

## Perception of the effectiveness of webinars on English language teachers in Western India

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### ABSTRACT

The proliferation of webinars and other similar web-based educational offerings attests to the interest in this instructional modality on the part of educators and learners in the area of English Language Teaching. With enforced lockdown and work-from-home becoming essential for teachers across the world, many educators enrolled themselves for a number of online events that include online courses, virtual conferences, and webinars. Never before, teachers in such a large number had attended or organized virtual events. Moreover, there are no established policies and experience in organizing such events. In light of the above background, the proposed study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these webinars attended by English Language teachers in western India.

The main objective of the study is to appraise the experience, learning outcomes, and the overall efficacy of the webinars. Data for the study were collected through questionnaires. And it was used to explore the English Teachers' acceptance of Webinars as a training tool based on four beliefs about Webinars i.e. perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, computer self-efficacy, and intention to use Webinars as a training tool. Theoretically, the study joins the research tradition of sociocultural theories and Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, CSCL, as well the theoretical approach of self-efficacy and Computer Self-Efficacy (CSE) concerned with individuals' media and information literacy.

Results suggest that the webinars had a positive impact on the teachers and they learned a great deal about factors such as subject knowledge, skills for designing courses and delivering sessions, and understanding of key issues in planning and delivering classroom lectures.

### Keywords

webinar, teacher training, impact, higher education, India, English teachers

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### Introduction

The universal advent of educational technology has had a deep impact on the Indian higher education system. In 1984, the University Grant Commission (UGC), the apex body that regulates higher education policies in India, initiated the nationwide Classroom Programme, a television-based educational initiative. With the formation of the Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC) in 1993 and the National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT) in 2009, efforts were made to extend 'digital literacy for teacher empowerment' (NMEICT). The NMEICT website offers information on flipped and embedded classrooms, the creation of digital content, the use of web platforms such as Moodle and WebX, and online training programs focusing on the integration of digital tools. There were efforts to create awareness among teachers regarding this and many training programs were conducted. However, most of the training programs were in on-campus mode. The training required the trainee and the trainer to remain

physically present during the lecture sessions. There was little or almost no experience for many teachers to organize and attend the courses online even in the urban areas of the country. Armed with features like screen sharing, whiteboard with drawing tools, presentation, survey, or chat, this entire experience was a little baffling for first-time users.

To obtain a sound database for the approach, around 50 English teachers from western India (Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan) responded to a questionnaire. Based on this empirical database they worked out an educational approach for conducting the webinars. As Zoumenou (Zoumenou et al., 2015, 67) and also Siñtto, T. (Siñtto, T. et al., 2016, p. 98) already stated, articles and academic studies about interactive webinars are quite rare in peer-reviewed journals. Included in an international Blended Learning scenario the webinars turned out to be a highly efficient tool for transnational cooperative learning and institutional cooperation. Nevertheless, a webinar takes careful planning

and content creation to make it an attractive event for the learners and to increase participant satisfaction.

The study shall contribute to the increased implementation of Blended Learning and motivate teachers and learners to use webinars. As Forgo Sandor (Forgo, 2013, p.1) already stated that there is still a lack of digital relevant device systems in educational institutions and digital skills of teachers particularly in India.

### Definition of Terms

The term "webinar" is composed of the two words "Web" and "Seminar". It is a web-based E-Learning tool, a real-time online seminar where the group meets simultaneously in a virtual classroom through the internet. One or more online-trainers conduct the online-seminar.

Until now there is no consensus on a definition of Blended Learning. To define it as a combination of traditional presence meetings and e-Learning is the least common denominator.

Blended Learning is the combination of direct instruction (traditional presence meetings) with elements of e-Learning, for example, complete computer-based learning environments or web-based tools like webinars, tutorials, or online-collaborations. Meanwhile, the range of different e-Learning tools is large. Virtual classrooms could be used as an interesting interface to work with other WBT's or CBT's.

### Review of Literature

The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) suggests a model of digital literacy for educators working in technical institutions in the country. It is based on the definition of digital literacy stated on a Government of India portal, Indian Computer Saksharta Mission (ICSM). The ICSM mentions digital literacy as a person's ability 'to operate digital devices like computers, smartphones, tablets and 'to send and receive e-mails, browse the internet, explore information, do online transactions' (ICSM, 2017). Adorned with 'technological determinism' (Jones and Hafner, 2012: 13), this definition ignores the 'sheer

diversity of specific accounts of "digital literacy" that exist' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2008: 2).

In India, whereas most of the universities have enabled their teachers to work in an international framework, other education providers have less or no tech-savvy teachers. Blended Learning "with the inclusion of webinars could increase such co-operations enormously in a convenient way and contribute efficiently" (Schmelzer, R. et al., 2016).

In the era of fast transmission of knowledge and information, it is very important for organizations today "to adopt or accept new technology and find new ways of doing work in order to maintain or enhance their competitive position in the industry." (Malik et al., 2015).

