PERCEPTIONS OF ELT PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS ON ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT VIA WEB 2.0 TOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated ELT pre-service teachers' perceptions on the use of web 2.0 tools in the methodology courses for alternative assessment purposes. The study group comprised 40 sophomore ELT pre-service teachers at a Turkish state university.

The period of the study lasted for fourteen weeks during which six different blended learning tasks were administered. The data collection process included a pre-survey, a series of reflection papers and a post-survey as well as semi structured in-depth interviews. The findings of the study revealed a positive attitude of the participants toward the use of web 2.0 tools for alternative assessment purposes both before and after the tasks were implemented. Besides, it was found that the participants approached more positively after the task implementation process. Participants of the study suggested several advantages and disadvantages in relation to the integration of Web 2.0 tools to their courses as a means of alternative assessment.

However, data revealed that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. In the end, the participants expressed their suggestions and future plans related to the tasks of the study. The results of the analysis conducted for both qualitative and quantitative data were found to be in line with each other.

Keywords: Alternative assessment, Web 2.0 tools, English language teaching, pre-service teachers

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Seeing that the language teacher education programs do not meet the expectations in qualifying their graduates with the knowledge and skills in instructional technology (Kessler, 2006), a quest for a practical language teaching theory which can lead these programs to place themselves to somewhere suitable in the digital age has started (Crandall, 2000).

According to Albion (2008) teacher education programs should highlight the importance of the Web 2.0 tools. In order for the Web 2.0 technologies to satisfy the needs in educational environments, the integration of Web 2.0 tools to instruction and assessment should be carefully planned (Ching and Hsu, 2011).

Supporting the previous arguments of the researchers, Balliro (1993) also touched upon the insufficiency of the traditional assessment methods in terms of reflecting the true level of the learners. Alternative assessment, on the other hand, comprising many assessment types, came up as an opposite term to standardized assessment types (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002). Like Barootchi and Keshavarz, Bailey (1998) also laid stress on the contrast between these two assessment types and defined the traditional methods as one-shot, indirect, and unauthentic while characterizing alternative methods as continuous, longitudinal, direct, and authentic.

Considering the skills expected from the students of the digital age, Gray, et al. (2012) indicated that much more effort is needed to enable a credible and effective assessment via Web 2.0 tools.

Even though the studies (Oliver, 2007; Kumar & Vigil, 2010; Göktürk-Sağlam & Sert 2012; Cephe & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Gray, et al., 2012; Ishtaiwa, & Dukmak, 2013) administered so far to reveal the perspectives of the parties (students, administrators, teacher educators, teachers, pre-service and in-service teachers) in the educational system is highly important, exploring the perspectives of the prospective teachers via a real classroom practice with the use of Web technologies is also very valuable and limited in number within the scope of the relevant literature.

For this reason, the study in hand is conducted to address the prospective teachers' perceptions related to the tasks via Web 2.0 tools designed for alternative assessment purposes by comparing their opinions both before and after the implementation process through the following questions:

- ✓ What are ELT pre-service teachers' perceptions about the integration of Web 2.0 tools to methodology courses for alternative assessment purposes?
  - o What are the advantages of assessment via Web 2.0 tools?
  - o What are the disadvantages of assessment via Web 2.0 tools?
- ✓ What are the suggestions and future plans of the ELT pre-service teachers about the use of Web 2.0 tools in methodology courses for alternative assessment purposes?

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METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out at the department of English Language Teaching (ELT), Istanbul University, Turkey. The data was gathered from the 40 sophomore prospective teachers who were supposed to take the course 'ELT Methods I' at the fall term. Numbers were assigned to the participants from 1 to 40 (e.g., P1 for Participant 1) to keep their identities confidential.

The data was collected via four different instruments: a pre-survey, reflection papers, a post-survey, and a semi-structured in-depth interview. Before the tasks were assigned, the participants were given the pre-survey to explore their perceptions toward assessment and technology. For every task, a reflection paper was collected from the participants to find out the participants' attitudes related to each task almost immediately.

Therefore, at the end, every one of the participants submitted 6 reflection papers. After all the 6 tasks were implemented, the post survey was handed out to the participants.

By the end of the term, participants who volunteered in the study group attended the in-depth interviews.

The procedure of data collection started with the pre-survey as soon as the fall term began and was followed by the implementation of the six Web 2.0 tasks;

- ✓ **(Task 1-Responding to a reflective question via a voice recording tool Voki [http://www.voki.com],**
- ✓ **Task 2-Preparing a quiz via Testmoz [https://testmoz.com],**
- ✓ **Task 3-Drawing a mindmap via Mindomo [https://www.mindomo.com],**
- ✓ **Task 4-Planning a classroom activity via Facebook [https://www.facebook.com],**
- ✓ **Task 5-Designing a poster via Glogster [https://www.glogster.com],**
- ✓ **Task 6-Preparing a presentation and video via Prezi [https://prezi.com] & Screencast-O-Matic [https://screencast-o-matic.com/home])**

covering the 14-week period of the term. The materials intended for the task implementation process were composed of a guideline, rubric, sample task, and reflection paper. The instructions on how these materials were planned to be used were explained in class to the participants and uploaded to 'Edmodo' (https://www.edmodo.com) after the class hour.

