

EXPLORING THE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE TEACHING*

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the teachers' perceptions of online teaching. The open-ended questionnaire survey method and qualitative research design were applied in this study. A total of 100 teacher educators from Yangon University of Education and senior assistant teachers who are currently post graduate students in Yangon University of Education participated in this study. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of 7 open-ended questions about teachers' perception of online teaching. Through the thematic analysis, four key themes such as efficiency of online teaching, benefits of online teaching, barriers to online teaching and needy support for online teaching were identified and each of these themes included three sub-themes. Under the efficiency of online teaching, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme: (i) digital literacy, (ii) engagement and (iii) restricted practical exposure. Under the benefits of online teaching, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme: (i) international cooperation & communication, (ii) flexibility and (iii) professional development. Under the barriers to online teaching, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme: (i) teacher-student relationship, (ii) technical issues & technological illiteracy and (iii) health issues. Under the needy support for online teaching, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme: (i) technical support, (ii) time, financial support and (iii) training programs. The findings of this study provided information for concerned authorities to reflect on, with the goal of implementing adjustments to their existing practices in light of the fact that online teaching continues to be an area of development in education.

Keywords: Perception, Teacher Perception, Online Teaching

Introduction

During the COVID-19 global crisis, when the entire world's activities across all domains of human life were restricted, information and communications technology (ICT) played a supporting role in sustaining teaching-learning activities (Thaheem et al., 2022). On the other hand, ICT-integrated teaching and learning, such as online teaching, provided a flexible approach and better access to learning opportunities as a substitute for face-to-face instruction (Akram et al., 2021). According to Bennett and Lockyer (2004), as the number of online programs and course offerings grows, the teachers' roles and the teaching process also has been changed. Online teaching requires an increasing number of faculty members and support workers.

Being an essential part of the present time, educators currently facing a growing need and pressure to transition into online education are being compelled to critically reassess their fundamental beliefs regarding pedagogy, the dynamics of the learning process, and their responsibilities and functions as instructors (Wiesenberg & Stacey, 2013). The increasing enthusiasm for online education poses a significant challenge for higher education institutions, compelling them to reconsider their cultural, academic, organizational, and pedagogical frameworks to effectively adapt to a new teaching and learning paradigm (Howell et al., 2004).

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In Myanmar, online learning has yet to be heard and known widely among people before the pandemic. During the pandemic, which made people stay home, the parents, the teachers and the students looked for the best way to continue learning at home. Due to the essence of internet access, online learning and online teaching can be effective (Myanmar Digital News, 2022). Spontaneously, online teaching has become increasingly prevalent, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It presents several advantages, but in addition to those, it poses a selection of difficulties and introduces several novel aspects for educators to consider. However, there is little research to explore teachers' perceptions of online teaching in Myanmar. In this regard, this study tends to provide a deep insight into understanding teachers' perceptions regarding efficiency, advantages, needed support for online teaching, and challenges they encounter.

Purposes of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to investigate the teachers' perceptions of online teaching. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To find out teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of online teaching
2. To investigate teachers' perceptions of the advantages of online teaching
3. To find out teachers' perceptions of the challenges of online teaching
4. To investigate teachers' perceptions of the support required for effective online teaching

Definitions of Key Terms

Perception. Perception is the action of seeing and perceiving through the sensory organs. It can be in the form of image, imagination, thinking, opinion, idea or impression (Mok, 2003).

Teacher perception. Teacher perceptions are teachers' mental impressions of their work and pupils are influenced by their previous knowledge and life experiences, shaping their professional behavior (Papadakis & Kalogiannakis, 2020).

Online teaching. Teaching that is primarily conducted online is referred to as online teaching (Baran et al., 2011).

Review of Related Literature

As a result of nationwide lockdown, educators began to teach virtually as they had no other option. Online teaching has taken a trend during lockdown as there is no other option to teach students and complete their syllabus. Not only this, the online teaching has also been initiated to make the students busy during quarantine and to keep their mind at ease by providing different assignments and other works (Dubey & Singh, 2020).

