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THE INFLUENCE OF WEBINARS IN DEVELOPING TEACHING SKILLS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY IN ELT

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of conducting webinars is to help the audience enhance their knowledge and update their skills by inputting the latest techniques and methods related to their respective fields. As there is a great opportunity for the participants to attend webinars just by sitting at home or in the office without spending more time and money, many people in the modern society are interested in attending them. Since there is no limit for the number of viewers to attend the webinars, they can be viewed by any number of participants throughout the world. Webinars are mostly used in the field of business in order to increase their sales and also give training to their employees who work in different places in the whole world. But, in modern times, webinars are widely used in the field of education and this scenario also reflects on the teaching and learning of the English language. Webinars are more useful for the language teachers, especially for the English language teachers, to implement novel techniques and approaches in their classrooms. Since these webinars have come into the limelight, they have become great boon for the English language teaching (ELT) faculty as they are mostly benefitted by knowing and implementing the latest and ongoing trends in ELT in their regular classrooms. This paper mainly focuses on the influence of webinars in developing the teaching skills of the English language teachers and also explains how far these webinars are useful for them in implementing the latest techniques in order to motivate the learners towards learning and make the learning environment a joyful, playful and entertaining one.

Key words: English language learners (ELLs), English language teaching (ELT), innovative, latest techniques, teachers, webinars.

Introduction

With the dawn of technology, there have been drastic changes in almost all the fields in the twenty-first century. Due to these technological changes, the entire universe has become a global village. With the advent of the internet, people can easily communicate with all people who live in different parts of the world. The modern man can

view the latest updates through the internet with the help of the mobile devices just by staying at home. The greatest advantage of the internet is that one can get the desired things home by purchasing them online. The scientists can control the satellites and programme them according to their necessity. The engineers also take the advantage the internet to make designs of

buildings, projects and dams. The twenty-first century engineers use the modern technology in order to plan and construct huge and massive skyscrapers and they have been successful in their attempts. The medical professionals also have been taking the advantages of the latest technology in performing critical surgeries and getting great success in their attempts. Even the researchers in the field of medicine are investigating new drugs for almost all the dreadful and life-threatening diseases. Man has been progressing in almost all the fields with the advent of technology. Even the greater yielding from the agriculture sector is only because of the implementation of new technology and the use of latest available fertilizers and pesticides by the farmers who are more familiar with the modernistic techniques and methods in agriculture. Furthermore, the travel time has been decreased enormously by the invention of bullet trains, helicopters and aeroplanes. Moreover, the ultramodern people can reach any desired destination with the help of GPS technology. After the introduction of robot technology in the industrial sector, the heavy and hard work done by many people has been performed by robots. As a result, the manpower use has been reduced and more work has been done effectively and systematically by robots.

In fact, the internet has brought drastic changes in the digital era. Communication has become more convenient even for a common man and he can save his time and money in sending and receiving mails in fraction of a second. Even the business correspondence has been done electronically and the business organisations are in a position to send and receive files, folders, pictures and videos through internet instantaneously all around the world. Moreover, the internet has been a windfall for the bank sector as most of the transactions are done online and even the bank officials also need the internet to perform their business. Cashless transaction is also the result of the internet and there is no need to carry money and people can travel anywhere with their cards or by doing online transfers. Furthermore, e-business or online transaction has become the order of the day and many customers are ordering for the

required items through the internet and getting them home safely and comfortably in a good condition. In addition to all these advantages, the internet has brought incredible innovations in the field of education.

It is a fact that the education field is benefitting a lot by using the internet. The concept of text books and libraries has been changed into digitised e-books and e-libraries. By using these advantages, readers can read any book from home. Also, teachers can refer to any book online using their mobiles or computers in the classroom and clarify the doubts of their students. Furthermore, the students also use their mobile devices in the classroom in order to learn the subject on their own. Due to the latest technological devices of the twenty-first century such as smart boards, interactive boards and digital boards, the learners are attracted and get more attention on the subject taught. Therefore, the teaching and learning has become easier in the present digital age.

