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MEASURING THE READINESS AND RESPONSIVENESS OF JEST TOWARDS BLENDED LEARNING: AN INVESTIGATION FROM DISTRICT SHAHEED BENAZIRABAD

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ABSTRACT

In the field of education, ICT plays a great role and it has been spreading throughout every branch of education. Blended learning, a revolutionary approach to education, expands on the significant contribution that ICT has made to improve the learning process. It provides a dynamic and adaptable environment for students with traditional in-person and online learning components. The purpose of the current research was to measure the readiness and responsiveness of JEST teachers towards blended learning: An investigation from district Shaheed Benazirabad. Identification and examination of the JEST teachers' level of responsiveness and readiness towards blended learning were the main objectives of the study measured with the help of a quantitative research method and paper paper-based survey was conducted. The adopted questionnaire with the 5-point Likert scale was used for data collection. The sample of the study was N=200 senior and junior JEST teachers who were working in secondary schools of Taluka Sakrand and Nawabshah, within the district Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh; and the data was collected with the help of a convenience sampling technique. The data was analyzed in frequency, mean, and standard deviation. From the results, it was concluded that the majority of the JEST teachers were not ready to teach with blended learning while their responsiveness or perception level was positive towards blended learning. It is recommended that the government should provide proper facilities to schools and teachers, training relevant to computer literacy, and professional development programs (PDP) for the JEST teachers to use the current trending blended learning approach within their classrooms and policymakers, donor agencies, and relevant authorities should look at the matter carefully and seriously. The JEST teachers should be trained with online teaching tools for teaching with blended learning. In general, training is highly recommended for the JEST teachers to teach with a blended learning approach.

Keywords: JEST teachers, responsiveness, readiness, blended learning, secondary schools, Shaheed Benazirabad

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, technology is the need of every individual. The use of technology is making man's life easier and more modern, one can perform any difficult and time-consuming tasks within seconds and minutes. Every individual is becoming addicted to technology. Without technology, one can feel incompleteness in life and unfamiliarity with those happenings that are occurring in the world (Osmanović & Osmanović, 2022).

Today, modern technology is emerging in the same way as the new sun every day. Each day a new rising sun brings happiness and sorrow, with peaks and valleys to a person's life. In the same way, technology is changing a man's life (Ventayen et al., 2019). In the field of education, ICT plays a great role and it has been spreading throughout every branch of education (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013). All educational fields are touching the peak of these digital trends (Osmanović & Osmanović, 2022). Like the ever-rising sunlight, technologies are also constantly updated each day which is why teachers should be skillful in ICT because they need new

skills every day according to the need for updated technologies. (Ventayen et al., 2019). In general, ICT empowers teachers and students, improving the accessibility and effectiveness of education, especially in tough times like the COVID-19 pandemic (Sánchez, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of blended learning even more. Teachers and institutions quickly shifted to blended approaches to ensure continuity of education in response to widespread school closings and the need for remote learning. The pandemic catalyzed innovation and the investigation of digital tools and platforms to provide fun and interactive learning opportunities (Bordoloi et al., 2021; Bhat, 2021).

Blended learning, a revolutionary approach to education, expands on the significant contribution that ICT has made to improve the learning process (Ashraf et al., 2022). The history of blended learning (BL) is extensive and has developed over time into its current configuration as a successful pedagogical strategy. To put it plainly, blended learning (BL) blends conventional face-to-face training with online or digital learning techniques to produce a flexible and tailored learning experience (Singh et al., 2021). It is observed that technology has become very advanced, even in schools, teachers are trying to take advantage of modern technology. With the help of this technology and by using ICT components within the classroom, teachers are advancing their teaching style. It is an innovative and applied, real, and useful method of imparting knowledge where learners and tutors both are getting benefits from F2F and virtual learning (Pardede, 2019).

OBJECTIVES

To identify the level of JEST teachers' readiness in Blended Learning at District Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh.