This also hints at how EL teachers are participating in collective synchronous webinars and chat communications "as a tool for collaborative learning through communicative exchanges of knowledge; as well as what possibilities flipped mini-lectures before follow-up webinars can provide as an expanded resource". (Amhag L, 2013)

The synchronous learning activities give the attendees "more learner-centered experiences and are important for them in order to continue the education and be able to be a part of the reciprocal learning processes" (Amhag L, 2015)

Ideally, the digital literacies of EST teachers should be placed in the same framework. Another framework that may suit EST teachers' digital literacies needs can be Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Koehler and Mishra, 2009) which combines teachers' pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and technological knowledge.

While there is extensive research on the positive impact of technology integration on language learning (Warschauer, 2002; Kessler and Bikowski, 2010; Hafner, 2014; Chen and Chan, 2019), research on teacher training or development in technology integration has not been as extensive, and thus, more research-based inquiries need to focus on education of language

teachers in technology integration (Kessler and Hubbard, 2017).

Fernández and Vázquez (2016: 153) claimed that teacher training in technology integration is inadequate. According to Hanson-Smith (2016: 210), there is a significant ‘gap between the current realities of global computer use and teachers’ abilities to use technology for educational purposes.

The impact of professional development related interventions is not a widely studied area in applied linguistics (Borg, 2018). Considering that in-service training of teachers has received much less research attention than pre-service training (Borg, 2011), studies on the impact of in-service training of college-level ESL teachers in technology integration on their practices are significantly limited in number. As it is important to train college/university teachers in the integration of technology (Rienties et al., 2013), more research is required to understand their practice of technology integration (Chai et al., 2013).

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- How did the participation of English Language teachers in western India in webinars impact their skill set?
- How did the participation of English Language teachers in western India in webinars impact their knowledge?

### Participants

A total number of 44 respondents from the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra participated in the study. All of them were the teachers of English Language either at schools, colleges, or universities. Their educational qualifications and experience, which were verified by the researcher, are presented in Figure 1. As per their request, their names and the names of their institutions have been withheld from the article.

### Methods of Data Collection

The Survey method was used where the researcher questioned a selected sample of individuals to obtain data about their perception of the usefulness of the webinars.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The selected sample was made to fill the following questions on the basis of their experiences in attending webinars. The prerequisite to be a part of this study was that the respondent must have attended at least 3 webinars.

The questions asked were:

**Part A—Demographics** that included age, gender, role in the organization, location of the organization, designation, and experience.

The responses indicate that there are a total of 44 respondents out of whom 12, 13, and 19 belong to rural, semi-urban, and urban areas respectively. It was also observed that 11 members were school teachers, whereas 33 members are teaching at Graduate level and above. Moreover, the average teaching experience of all respondents is 12.6 years.

### Part B- General information regarding the webinars

- The number of webinars attended
- Names of the last 2 webinars attended.
- What was the average duration of the webinars attended by you? (in Minutes)

40	40-60	60-90	More than 90
6	16	15	7

- According to you, what should be the ideal duration of a webinar?

40	40-60	60-90	Depends on Topic
11	22	8	3

It was also observed that out of 44 respondents, 28 people have attended more than 07 webinars in the duration of around 3-4 months. A total of 14 respondents attended webinars of more than 60 minutes. Their responses also indicate that 22 members feel that the webinars should have a duration of 40-60 minutes.

**Part-C About the resource persons**

- Were the resource persons qualified enough to deal with the subject? (Rate out of 5)

<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
21	15	7	0	1

- Did the resource persons make enough effort to engage the audience and retain the interest of the attendees?

<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
17	14	10	2	1

- Did the resource persons make too much effort to entertain the audience at the cost of losing content?

<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
9	4	10	11	10

- Were the resource persons comfortable with using technology for delivering lectures?

<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
17	14	9	2	0

It was observed that 36 members out of 44 have given the rating 4 and above out of 5 to the qualification of the Experts which shows that the respondents were highly satisfied with the quality of experts. 31 people also rated 4 and above out of 5 to the Audience Engagement quality. They also felt that the Experts were highly adaptive and comfortable with the technology they were using.

**Part D—Platforms used for the webinars**

- What were the platforms used for the webinars that you have attended?
- Do you think that the selection of the platform affects the overall quality of the webinar?
- In your opinion, which of the following are the important factors while choosing the platform?
  - Security and encryption
  - Ease of screen sharing
  - In-built audio/video sharing
  - User friendly
  - Scalability (number of participants permitted)
  - Recording options
  - Time duration
  - Other

The responses indicate that the webinars were delivered by using platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, WebEx, YouTube, Microsoft Teams, Adobe Connect, Gotowebinar, and Webinarjam. 27 people out of 44 were satisfied with the platform chosen whereas only 7 people thought it otherwise.

**Part E-Functional aspects of the webinars**

In your opinion, what are the advantages of webinars?