In this modern millennium, teaching English language to the second or foreign language learners has become more convenient for the teachers of English due to the innovations in educational technology. Since the teachers of English have got the advantage of the latest technologies, there have been drastic changes in the concept of teaching and learning of the English language. Some teachers of English have been using the available latest technology and they are widely using the technological inventions such as mobile devices, computers, OHPs, smart boards, digital boards, interactive boards and so on in their regular classrooms. As a result, they are successful in bringing the full attention of the learners towards the topic taught and the learners always participate dynamically by learning the subject in a pleasant milieu. To administer the available technologies effectively and implement the latest techniques and methods successfully in order to make the teaching and learning a productive one, the fraternity of the English language teachers has to be trained in the area of English language teaching, especially, on the ongoing trends that take place in the whole ELT world. As it is more problematic for the trainers to train on the ongoing trends in

English language teaching (ELT) to all the teachers of English in the unabridged world on a single platform, the concept of conducting webinars is the right solution to resolve this problem.

What is a webinar?

The term 'webinar' has been coined from the phrase "web seminar" that is recurrently apprehended on the internet as a workshop or seminar which involves a presentation, discussion, demonstration or any other instructional event. Some linguists labelled webinar as an online workshop or seminar which is presented over the internet. Techtarget terms it as, "A webinar is an educational, informative or instructional presentation that is made available online, usually as either video or audio with slides". According to dictionary.com, "A webinar is a seminar or other presentation that takes place on the internet, allowing participants in different locations to see and hear the presenter, ask questions, and sometimes answer polls". As stated in Oxford Dictionary, "A webinar is an occasion when a group of people go on the internet at the same time to study and discuss something". According to Collins Dictionary, "A webinar is an interactive seminar conducted over the internet". Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary gives its definition for a webinar as, "A webinar is a presentation or seminar which is a meeting for training or discussion that is conducted over the internet". In general, a webinar is a virtual and live event that is performed online. Hence, a webinar is a live, virtual event which is performed online and it is an instructive or educational conference that includes audio-visual communication between the participants and the speaker.

The length of the ideal webinar

There have been many researches done on the length or duration of a webinar and they exposed their reports on it. BigMarker via Medium conducted a survey with the attendees of a webinar on the length of the ideal webinar and disclosed that the length of a 45-minute webinar is liked by 44% of the attendees and a 30-minute webinar is interested by 41% of the attendees, whereas, only 10% of attendees are more interested in a one-hour duration of a webinar and only 5% are

interested in a 20-minute duration of a webinar. But, speaking about the ideal time of the webinar, The BigMarker cites, "The ideal length of a webinar should be 30 to 45 minutes long, with 41% of people choosing a 30-minute webinar, and 44% performing a 45-minute webinar". In a survey report conducted on the webinar viewing time by ON24 and their 2018 Webinar Benchmarks says, "The average webinar viewing time in 2018 was 56.4 minutes and most webinars run for an hour". According to these survey reports, the ideal webinar should last for 40 to 45 minutes.

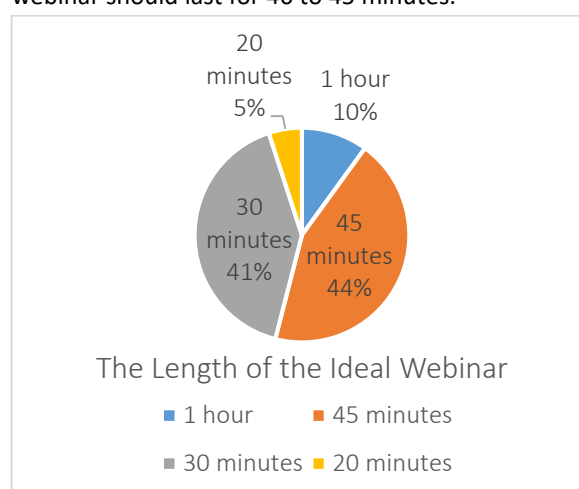


Fig.: The Length of the Ideal Webinar (Data Source: BigMarker via Medium)

(<https://medium.com/@BigMarker/12-webinar-statistics-you-need-to-know-b3e28b275abe>)