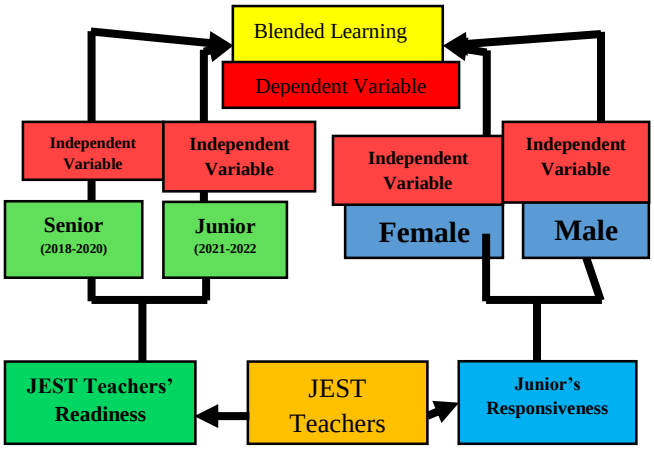
To examine the level of JEST teachers' responsiveness to blended learning in terms of (Process, content, and ease of use) at District Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the level of JEST teachers' readiness in Blended Learning at Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh?

What is the level of JEST teachers' responsiveness to blended learning in terms of (Process, content, and ease of use) at Shaheed Benazirabad, Sindh?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



LITERATURE REVIEW:

In today's period, teaching with a "blended learning" approach is considered advantageous. It is a deliberate combination of two or more aspects that is an online and physical intervention, these two aspects are combined by a teacher to support the teaching and learning process more effectively (Pardede, 2019).

According to the current situation, blended learning is gaining popularity in the educational fields so, junior elementary school teachers (JEST) should have skills relating to "blended learning" to compete with the technology and modern teaching approaches collectively (Ventayen et al., 2019). The study of Tayebinik and Puteh (2013) revealed, that Blended Learning has great advantages as compared to pure e-learning. It is efficient for both teachers as well as students to interact with each other. It helps to improve the students' acquisition of knowledge, they can explore more tools and techniques by learning with them in the classroom (Osmanović & Osmanović, 2022).

With technology, teachers can design dynamic, interesting lessons that cater to their students' various needs and preferences. It allows the incorporation of multimedia resources, interactive simulations, and personalized learning pathways, encouraging engagement and in-depth comprehension. Teachers are essential to utilizing technology wisely, creating meaningful learning experiences, and giving students

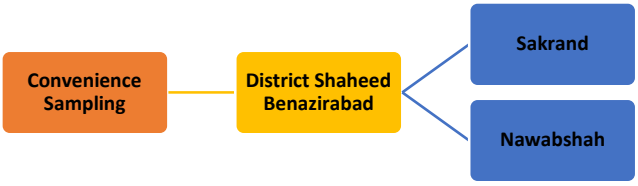
direction and support. To the greatest extent possible, they must combine their pedagogical skills with their knowledge of combining traditional and digital approaches (Cahapay et al., 2020; Dehraj et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research design was used for the current research study and the paper survey technique was used for the collection of numerical data from the JEST teachers within district Shaheed Benazirabad to carefully investigate their readiness and responsiveness toward blended learning. All junior (newly appointed i.e. 2021-2022) and senior (appointed in 2018-2020) JEST teachers of district Shaheed Benazirabad Sindh who are working in secondary schools were chosen as the population of the study. The researcher herself was also part of the population and sample.

Sample size

The researcher had chosen schools from the two most useful and convenient talukas out of four as a sample from district Shaheed Benazirabad, These are Nawabshah, and Sakrand. The sample size was (n=200) JEST teachers across the most convenient multiple schools of Taluka Sakrand and Nawabshah.



Survey Instrument

The researcher used an adapted close-ended questionnaire for primary data collection. The 11 items of the questionnaire were adopted from Khalil Al-Hyari's study conducted in 2020 and 19 items were adopted from Howard's study conducted in 2021.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher analyzed the data with the help of the IBM Statistics SPSS-21 package. Descriptive statistics were used and the frequency, mean, and standard deviation were calculated and presented in tables. The validity of the instrument was ensured by the experts in the field of education while its reliability was measured in Cronbach alpha by using SPSS and it is 0.174, which indicated that the research instrument was acceptable and ready to use for the data collection.

Variables	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Readiness and Responsiveness of JEST Teachers	30	.714

RESULTS

The results of the current study were analyzed by using SPSS-21 and critically analyzed the important findings by calculating descriptive statistics to generalize the population.