Additionally, it resulted in a decrease in the utilization of transportation resources and associated expenditures. The use of this technology has facilitated several administrative duties, including the documentation of lectures and the monitoring of attendance. Online teaching can be administered to a large number of students without space constraints and by using multimedia technology; they can deliver the lecture in an effective way (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Faculty members felt they need to take an online lecture in short because in the online teaching methods, it is difficult to keep the students' attention for long as the students get distracted and bored in a short span of time (Almahasees et al., 2021). Faculty members felt difficulty in teaching

psychomotor skills and hands-on sessions such as laboratory and clinical skills (Mukhtar et al., 2020).

Teachers confronted obstacles like a lack of basic infrastructure at home, technological problems, etc. Thus, it is appropriate that virtual teaching can only be effective with knowing the positive and negative perceptions and obstacles teachers face toward e-learning, as they are frontline employees of any educational foundation. With this backdrop, research endeavors need to scrutinize school teachers' perceptions as well as challenges concerning online teaching so that educational institutions and policymakers can use their experiences to bring about requisite changes by incorporating newer methods and techniques of teaching and learning during and after the pandemic (Kamal & Illiyan, 2021).

Method

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were 50 teacher educators from Yangon University of Education and 50 senior assistant teachers who are current post graduate students in Yangon University of Education. The sample was chosen by using purposive sampling.

Research Method

The design and method used in this study were qualitative research design with interview questions method.

Instrumentation

The open-ended questionnaire consisted of 7 open-ended questions about teachers' perceptions of online teaching. All the items used in this study were conducted in the Myanmar language version. Then, experts review was conducted for face validity and content validity of the instruments by the experts in the field of educational psychology and educational test and measurement from Yangon University of Education. Next, some items were modified according to their suggestions and recommendations.

Qualitative Data Analysis Method

In the study, the thematic analysis was conducted in order to analyze the qualitative data. The responses of open-ended questions, the participants' qualitative data were assigned into codes that capture the essence of responses operationally and the frequency of the occurrence of codes has been analyzed. After developing codes, the next step involved defining and naming themes. By identifying broader patterns of shared meaning across the data set, coded data can be developed into a theme on illuminating the research question (Charmaz, 2001). In the study, participated teacher educators were coded as **TE**, and senior assistant teachers were coded as **ST**.

Results of Qualitative Study

This section presents the results of the survey conducted with the selected participants. The participants' entire response to each question was translated into English in spite of having certain probable grammatical changes. However, the original structure of the responses was retained as much as possible. Through the thematic analysis, four key themes were identified. Each of these themes included three sub-themes (see Table 1).

Table 1 Coding Scheme for teachers' perceptions of online teaching

Main themes	Sub-themes
Efficiency of Online Teaching	- Digital literacy
	- Engagement
	- Restricted practical exposure
Benefits of Online Teaching	- International cooperation & communication
	- Flexibility
	- Professional Development
Barriers to Online Teaching	- Teacher-Student Relationship
	- Technical Issues & Technological illiteracy
	- Health Issues
Needy Support	- Technical Support
	- Time, Financial Support
	- Training Programs

Efficiency of Online Learning:

According to qualitative analysis, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme (Efficiency of Online Learning): (i) digital literacy, (ii) engagement and (iii) restricted practical exposure. The following excerpts can best represent the information given by teacher educators and senior assistant teachers.

Digital literacy

Code - ST-1

Gender - Female

“Online teaching allows students and teachers to develop their technological skills and important digital literacy skills that are increasingly valuable in today's digital age”.

Code – TE-2

Gender - Female

“Undoubtedly, online teaching is a significant opportunity for enhancing one's digital literacy skills. Participating in online courses and educational activities automatically provides learners with exposure to a diverse range of digital tools, platforms, and resources”.

Code – TE-3

Gender - Male

“Teachers who may not have sufficient technological skills struggle to navigate and utilize the various online platforms and tools required for virtual teaching”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that digital literacy is absolutely essential for teachers who are teaching online, as it forms the foundation for effective and engaging online instruction. And then, digital literacy is being enhanced through online teaching as teachers have to use various digital tools and platforms to deliver their lessons.

Engagement

Code – TE-4

Gender - Female

“It is effective for student learning only if it can be supplemented with online resources and activities to further enhance their understanding and engagement”.

Code – ST-5

Gender - Female

“In the realm of online teaching, where physical presence is limited, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement becomes even more crucial”.