A Webinar and its Essential Elements

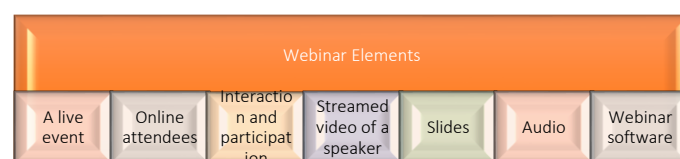


Fig.: The Elements Essential for a Webinar

All the educational videos we watch on the internet are not webinars. To be a webinar, the online event should have seven elements such as a live event, online attendees, interaction and participation, streamed video of a speaker, slides, audio and webinar software. Let us discuss these points in detail. First of all, the webinar should be a live event. Just like the other events, a webinar has a predetermined date and time. Once the event is over, many organisers make their video will be made available on-demand. Moreover, the organisers also send a link to all the registrants to

watch the webinar the day after the webinar occurs as it enables them the ability to watch it at their leisure time without missing anything and everyone get the opportunity to watch it even if they could not watch it because of various reasons. However, there has to be a time when the live streaming occurs that makes a webinar an event rather than just a video. Hosting a live event with a fixed time and date enables the online participants with live participation. Then, another feature that the webinars share with live events is its online participants. Participants can join from anywhere all around the world. Of course, it is impossible to conduct a webinar without any attendees. The organisers at least need some viewers, not many since these webinars are viewed on demand. According to GoToMeeting cites, "66% of webinars have with less than 50 attendees". To increase the participation of the attendees, the hosts put heavy consideration into the day and time to host their attendees. Then another important element for a webinar is interaction and participation. Here the interaction takes place in multiple forms such as Q&A sessions, live chats, polls, survey questions and social media sharing.

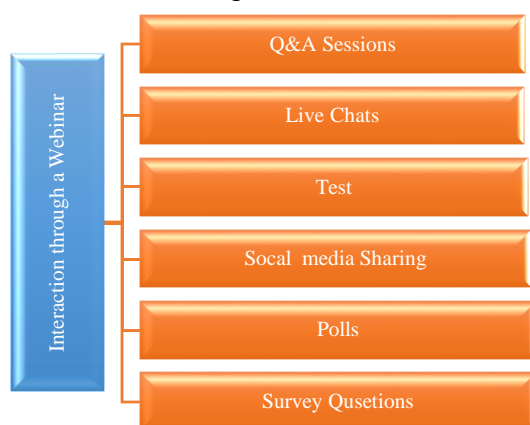


Fig.: How to interact through a Webinar

All the webinars have Q&A sessions where the attendees clarify their doubts by putting some questions to the host questions and the host answers them. Questions are also submitted through live chats. The chat is private and only the host of the webinar can see these questions. Some other times, the chat feature is live and all attendees see the comments in the chat box and respond to each other. Another fun interactive element of webinars is the use of polls and surveys.

Here the host has predetermined questions where the participants are supposed to respond with their answers. Then the results are immediately displayed and shared on the screen. The hosts prepare the questions mostly with multiple choice or ranking or likert-scale questions in order to share the results quickly. The attendees join the conversations on Twitter when social media sharing is allowed during the webinar. As these webinars are live, the participants get an opportunity to ask the host their questions, interact with the other participants or participate in polls. Another most important way of interaction is the streamed video of the speaker. Here, the speaker of the webinar should have a good authority on the subject or topic he demonstrates. Moreover, the audience can see the speaker, whereas the speaker cannot see them. Furthermore, the audience sees the live-streamed video of the speaker as they present.

Slides play a vital role in the presentations of webinars and we never see a webinar presentation without any slides. The most charismatic event that the speakers pull off their engaging presentations is with slides. Sometimes, if the audience misses any important point delivered by the speaker(s), the main points of the content will be displayed in the form of slides. So the speakers should not ignore these slides. For example, PowerPost is an enterprise publishing platform that focuses on owned media and they hold many successful marketing masterclass webinar series with all multimedia features. When the participants are distracted by the surrounding chatty co-workers or friends, these slides keep them focused on the event. Presentation software like PowerPoint, Google Slides or Prezi is used to create webinar slides. Another important interactive tool is audio. The participants understand the content that is delivered by the speaker when they hear the speech clearly. That is the reason a microphone is needed for the speakers or hosts.

Finally, webinar software is needed in order to combine and execute all these said elements. This software enables the speakers to have an interactive event with attendees from various parts of the world and it glues and holds everything together. Those who cannot afford for webinar

software, they can maximise their event opportunity through free webinar software. The capabilities vary between webinar software. The available features include depending on the webinar platform. The features of webinar software includes Q&A tools, live chats, polls and surveys, screen sharing, streaming capabilities, sending invitations from the webinar software, pre-recorded voice and sound options, multiple presenters, registration reminders and calendar notifications. So, these are the seven most important interactions of a webinar.