Table 1

Gender * Taluka Cross tabulation

Count

		Taluka		Total
		Nawabshah	Sakrand	
Gender	Male	43	50	93
	Female	65	42	107
Total		108	92	200

As indicated in above Table 1, it is evident that from district Shaheed Benazirabad two Talukas Nawabshah and Sakrand participated in the current research study and the population comprised both male and female teachers. From the Taluka Nawabshah N=108 participants were involved; the frequency of males is N=43 and the frequency of females is N=65. From the Taluka Sakrand N=92 participants were involved; the frequency of males is N=50 and the frequency of females is N=42. Overall these findings indicate that the majority of the female participants were from Taluka Nawabshah and the majority of the male respondents were from Taluka Sakrand.

Table 2

Gender * Age Crosstabulation

Count

		Age				Total
		25 - 30 years	30 - 35 years	35 - 40 years	40 - 45 years	
Gender	Male	19	27	21	26	93
	Female	30	19	32	26	107
Total		49	46	53	52	200

According to the results from Table 2, neither the male nor the female respondents fall into the age category Above 45 years. Within each age category,

there were distinct frequencies of male participants: 19 respondents fall into the 25–35 year age range, 27 into the 30-35 year range, 21 into the 35–40 year range, and 26 into the 40–45 year range. The distribution is as follows for female participants: 30 respondents fall into the 25–35 year age range, 19 into the 30-35 year range, 32 into the 35–40 year range, and 26 into the 40–45 year range. This information adds in comprehending the demographic structure of the study's participant pool.

Table 3

Gender * Appointment Crosstabulation

Count				
		Appointment		Total
		Year 2021 - 2022	Year 2018 - 2020	
Gender	Male	61	32	93
	Female	65	42	107
Total		126	74	200

The distribution of responders by gender and their corresponding appointment years is shown in above Table 3. Notably, there were 61 males and 65 women who responded throughout the appointment period of 2021–2022. In comparison, there were 42 female responders and 93 male respondents during the previous appointment years of 2018–2020. There were 93 males and 107 females who responded overall in each gender and appointment group. There were 126 respondents for the years 2021–2022, and 74 respondents for the years 2018–2020, for a total of (n=200) respondents overall, across both genders and appointment dates.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of JEST teachers' readiness to blended learning

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TCK_7: JEST teacher's confidence about the use of technology	200	2.37	1.368
TCK_8: JEST teacher's confidence about the implementation of curriculum online	200	1.48	1.435
TCK_9: JEST teacher's confidence about the use of courseware programs	200	1.75	1.448
TPK_10: JEST teacher's confidence about creating an online environment to build new knowledge and skills.	200	1.65	1.413
TPK_11: JEST teacher's confidence about the implementation of methods for online teaching.	200	1.70	1.400
TPK_12: JEST teacher's confidence about moderation of online interactivity among students.	200	1.88	1.398
TPK_13: JEST teacher's confidence about the encouragement of online interactivity among students.	200	2.32	1.314
TPCK_14: JEST teacher's confidence about online assessment to modify instruction.	200	1.59	1.372
TPCK_15: JEST teacher's confidence about the use of technology to predict students' topic comprehension.	200	1.70	1.411
TPCK_16: JEST teacher's confidence about the use of technology for the representation of content effectively.	200	1.75	1.315
TPCK_17: JEST teacher's confidence to meet the demands of online teaching.	200	1.93	1.384

Results from the above table 4 highlighted negative effects on variables most of the participants disagreed with items and it was concluded that they weren't ready to use BL in their context.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of JEST teachers' responsiveness to blended learning

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Blended Learning Process			
BLP_18: Blended learning is an alternative to F2F approach.	200	3.20	1.484
BLP_19: Blended Learning application is more useful than F2F approach.	200	3.29	1.430
BLP_20: Applications of blended learning save time and effort.	200	3.43	1.485
BLP_21: Blended Learning has a significant role in the technical development.	200	3.34	1.471
BLP_22: BL enhances the interaction between teachers and students.	200	2.86	1.378
BLP_23: Blended learning is an effective learning tool.	200	3.29	1.512
BLP_24: BL are interesting and useful.	200	3.57	1.469
BLP_25: Blended learning enhances the quality of education.	200	3.61	1.410
Blended Learning content			
BLC_26: Blended learning content has provided better understanding of the subject.	200	3.30	1.480
BLC_27: E-learning approach offers a better learning experience than Traditional F2F approach.	200	3.01	1.334
BLC_28: BL application layout is not attractive.	200	2.89	1.460