Code – ST-6

Gender - Female

“Engagement sparks student interest and motivation in the subject matter. When students find the online learning experience engaging and relevant, they are more likely to be enthusiastic about their studies”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that student engagement is key to a successful and effective online teaching environment. It is important for teachers to create interactive and stimulating online learning environments that encourage student engagement through various methods such as interactive assignments, group activities, and real-time discussions.

Restricted practical exposure

Code – TE-7

Gender - Male

“It may not be effective for certain subjects or hands-on activities which may require in-person interaction and supervision to ensure effective learning outcomes”.

Code – ST-8

Gender - Female

“It may lack the same level of personal interaction and hands-on learning opportunities that face-to-face classroom offers”.

Based on the above responses, it is obvious that restricted practical exposure in online teaching refers to the challenges and limitations faced by teachers and students when attempting to provide or gain hands-on, experiential learning experiences in a virtual or remote learning environment. This concept underscores the difficulty of replicating physical, in-person practical experiences in an online setting.

Benefits of Online Teaching:

According to qualitative analysis, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme (Benefits of Online Teaching): (i) international cooperation & communication, (ii) flexibility and (iii) professional development. The following excerpts can best represent the information given by teacher educators and senior assistant teachers.

International cooperation and communication

Code- TE-9

Gender - Female

“Online teaching opens up avenues for collaboration among teachers from different parts of the world. Through virtual platforms and online communities, educators can share resources, exchange ideas, and foster a global network of professional support”.

Code- ST-10

Gender - Male

“Online teaching allows teachers to reach a wider audience and connect with students from different parts of the world. This not only enhances cultural exchange but also helps diversify perspectives and encourage global collaboration”.

Code- TE-11

Gender - Female

“Online teaching allows teachers to communicate with their students through various channels such as chat, discussion boards, and video conferences. This creates opportunities for personalized feedback, one-on-one support, and ongoing dialogue that can promote better understanding and collaboration”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that international cooperation and communication play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of online teaching. International cooperation and communication leverage the digital environment to connect learners and educators from around the world. Incorporating international cooperation and communication into online teaching enhances the quality of education by promoting cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, and collaboration on a global scale.

Flexibility

Code- ST-12

Gender – Female

“Online teaching ensures that students can continue their academic progress even during times of crisis (COVID-19 pandemic) or when physical (face-to-face) classrooms are inaccessible”.

Code- TE-13

Gender – Male

“Due to various reasons such as geographical distance, time constraints, or health concerns, online teaching provides a convenient and flexible alternative that ensures continuous learning opportunities for students.”

Code- TE-14

Gender – Female

“Online teaching provides flexibility in terms of scheduling and location, enabling teachers to work from the comfort of their homes or while travelling”.

Based on the above responses, it is obvious that flexibility is one of the most beneficial factors of online teaching. Online teaching allows teachers to create flexible schedules, accommodating both their own availability and students’ needs. It also offers flexibility in regarding time and location and allowing students to access educational materials and resources from anywhere.

Professional development

Code- TE-15

Gender – Male

“Teachers can continuously update their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest digital tools and technologies through teaching online”.

Code- TE-16

Gender – Female

“Ongoing professional development opportunities should be offered to ensure that teachers stay up-to-date with the latest tools and techniques for online teaching”.

Code- ST-17

Gender – Female

“As educators engage in online teaching, they gain confidence in their ability to adapt to new technologies and deliver effective instruction in a virtual setting”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that professional development in online teaching is a dynamic and essential process. It equips educators with the skills, knowledge, and mindset required to excel in the ever-evolving landscape of virtual education, ultimately benefiting both instructors and their students.

Barriers to Online Teaching:

According to qualitative analysis, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme (Barriers to Online Teaching): (i) teacher-student relationship, (ii) technical issues & technological illiteracy and (iii) health issues. The following excerpts can best represent the information given by teacher educators and senior assistant teachers.

Teacher-student relationship

Code- TE-18

Gender – Female

Without the physical presence and immediate feedback from the teacher, students may become distracted or lose interest in their learning material”.

Code- ST-19

Gender – Female

“Lack of face-to-face interaction and physical presence in a classroom setting may hinder students' engagement and ability to fully grasp the complex concepts”.

Code- TE-20

Gender – Male

“Students can easily resort to cheating during online exams or assignments. They may provide unreliable reasons for their actions, such as technical difficulties or misunderstanding the instructions, to justify their dishonesty”.