The Common Features of the Webinar Software

Webinars are available in plenty and among them, there are many free, ad-supported and subscription or paid webinar software and services that the participants have a choice to choose the best of them. Some of the most useful and common webinar software features include:

- Participants can get a chance for live chat.
- Participants can share their video files.
- They offer calendar scheduling and invites.
- They promote the participants to share the screen.
- They provide the attendees with some other incentives like live feedback forms, Q&A tools and polls.
- They provide an opportunity to prerecord the video or voice options.
- They give an opportunity for the participants to listen to the Conference in live.
- They promote the facility for live capturing to save presentations or streaming abilities.
- They chat filters to connect attendees and presenters with social accounts,
- They support for many number of presenters.
- They provide an option for prerecording the video or voice.
- They provide an opportunity for the host to display slideshow using PowerPoint presentation.
- They provide an opportunity for the host to show a video either stored on their

computer or found online, such as on YouTube.

- They are designed to make real-time audio communication possible to talk to an audience.
- They provide an option for the host to record their entire presentation including all visuals and audio.
- They provide the opportunity for the host to use their mouse to create markings, create annotations and highlight things on the screen.
- They also give a chance for the host to open up a chat box to text chat with the audience, where it is very helpful for the audience who would like to ask questions.
- They offer the ability to create polls given to audience for survey or quiz purposes.
- They provide an opportunity to conduct a multi-directional conference.
- They give an opportunity to make use of digital boards or smart boards.
- They are helpful in conducting polls and surveys.
- They give an opportunity to download and watch presentations and videos.
- They provide the opportunity for the presenter to share the desktop.
- They permit to record the broadcasts to watch them later.

The webinar users have to know the common features of webinar software so that they make use of it thoroughly when they give presentations or participate as attendees in online webinars. Let us discuss the focal pluses of a webinar.

The focal pluses of a webinar

Since webinars are seminars which are conducted only online, thinking of finding a right physical venue is not needed. Moreover, all the time, these webinars allow the participants in hosting a virtual meeting. The speaker's or speakers' presentation is sheared with the participants even if their physical presence is not there at the hosting place. But, like a seminar or conference or workshop, the participants can participate actively in the webinar just by staying at

their homes or offices and attend the ongoing webinar just by keeping a laptop, a computer or a mobile device that is connected with the powerful internet connection. In the modern era, most of the webinars are conducted for business purposes and they are mostly for developing their businesses or selling their products in the international market with minimal expenditure. Even many agribusinesses have been using webinars very frequently in educating and certifying their employees. Almost all the fields have been using webinars as their platform to develop and train their employees in obtaining the latest information and new trends in their respective fields. In the recent years, webinars have become a new trend in the field of education as they not only reduce the cost but also save more time of the teachers. Since teachers are getting the opportunity of attending the webinars either from their own school or house, they save their time, energy and money. Another main advantage that we get from the webinar is that even if one misses any webinar, he/she can watch it later as the webinar is always available on the net and can be viewed later. One more benefit from the webinar is that the attendees can have the main important points in the form of PowerPoint where he gets it to his mail box. The participants can also download the distributed materials during the live chat. Another benefit that the participants get from the webinars is that they can ask questions and get the answers from the speaker on the spur of the moment or later when there are many questions. When their questions are not answered immediately, the participants can get the answers to all the questions that are asked by all the participants. This is really a boon for the participants. Therefore, the speaker has no way to escape from answering any questions that are asked or typed by the participants. Since the participants view the webinar at their own places, there is no need to arrange a huge hall even if the number is pretty high. The participants can really enjoy the webinar when the presentation is with full of fun and witty. Therefore, the organisers of the webinar should select the topic that is more suitable to the

listeners and they should always take up the latest topics for their presentation.

These days, several people are searching on the net for webinars and their number has been growing day by day. According to the statistics that is available on Google, there are 110,000 people search for webinars on all subjects in Google with an average of 271,500 times a month. This evidence shows that there is a lot of demand for webinars all over the world. Let us discuss how the webinars are influencing the English language teachers in developing their teaching skills.