BLC_29: Blended Learning with its applications improved education to the best.	200	3.34	1.358
BLC_30: The BL materials are both interesting and engaging.	200	3.20	1.517
BLC_31: BL content affords the flexibility to learn successfully.	200	3.00	1.454
Blended Learning ease of use			
BLE_32: Slow internet connectivity is a problem for BL.	200	3.18	1.394
BLE_33: BL instructions' aren't easy to follow.	200	3.53	1.537
BLE_34: Technical difficulties make the online component of blended teaching frustrating.	200	3.22	1.322
BLE_35: Blended Learning applications are, hardly, challenging for use.	200	2.53	1.393
BLE_36: Blended Learning applications and tools are hard to be learnt and understand.	200	3.10	1.467
Valid N (listwise)	200		

Results from above table 4 highlighted positive effects on variables most of the participants agreed with the items and it is concluded that their responses are in favor of BL as they were aware of its role and importance.

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of a research study that was carried out after surveying a group of JEST teachers are carefully analyzed in this discussion. In the setting of two separate Talukas, Nawabshah and Sakrand, this study aimed to investigate several factors of JEST teachers' readiness and responsiveness toward blended learning (BL). A wide range of factors were covered by the survey, including demographic data, technology comfort levels, difficulties, and attitudes toward BL. For educational authorities and organizations, the findings provide insightful information on the current level of JEST teachers' readiness and responsiveness toward blended learning.

The study's survey of teachers from the two Talukas found a significant gender gap in their involvement. While the majority of male respondents were from Taluka Sakrand, the majority of female participants came from Taluka Nawabshah, and the majority of male respondents came from Taluka Sakrand. Additionally, a great percentage of participants male and female were between the ages of 35 and 40, suggesting a rather homogeneous distribution in this age range. According to the data, many of the JEST teachers who responded to the survey appear to be in the mid-age which may affect their capacity to adopt new pedagogical techniques and technological advancements. Teaching experience was divided into two categories, junior JEST teachers (for the years 2021–2022) and senior JEST teachers (for the years 2018–2020). The statistics showed that 126 junior JEST teachers responded to the survey questionnaire, compared to 74 senior JEST teachers. In addition, there was a gender imbalance, with 107 females and 93 males among the respondents. The study revealed that 108 participants were from Taluka Nawabshah, while 92 were from Sakrand, indicating a regionally (locally) balanced sample.

The study found that JEST teachers lacked confidence in several areas, including the creation of an online learning environment, the use of diverse teaching techniques, the management of online student interaction, the modification of instruction through online student assessment, and the use of courseware tools for instruction, were all areas in which teachers showed a lack of trust. These results highlight particular areas where help and training for teachers are required. The participants expressed confidence in increasing student online interaction, they acknowledged that it can be challenging to predict students' technological aptitude and subject-matter comprehension. The results also revealed difficulties in developing accurate content representations that differ from typical textbook knowledge. The study also noted that the teachers felt unprepared to handle all of the responsibilities of online instruction. The fact that there was no visible difference between junior and senior JEST teachers' readiness for blended learning was a major discovery, indicating that preparation for this method of instruction was not greatly influenced by teaching experience alone. Additionally, it emphasizes the value of programs for professional development and customized training courses. The study found that most respondents preferred blended learning to conventional face-to-face methods. They thought that blended learning reduced time and effort and was crucial for technical progress. There was general agreement that it did not significantly improve a teacher-student relationship. Overall, respondents thought that blended learning was an excellent and

helpful instrument that enhanced educational quality and enhanced subject comprehension.

Despite their overall positive outlook, respondents expressed concerns related to blended learning. Many believed that internet speed issues posed a significant problem for the successful implementation of blended learning. Additionally, respondents found the instructions for blended learning challenging to follow and cited technical difficulties as a source of frustration. However, they disagreed that blended learning applications are hardly difficult to use, indicating that with proper support and training, these challenges could be lessened.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that JEST teachers' confidence in using technology is a key component of their attitudes, respondents showed strong support for the perception of using technology to teach concepts, which was a notable finding. However, when it came to implementing the district's curriculum in an online setting, their confidence faded.

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