Based on the above responses, it is obvious that one challenge of teaching online is the lack of personal interaction with students. This can make it difficult to gauge their understanding and address their individual needs.

Technical issues and technological illiteracy

Code- TE-21

Gender – Female

“Technical issues such as unreliable internet connections or incompatible devices can disrupt the learning process”.

Code- ST-22

Gender – Male

“Power outages disrupt online teaching sessions, leading to missed lessons and reduced learning opportunities”.

Code- TE-23

Gender – Female

“Teachers who may not have sufficient technological skills and then struggle to navigate and utilize the various online platforms and tools required for virtual teaching”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that teachers face technical issues such as poor internet connectivity, electricity and may lack of technological knowledge that can lead to disruption in online teaching.

Health issues

Code- ST-24

Gender – Female

“Health problems can arise when teaching online due to the sedentary nature of the job”.

Code- TE-25

Gender – Female

“Long-term computer use can cause eye strain, back pain, and poor posture.”

Code- TE-26

Gender – Male

“Prolonged screen time, sitting for long periods, and lack of physical activity can all contribute to health problems such as eye strain, back pain, and decreased overall well-being”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that online teaching can bring about a range of health-related issues for teachers due to prolonged screen time and sedentary work environments.

Needy Support:

According to qualitative analysis, three sub-themes emerged from the main theme (Needy Support): (i) technical support, (ii) time, financial support and (iii) training programs. The following excerpts can best represent the information given by teacher educators and senior assistant teachers.

Technical support

Code- TE-25

Gender – Female

“Teachers need a stable and reliable internet connection to conduct virtual classes, upload and download teaching materials, and communicate with students”.

Code- ST-26

Gender – Male

“Electricity is one of the most essential supports required to facilitate effective online teaching. Without a steady supply of electricity, teachers would not be able to power their computers, laptops, or any other device necessary for online instruction”.

Code- ST-27

Gender – Female

“Teachers need to be provided with the necessary devices, such as laptops or tablets, to ensure seamless online instruction”.

Code- TE-28

Gender – Female

“Having a supportive administration and resources such as online teaching resources, lesson plans, and materials can further enhance teachers' ability to facilitate online teaching successfully”.

Code- ST-29

Gender – Male

“Providing a dedicated team of technical support staff can help address any technical issues that teachers may encounter during their online teaching sessions”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that it is necessary to facilitate stable power supply, a stable and reliable internet connection and access and equity to technical devices. Moreover, teachers need constant assistance to troubleshoot any technical issues that may arise during their online classes. Therefore, it is crucial for schools and institutions to provide the necessary support and resources to help teachers succeed in their new teaching environment.

Financial support

Code- ST-30

Gender – Male

“Without adequate financial support, online teaching may be hindered, resulting in a less effective learning experience for students”.

Code- TE-31

Gender – Female

“Offering incentives such as grants or stipends for educators who successfully complete online teaching certification programs can help motivate them to further enhance their skills in this area”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that time and financial support are crucial factors in ensuring the success of online teaching including incentives.

Training programs

Code- TE-32

Gender – Female

“Teachers require comprehensive training programmes. These programmes should cover not only the technical aspects of online teaching to enhance their digital literacy skills but also effective instructional strategies and methods for engaging students in a virtual learning environment”.

Code- ST-33

Gender – Female

“Many teachers may not have received proper training or guidance on how to effectively use information and communication technology (ICT) tools for online teaching”.

Based on the above responses, it can be seen that well-prepared technological training which includes both technical and digital skills should be provided teachers to enable the effective online teaching.