The influence of webinars in developing teaching skills of the English language teachers



Since teaching English to the speakers of second or foreign language is quite challenging one, the teachers of English should refresh and rejuvenate their knowledge and teaching skills from time to time. As a result, they can implement the latest techniques in their classrooms and prepare the students well in performing the given tasks well. As the present system of education gives very less chances for teacher development, the teachers of English should try to think of alternatives in updating their knowledge. In this process, webinars are found to be more appropriate for them in refreshing their knowledge and teaching English in an entirely different and varied way.

Since the main objective of the English teachers is to create positive learning environment in the classroom to motivate their learners towards their teaching and learning, the teachers should not be satisfied with the knowledge what they have. As Rao, P. S. (2018) states, "Though these webinars last for a short period of time, they provide more detailed knowledge about the subject that is presented. So, the participants get valuable information about the latest strategies, techniques, methods and approaches of English language teaching and learning from those webinars". Hence,

it is their primary duty to continue learning new concepts and try to update the existing knowledge to motivate their learners positively towards learning the concept in a learner-friendly way. There is a possibility for the teachers to enhance their knowledge by attending workshops, seminars, refresher courses, conferences and so on. To do all these, the teachers have to spend more money and time. It may not be possible for all the teachers to attend these programmes and they do not pay more attention towards them. So, webinars seem to be the right solution for the entire teaching community to augment their knowledge and teaching skills. Moreover, Rao, P. S. (2018) asserts, "Webinars are useful instructional tools to learn English language and understand or update new developments in English language in terms of vocabulary and usage. Webinars also help the learners improve their grammar and pronunciation". Just by staying home or sitting in the office by activating the internet with the help of a mobile or a laptop and a headphone, the teachers of English can attend a webinar comfortably. As the main idea of conducting webinars in ELT is to help the teachers of English to improve their teaching methods, approaches, techniques and strategies, many teachers of the modern century are attending them with a lot of enthusiasm and interest.

Teachers are the real masters to bring drastic changes in the learning behaviour of the learners. For this purpose, webinars are more useful for them to implement latest methods, modern techniques, new approaches and cutting-edge strategies in their regular classrooms. Webinars are useful for both teachers and learners of English to learn the language in a congenial and pleasant environment. In this connection, it is wise to quote Rao, P. S. (2019), "The teachers have to attend these webinars as they can attend from home or office and refresh their teaching skills and strategies in order to make their classrooms lively and attractive. This results a positive learning attitude among the learners to learn the English language skills in a new environment". Since there is a major revolution among the dynamic teachers of English in attending the webinars to enhance their teaching skills, the webinars have been

organised by various English language training institutions such as the British Council, Oxford, Cambridge, Macmillan, Pearson, IATEFL, EF English First and so on. They organise the webinars very frequently and the topics for the webinars are more useful for the teachers in developing their career. As the participants of the webinars can interact with the speaker or speakers and clarify their doubts, they are also interactive. When there are many attendees who put questions and the time is limited to answer them, the answers will be directly sent to the emails of the participants after two or three days of the completion of the webinar. The participants are also supplied the slides of the webinar so that they can go through them whenever they want. They can have the link of the webinar to view it later whenever they wish to watch it.

It is a fact that the teachers need to know many new trends that take place in teaching English to the modern learners of second or foreign language learners. The webinars conducted by various standard organisers are free and the participants can participate in them from anywhere in the world just simply by staying home or sitting in their offices. They need strong and powerful internet and a laptop or a mobile device or a computer and headphones for this purpose. Since the organisers conduct webinars on various topics with the latest information, the attendees will certainly grasp the new information. With this information, the teachers of English can implement the bottommost techniques and methods to improve the learning skills of their learners. Even these webinars will be more useful for teachers to bring significant changes in the behaviour of their students in learning the English language. Thus, the teachers of English should concentrate more on webinars to implement the latest practices that are new to the fraternity of English teachers.