As one of the data collection instruments, the reflection papers specifically designed for the study were submitted on Edmodo by the participants after the requirements of each task was fulfilled. When all the tasks and the reflection papers were collected from the participants via Edmodo, the participants were handed out the post-surveys.

As the last part of the data collection procedure, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants who were willing to participate.

In this study, a mixed method approach was followed since it included both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2007). The constant comparative method was adapted to analyze the qualitative data while the quantitative data was analyzed statistically with the program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0. The data obtained from the reflection papers was analyzed by running an ANOVA test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Responses to the items included in the pre-survey to reveal the background of the participants related to Web technologies indicated that nearly the whole study group (between 82.5% and 92.5%) had no experience of Web 2.0 tools within the scope of the courses they took. Majority of the participants (87.5%) did not take instructional technology courses before and very limited number of participants (10%) took part in online assessment. Therefore, it can be inferred that the participants are experienced in neither instructional technology nor online assessment.

The mean 3.103 shows that the participants' attitude toward the use of technology in education was positive. Since the participants indicated that it is motivating to make use of technology in education (n=32), it is better if much more technology is integrated to the lessons (n=38).

Almost all the participants supported the idea that there is a need of multimedia to lead the students in practicing the subjects learnt in class. Additionally, since online material sharing is enjoyable (n=32) and technology contributes to their success (n=36), participants are in favor of technology use in their classes (n=36). It is promising to see that majority of the participants (n=37) are planning to use technology to teach English since the participants will become English language teachers.

The data obtained from the open-ended questions in the last part of the pre-survey showed that, the participants mostly mentioned the advantages of making use of Web 2.0 tools in their methodology courses. Some of the related comments made by the pre-service teachers were as follows:

Students can ask and answer, comment on each other's posts so they learn better (P20, 09/25/2013).

My assignments could be seen by other students and the teacher so that I can get feedback from others and learn better (P29, 09/25/2013). They motivate us. We can do our tasks without feeling under pressure with these tools (P9, 09/25/2013). These programs make learning more permanent (P13, 09/25/2013).

At the end of the pre-survey, the students were requested to state their suggestions and further comments in relation to being assessed via online tasks with the use of Web 2.0 tools. The participants touched upon some issues like the online assessment's not being useful since not all the students have the equal skills in the use of the Internet and technological tools.

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In addition, they suggested that these online tasks should not be too frequent, also that the instructors should be aware of the students' concerns and be helpful in dealing with the problems that may emerge. These comments and suggestions of the participants showed that the participants do not feel confident about being assessed with Web 2.0 tools and they have some concerns about the problems that may emerge. The results of the post-survey indicated that when the students were asked to define their proficiency level as an Internet user, many felt they had become more proficient. While there is an increase in the intermediate (12,5%) and advanced levels (5%), the decrease in the basic level (17,2%) can be observed in the post-survey.

In the post-survey, the participants were asked to reveal their attitudes toward tasks after the tasks were implemented. The general mean of the participants' attitudes which is 3.10 demonstrates that the participants had a positive attitude towards all the tasks. With the mean of 3.475, Task 5 was found as the most effective task by the participants. With the mean of 2,775, Task 1 had the lowest mean among other tasks, that is, the students mentioned that Task 1 was the least effective task among the others although the students had a positive attitude toward it. According to the results of the open-ended questions in the last part of the post-survey, the participants mostly mentioned the advantages of the integration of web 2.0 tools to their methodology courses. Some of the related comments made by the students were as follows:

> *Students can prepare their tasks in a comfortable environment making use of various sources (images, videos, etc.) so they become aware of the subject in details (P13, 12/11/2013).*

> *I didn't feel under pressure and I liked the course thanks to the online tasks (P38, 12/11/2013).*
> *We can improve our students' language skills (P7, 12/11/2013).*
> *I can check my students' work and give feedback via Internet whenever and wherever I want (P35, 12/11/2013).*
> *It saves both the students' and my time (P27, 12/11/2013).*

In the post-survey, the last question aimed to allow students to give their suggestions and further comments in relation to being assessed via online tasks using Web 2.0 tools. One participant, who commented on technology being integrated into courses through government support, mentioned that technology changes the quality of education in a positive way.

Another participant stated that technology is a necessity of our age and people of this age enjoy technology. In addition, one of the participants mentioned that incorporating technology in their courses made learning more effective.

A participant commented that the tools were very motivating since they reveal the students' creativity; however, the reflection papers were not helpful. Another participant said that the Web 2.0 tools made their lessons more effective and interesting; therefore, s/he wanted to use these tools in his/her own courses in the future.

One of the participants commenting on both the tasks and tools explained that even if the tasks seemed time-consuming at the beginning, later on s/he was very pleased to learn how to use these tools since s/he wouldn't have tried and learned how to use them on his/her own.

Other comments on the task implementation process included the statements "taking a course in which technology was used was quite interesting," and "this methodology course with online tasks was really effective."

Participants also emphasized that as pre-service teachers, they need to learn how to make use of technology in their courses.

