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## Pre-service English teachers' perceptions of web-based assessment in a pedagogical content knowledge course

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### Abstract

Many e-learning experts and educational technologists have emphasized that e-assessment can play an important role in improving the quality of student learning experiences, particularly in higher education. However, there still seems to be a need for investigating what students think and feel, and learning context-specific issues. This study examined pre-service English teachers' perceptions of web-based assessment within the methods and approaches course they took in an English teacher training program at a large state university in Ankara. It also aimed to explore individual differences by gender and the time spent using the Internet, as well as the relationship between their GPAs and perceptions. Fifty student teachers enrolled in a content knowledge course rated the statements in a five-point Likert scale. The qualitative data was also collected through interviews. The results indicated that although the participants did not seem to fully appreciate the use of web-based assessment and showed some lack of interest to use this form of assessment in their future classes, they displayed a positive computer attitude and positive perception towards ease of use of web-based testing for their course. They did not favor a shift to a fully web-based form of assessment, but more students preferred a web-based assessment in combination with paper-based assessment than having only paper-based tests. Factors such as frequency of internet usage and level of computer literacy were also found to have significant impact on the students' attitudes towards web-based assessment.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades developments in computer speed and accuracy have accelerated the use of computer technology in many areas of education. Educational institutions have increasingly come to rely on online systems of instruction and assessment. Therefore, educators emphasize the need for aiding administrative efficiency, increasing the frequency of assessment, extending the range of assessment methods ‘through computer-aided instruction’ and increasing objectivity and consistency among many pedagogical issues (Bull and McKenna, 2004, p.3). Furthermore, developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have contributed to the growing popularity of web-based assessment as an alternative method of test administration for both formative and summative assessment purposes. In general, web-based assessment refers to the online “use of computers to deliver, mark and analyze assignments or examinations” (Bull and McKenna, 2004, p.1). Other terms used to describe the application of computer technologies to the process of assessment are computer-assisted assessment, computer-aided assessment, online assessment, e-assessment, and computerized assessment (Bull and Danson, 2004; JISC, 2007; Bull and McKenna, 2004). The umbrella term associated with any form of computerized assessment is usually computer-assisted assessment (CAA). Even though authors may have some individual interpretations of the terminology, “the underlying strategies and practices for making effective use of computers for student assessment remain constant” (Bull and Danson, 2004). As mentioned above, these terms are used interchangeably in the literature; however, in the present study the term web-based assessment is used as a general concept of computer-assisted assessment.

Experts and educational technologists underline that web-based assessment plays an important role in improving the quality of student learning experiences, particularly in higher education (Bull, 1999; JISC, 2007; Bull & McKenna, 2004; Conole and Warburton, 2005; Saricoban, 2013). This thinking is motivated by the fact computer knowledge has become not only an integral part of everyday life for most people but almost requirement in higher education as well. Furthermore, web-based assessment tools are now a well-established component or module of learning management systems (LMS) (Myrick, 2010). A lot of studies have been carried out regarding the development and application of web-based instruction and assessment. However, studies focusing on what students think, feel and learn context-specific issues have remained scarce. In fact, it is necessary to investigate such factors that are likely to influence students’ intention towards usage of such an assessment mode (Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1989). In addition, most studies have been conducted either in other countries or with students enrolled in programs other than English language teaching (e.g. Akdemir and Oğuz, 2008; Bonham, Titus, Beichner and Martin, 2000; Davidson-Shiver, Adkinson and Jackson, 2008; Costa, Mullan, Kothe and Butow, 2010; Dermo, 2009; Jamil, Topping and Tariq, 2012). In Turkey, while every English language teaching (ELT) department offers a course in computers and universities are beginning to implement e-learning practices via tools such as *Blackboard* and *Moodle*, there is currently no empirical study that deals with pre-service English teachers’ perceptions of the test administration mode under discussion. Thus, the present research aimed to address this issue by investigating the pre-service English teachers’ perceptions of web-based assessment within the language teaching methods and approaches course that they took in an ELT department at a large state university. Specifically, the researcher felt motivated to examine their general perceptions regarding this type of test mode, their preferences for computer-based and paper-based tests and relationships among some factors.

## 2. Literature review

The implementation of web-based assessment by educational institutions in the past decade led to numerous studies from various parts of the world. For example, Akdemir and Oğuz (2008) examined the impact of computer-based assessment by comparing the computer- vs. paper-based test scores of Turkish undergraduate students enrolled in the departments of Primary School Teaching and Turkish Language and Literature. Their findings did not reveal any significant difference between the students’ scores, which showed that web-based testing is a convincing alternative to paper-based tests. Another study by Costa *et al.* (2010) found web-based learning and assessment tools to be an appropriate assessment method for master students in psychology.

Over the past two decades, web-based assessment has remained a significant subject of such research areas. Some practitioners continue to express their concerns regarding the drawbacks of using this form of assessment.

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