Since webinars are frequently organised by various well-known English training institutions, the teachers of English are advised to attend all of them. The webinars conducted by the British Council are conducted for various age groups such as teachers, teens, kids and adults and the experts of the material preparation team systematically

organise the material that is useful for the viewers. The British Council arranges these webinars on the current topics and they are more useful for the teachers of English to know the ongoing issues in ELT. Cambridge English is another major organisation that develops webinars on a variety of topics and these more useful for the development of the learning skills of non-native speakers of English. So, these webinars are planned and prepared according to the needs of the teachers of English as a foreign or second language. In addition to this, the teachers will be in a position to prepare some additional and innovative materials useful for the learners and make the learners to participate actively in the classroom activities. One more organisation that provides webinars is Pearson. The webinars conducted by Pearson are covered with latest topics that give the right knowledge about the current trends in ELT. The presenters of Pearson webinars are well-prepared in presenting the content and all the presenters always motivate the participants with their inspiring presentations so that the teachers of English are more attracted by them and concentrate more on the topic. This leads the teachers to grasp the whole content with ease and they try to carry out these new techniques in their classrooms whenever and wherever they are needed. Even the presented number of webinars is less, the method they prepare them and the way they present them is entirely different from the other organisations.

One more organisation that conducts regular webinars in ELT is Oxford Professional Development. These Oxford webinars are conducted by the most experienced professionals who give excellent training for the teachers of English who like to develop their teaching skills and improve their knowledge on the present trends in the English language teaching. The added advantage of these Oxford webinars is that they maintain online webinar library and the participants can view them whenever they want. Macmillan Education is another organisation that conducts regular webinars with their expert team and they always try to bridge the gap between the teacher and the learner in making the classroom teaching a fruitful one. These webinars are more useful for

teachers, learners, educationalists and authors to implement the novel practices and methods in ELT. The other organisations that hold webinars include IATEFL, National Geographic Learning, and Education First and so on. They conduct webinars in ELT and they are always with newest and latest topics that are very beneficial for the teachers of English to implement the current methods and approaches that involve in improving the learning skills of the learners. They always aim at fulfilling the needs and requirements of the present generation of learners. They also try to build a strong bond between the teachers of English and the learners by focusing on the necessary points that are new to the topic and also suggest the teachers with alternate methods to overcome their teaching difficulties.

As the teachers are benefitted in many ways from webinars, they are essential for the development of the career of the teachers of English. It is true that webinars provide information about the current methods and approaches in ELT and the teachers of English have to learn these modern trends to make the classrooms lively and active for the learners. In order to make the teaching and learning a successful one, the teachers should always try to learn the new concepts of ELT from these webinars that are prepared and conducted by various organisations of ELT training.

Conclusion

The present paper focuses mainly on the importance of webinars and their influence on developing teaching skills of the English language teachers. First of all, the importance of technology has been discussed thoroughly. Then the internet and its advantages have been presented profoundly. Later, the definition of a webinar has been exhaustively discoursed. After that, the essential elements of a webinar have been given comprehensively. Furthermore, the focal pluses of a webinar have been brought out in a systematic way. Moreover, the influence of webinars in developing teaching skills of the ELT teachers has been elaborated in detail. Finally, the teachers of the English language have been given valuable guidance in utilising the webinars not only to

enhance their knowledge and teaching skills but also to develop the learners' learning skills.

Since webinars on ELT provide the latest information to the teachers of English to update their knowledge and teaching skills, they are more useful in the modern classrooms. There have been tremendous changes in the field of ELT and there have been new methods, latest approaches and modern techniques and it is impossible for all the teachers of English to have the knowledge of these latest issues. Rao, P. S. (2019) says, "The teachers of ELT should attend all the webinars available on the internet where they get the up-to-date information about the latest developments that take place in their field and also enhance their teaching and learning skills enormously". As there are many standard organisations which conduct webinars on regular intervals, the teachers of English should utilise this rare opportunity to update their teaching skills. Also, the teachers of English should grasp the ongoing trends in ELT and implement them in the English classroom in order to make the learning a joyful and pleasant way. In addition to listening to the webinar, the teachers can also clarify their doubts spontaneously and feel comfortable while teaching their students. Furthermore, the teachers can get the opportunity to view the webinars either at home or in the office without wasting their money and time. The ELT webinars play a pivotal role in shaping the career of the teachers of English. Therefore, the teachers of English are advised to attend as many webinars as possible to enrich more knowledge on the current trends in ELT. Moreover, the teachers of English are advised to implement the newly learned techniques, methods and approaches in the present classrooms so that the learners can understand the content in an entirely different environment.

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