- Great flexibility and convenience
- Cost-efficient
- Ability to reach dozens or hundreds of people all around the world
- Interaction through anonymity
- Provide a wide variety of lessons
- Allow participants to grow their networks
- Other:

In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of webinars? \*

- Technical difficulties
- Absence of body language
- Environmental control
- Lack of dialogic interaction
- The audience gets easily distracted
- Lacks human touch
- Cannot be used for intense/sensitive topics

- Other:

For what reasons do you think webinars should ideally be organized? \*

- for formal lectures
- for the topics that don't require much interaction
- for a follow-up lecture once participants have attended in a class lecture
- for Practical – Seminar – Tutorial
- Other:

What do you think will be the future of webinars post covid19? \*

- It's a trend to stay.
- Once everything goes back to normal, webinars will be a thing of the past.
- Other:

Summarily, the respondents have felt that webinars are cost-effective, flexible, and very much convenient to attend. Webinars also provide an opportunity to connect with the world and increase social networking. The majority of the respondents have felt that Technical difficulties such as network issues and digital illiteracy are remarkable disadvantages of webinars. The responses also suggest that the webinars should ideally be organized for formal lectures as well as for the topics which require the least interaction. There was a 50-50 ratio of whether webinars shall be the trend that will stay or they will fade away as the covid phase passes away.

**Part F- Usefulness of the webinars (on a five-point Likert scale)**

1. The webinars have helped me significantly in terms of improving my subject knowledge.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
20	4	12	6	2

2. The webinars have helped me significantly in terms of improving my skill set.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
25	2	9	6	2

3. The webinars have helped me develop skills for designing courses and delivering sessions.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
25	2	9	6	2

4. The webinars have helped me deepen my understanding of key issues in planning and delivering classroom lectures.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
26	2	9	5	2

5. The webinars have helped me identify strategies for my further development.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
26	2	9	5	2

6. As an English Language teacher, I feel more empowered after attending these webinars.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
21	4	13	4	2

7. All domains of language learning (LSRW) were equally emphasized during the webinars.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
17	8	11	4	4

8. The webinars have made me more proficient in using technology for teaching.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
21	4	13	4	2

9. I feel more motivated to attend webinars in comparison to face-to-face seminars.

Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
28	1	6	7	2

Close-ended questions that comprised dichotomous, multiple-choice, rating, Likert scale, and checklist were part of the questionnaire. These responses were analyzed by assigning a value to every answer. This made it transparent to compare responses of different individuals which, in turn, enabled statistical analysis of survey findings. It enabled the researcher to limit the scope of possible responses, remove ambiguity, ensure consistency, and allow the study of the distribution of a certain parameter across the population.

An inductive content analysis (White and Marsh, 2006) was carried out to analyze the questionnaire responses of respondents in each case. Keywords and phrases from the responses were highlighted to create a coding scheme that corresponded to the research questions. A thematic analysis was carried out to classify the data under descriptive categories indicating the quality of the resource persons, selection of the platforms, functional aspects of the webinars, and usefulness of the webinars.

### Findings and Discussion

After analysing data for each case, triangulating them, and carrying out a cross-case analysis, the following findings were arrived at.

- Quality of the Resource Persons/Speakers
- selection of the platforms
- functional aspects of the webinars
- the usefulness of the webinars.

The study presents the impact of webinars on EST teachers in the western part of India. It should be noted that this study describes a limited number of participants and this needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. Although it may not be considered significant, the overall positive impact of the Webinars on English Language Teachers could be explained by a variety of factors. First, as pointed out by Lisbeth Amhag

(2015), online synchronous webinars and chat communications give the attendees more learner-centered experiences.

The study inclines towards a positive approach in teachers with respect to online dissemination of knowledge. satisfaction. This indicates the acceptance and need for blended training programs in the area of teachers' training.

However, a more detailed study including teachers from different geographical locations can be undertaken. Future studies could also include university administrators' perspectives and consider the impact of technology integration on the language learning process.

### Conclusion

A lot of research has been done on integrating technology into classroom teaching but studies highlighting teacher training or faculty development in virtual mode is almost non-existent in India. The country does not facilitate online teacher preparation programmes. However, the integration of digital tools in teacher education is being taken up seriously by the current government. However, one may question the quality of training offered on government portals, considering that most portals are not experiential in nature, teachers in a semi-urban and rural part of the country are still struggling with accessibility issues, and there is a lot of lack of awareness amongst teachers in with respect to usage of technology.

This study is an attempt to offer need-based and EST-specific technology integration training to EST teachers and evaluate its impact on their technology integration practices. The results of the study indicate a discernibly positive impact on teachers' ability to integrate digital tools into teaching EST. However, further investigation with larger sample size is necessary. It can be hoped that the publication of the findings of this study will prompt further research attention to this area. Empirical studies can push for a change in policy and make the case for ESP teacher education. It is also important that researchers who are supported by the government to conduct training programs try to carry out tracer or impact studies. Tracer

studies can help to finetune existing training models and develop more robust plans for the future.

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