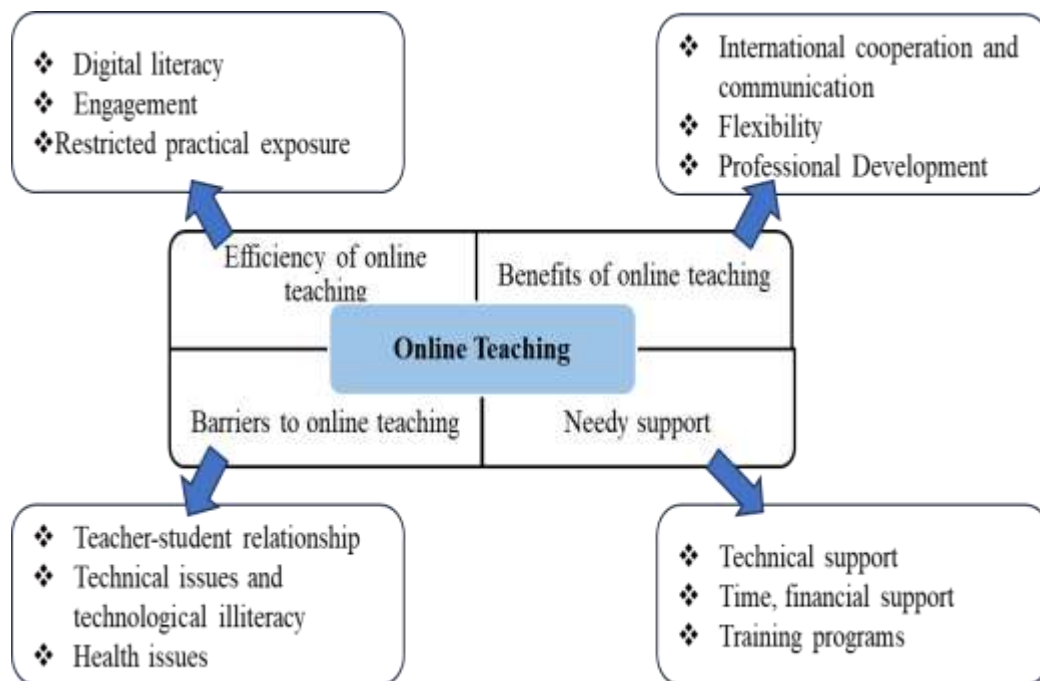


Figure 1 Summary Results of Teachers' Perceptions of Online Teaching

Discussion

Findings reveal that four main themes were identified through qualitative analysis. They were efficiency of online teaching, benefits of online teaching, barriers to online teaching and needy support. Then, there were also three sub-themes for each main theme. Concerning with the efficiency of online teaching, there were three sub-themes such as digital literacy, engagement and restricted practical exposure. Participant teachers perceived that online teaching can improve digital literacy skills. This result is consistent with the study that digital literacy is urgently required for teachers to reach optimal levels of digital skills so as to undergo effective online teaching (Cristina, 2021). Most participant teachers said that, it is needed for students to be engaged for effective online teaching. Akram et al. (2022) also stated that technology-incorporated teaching such as online teaching also assists them in enhancing their instructional practices effectively, making the learning process exciting and interactive, and keeping learners motivated. And then, they perceived that there may be fewer hands-on learning opportunities may be less in online teaching. This is consistent with the finding that faculty members felt difficulty in teaching psychomotor skills and hands-on sessions such as laboratory and clinical skills (Mukhtar et al., 2020).

Concerning the benefits of online teaching, there were three sub-themes such as international cooperation and communication, flexibility, and professional development. Participant teachers perceived that teachers can collaborate and communicate with people from different parts of the world which enhances cultural diversity. This result is consistent with the study that online teaching opens up opportunities for students to access a wider range of educational resources and experts from around the world, enriching their learning experience. And have access to

a wide range of educational resources and materials (Rosalina et al., 2020). Most participant teachers said that online teaching provides flexibility regardless of place and time constraints for both teachers and students. This is consistent with the finding that the utilization of ICT for teaching-learning purposes enables teachers and students to stay connected and facilitates learners irrespective of their location and time (Thaheem et al., 2022). Teachers also feel comfortable guiding and discussing with their students within or outside the universities through several digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Google groups (Hodgson & Shah, 2016). They perceived that online teaching can support for their professional development such as advancing their digital skills and gaining confidence in adapting new technologies. When faculty members see online learning as academically respected and recognized within their college or university, they are more confident and motivated to teach online and create high-quality courses (Arlie, 2016).

