research participants. I worked multiple times on finalizing the

guiding questions as per the suggestion of my research supervisor. My research participants were all founder principals of Kathmandu. I met all the research participants physically and had a face-to-face interview to make my data reach. During the thesis proposal defense, my research question was to narrate the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, but while defending the thesis proposal, the research committee suggested comparing the situation and making it post-COVID context as well. I had multiple sitting with research participants to collect data. While collecting data, I observed their facial expressions and body language. To ease research participants, I interviewed them in a pre-scheduled and their own offices at their convenient time so that I could get genuine data. While interviewing, their experiences were panicking, such as ICT management, transforming physical traditional classes to online virtual classes, teacher management, parent coordination virtually, and financial management as a school principal sounded difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, their approach to tackling the situation was different from each other. They felt comparably easier in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic than in the first wave to continue education in their school.

With the consent and permission of my research participants, I recorded their interviews and transcribed the information that I got from them. After that, I coded data to generate different themes to interpret their shared lived experiences. I developed narratives based on their shared lived experiences, and I analyzed them based on the research question. This dissertation is based on the narrative inquiry, focusing on the lived experiences of the school principals. With their shared experiences, I found that many of us as a school principal have faced similar difficulties during and the post-COVID-19 context.

Chapter Summary

This chapter talked about what the study found about private school principals' experiences during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and shared the main conclusions. It additionally, discussed what the finding means for school leaders, teachers, parents, and policy makers. The chapter ended with my own reflections on the research journey. It described how the pandemic urged schools to rethink about traditional ways of teaching and leading the schools through challenges which had not faced before. It also highlighted the important lessons learned, the strength of school communities, and the long-lasting changes that are helping prepare education for a more flexible and technology-driven future.

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