Concerning the barriers to online teaching, there were three sub-themes such as teacher-student relationship, technical issues, illiteracy, and health issues. Participant teachers perceived that students can be disturbed during lessons and can easily cheat due to a lack of personal interaction with teachers. This result is consistent with the study that in online learning, teachers' control over students is low and students' attitude of negligence has been witnessed to a great extent (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Most participant teachers said that technical issues such as electricity outages, unreliable internet connections, incompatible devices and teachers who lack technological literacy are major obstacles to effective online teaching. This is consistent with the findings that there are many factors in developing countries; lack of ICT infrastructure (Akram et al., 2022), electricity and internet (Akram et al., 2021), technological knowledge and expertise (Asad et al., 2020). Dede et al. (2008) also stated that teachers' knowledge of online technologies present obstacle to online professional development. And then, the participant teachers perceived that health problems can arise while teaching online. According to Dayal (2023), educators who are engaged in remote teaching have expressed feelings of isolation, prolonged exposure to screens, difficulties in managing heightened stress levels, and fatigue resulting from an augmented workload.

Concerning with the needy support for online teaching, there were three sub-themes such as technical support, incentive support and training programs. Participant teachers perceived that stable internet connection, steady supply of electricity, access to electronic devices, a team of technical support and support from administrators. Support for technology is essential for developing effective online teaching strategies. When choosing which technology platforms to use, structuring the course in the online learning environment, making sure technologies work, troubleshooting when problems occur, assisting students with their technological issues, and setting up the technological infrastructure, faculty members require ongoing assistance, especially during the transition phase (Baran & Correia, 2014).

Most participant teachers said that online teaching can be effective if they have adequate time and financial support such as the provision of incentives. Shah et al. (2020) explored that few teachers reported fruitful results of adopting ICT in their teaching practices, while other teachers could not find time and feasibility to apply ICT in their teaching practices due to the limited time and tight working schedule. Allen and Seaman (2017) also suggested that a constructive dialogue about online teaching support and quality is needed because faculty members are concerned about the time and effort put into it and the lack of support and incentives from organizations. And then,

the participant teachers perceived that they require comprehensive training programs which include not only digital literacy skills but also pedagogical strategies for effective online teaching. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on the ways in which content, online technologies, and pedagogical methods interact within their own classrooms, so programs that support and develop teachers are crucial (Kohler, 2018).

The findings of this study provided information for concerned authorities to reflect on, with the goal of implementing adjustments to their existing practices in light of the fact that online teaching continues to be an area of development in education. In order to reduce obstacles to online teaching and to be effective online teaching, the following points were recommended.

Recommendations

1. Concerned educational authorities should efficiently formulate effective policies to incorporate ICT in teaching-learning practices that meet the country's current needs and academic situations at all levels.
2. Teachers should be provided with the opportunities to enhance their digital literacy and to expand their technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK).
3. Stakeholders should pay extra attention to making sure that ICT is successfully used in schools, and teachers should be rewarded for their efforts with incentives or awards.
4. Reward systems in which leadership recognition, tenure and promotion, and money stipends for additional work. and commitment to online education should be part of faculty members' careers.
5. Teachers should use a variety of resources and activities such as simulations, interactive websites, online museum exhibitions, social media, and gamification such as Twinkle, Quiz, Kahoot.
6. Strategies like regular check-ins, group discussions, video demonstrations, virtual rehearsals, individualized feedback sessions and collaborative projects should provide with clear guidelines and expectations for online participation to keep students engaged.
7. Alternative methods for fostering emotional support through virtual platforms and digital communication tool such as zoom, skype should be utilized in online teaching.
8. Educational authorities should prioritize the provision of necessary resources and support system for effective online teaching.
9. Educational stakeholders should operate backup power sources such as generators or battery backups to mitigate the impact of power outages.
10. School administrators and local internet providers should work together for providing internet access involving distribution of mobile hotspots.
11. Teachers should have access to a support network of colleagues and administrators to provide invaluable guidance and assistance for challenges of online teaching.
12. Teachers should take free online courses through online to improve their digital literacy skills.
13. Once the needs are analyzed and problematic areas are noted, alternative solutions should be negotiated with all the stakeholders and related precautions need to be taken.

14. Lastly, online and face-to-face teaching approaches should be incorporated to create a flexible learning environment that matches students' different requirements.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study was conducted with a cross-sectional study design, so longitudinal studies should be conducted to be more reliable, generalized, and more valid data. This study included only one university of education. To be more representative, future research should be conducted with the remaining universities of education and basic schools. Moreover, participants comprised only teacher educators and senior assistant teachers. Additionally, more empirical studies among other populations, such as other in-service teachers, adolescents, basic education students, and other university students, should be studied to explore the importance of online teaching in the digital age.

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