As for their suggestions, one of the participants stated that technology integration should start from primary schools, since the participant claimed that s/he had not assessed any technological tools until the university.

Another participant suggested that the share of the tasks in the overall course grade should be increased so that the students would focus on the tasks more rather than just studying for the exams.

In addition, one participant proposed that how to use the tools should be taught beforehand.

Moreover, a participant said that in order for learning not to be boring, technology should be used for assessment purposes. Knowing that technology develops very fast, one of the participants highlighted that technology should be integrated to their courses for them to improve themselves.

Participants' Reflection Papers

Based on the analysis of participants' reflection papers, the advantages and disadvantages of each task are indicated.

As can be seen in Table 1, the advantages stated by the participants for each task outnumbered the disadvantages.

Even so, the participants did not disregard the disadvantages of each task.

The findings of Göktürk-Sağlam and Sert's (2012) study are consistent with the present study.

In both the present study and Göktürk-Sağlam and Sert's study, the perceptions of the novice ELT teachers were investigated and the results indicated that the advantages of the use of Web 2.0 tools outweighed the disadvantages.

In accordance with the data obtained from the reflection papers and the interviews, the suggestions and future plans of the participants on the incorporation of Web 2.0 tools to the methodology courses for alternative assessment purposes are presented with a bullet point summary in the next section.

Table 1.
The advantages and disadvantages
of each task according to participant views

Advantages	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
a. Helpful for teaching career	✔	✔	✗	✔	✔	✔
b. Gives opportunity to review the subject	✔	✔	✔	✗	✔	✗
c. Understanding the subject comprehensively	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
d. Gives opportunity to express yourself	✔	✔	✗	✗	✗	✗
e. Makes learning permanent	✔	✗	✗	✗	✗	✔
f. Grabs attention	✔	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔
g. Learn by having fun	✔	✗	✗	✔	✔	✔
h. Encourages students to be active	✔	✔	✔	✗	✔	✗
i. Systematic and organized	✗	✗	✔	✗	✗	✗
j. Interactive	✗	✗	✗	✔	✔	✗
Disadvantages	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
a. Did not include clear instructions	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
b. Not comprehensive and informative	✔	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
c. Caused stress	✔	✗	✗	✗	✔	✔
d. Time consuming	✔	✔	✔	✗	✔	✔
e. Challenging	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Suggestions of the participants
- **More detailed and comprehensible instructions should be included in the guidelines.**
- **Much more time should be given to complete each task.**
- **Improvements which address the possible technical problems should be made before assigning each task.**
- **Specifically, for Task 1 the reflective question should have been more comprehensive to lead the participants cover the subject fully when they answered the question.**
- **In Task 2, in order to prepare a quiz, they first needed a better understanding of testing concepts since as sophomores they had not yet taken any courses on testing.**
- **In Task 3, more detailed instructions were needed to enable the participants to decide what should be the main and subtopics of the mind-map.**
- **Either the Task 4 should be done individually, or the students should have been given the option to choose their own group members.**
- **Task 5 should have been done individually instead of working in pairs.**
- **Task 6 should have been done in pairs or groups.**

In general, the participants suggested that in order to have adequate technological skills for assessment, technology integration into their courses should begin way before their university education, so that they would feel ready when they started studying at the university level.

Future Plans of the Participants

The participants especially found the tasks 1, 3, 5, and 6 useful for their futuRE teaching careers and planned to use them in their own future classes. These tasks are recording voice, designing a mind-map, preparing a poster, and designing a presentation respectively. In terms of the tools, the participants indicated that they plan to use Mindomo (the tool for Task 3) and Prezi (https://prezi.com - the tool for Task 6) in their teaching. Since in each task a different type of evaluation was used, the participants mentioned which types of evaluation they liked most and wanted to use in their own classes. The most frequently mentioned types of evaluation by the participants were group evaluation and self-evaluation. Participants did not prefer computer-based evaluation since they believe that the students may not have the necessary technical equipment, and the teacher could give the same feedback that the computer gives.

Overall, the results of this study support that almost all the participants had positive attitudes towards benefiting from Web 2.0 tools for the purpose of assessment. Hence, the school administrators, curriculum developers and instructors should adapt the Web technologies to their assessment systems. It is important for the students to meet the Web technologies as from the primary school. Additively, the instructors should make sure that the students know how to make use of the Web 2.0 tools before assessing the students via technology. As engaging the students and keeping their motivation level high has always been of interest to most of the teachers, what prospective teachers repetitively mentioned, throughout the present study, by saying that Web 2.0 tools made the course content more interesting, colorful, and enjoyable should be evaluated as an encouraging factor in incorporating technology to future classes.

What holds back the language teachers in considering the potential uses of technology for assessment purposes could be listed as lack of guidelines, technological equipment, training and practice? It is significant to provide the necessary training and present guidelines from various sources on alternative assessment via Web technologies within the scope of ELT pre-service teacher education or in-service training. However, without giving the teachers the opportunity to practice their knowledge of technology in real classroom environment, be observed and get feedback from the teacher educators, it is highly improbable for the teachers to improve themselves and apply their knowledge in class efficiently. Last but by no means least, the most important of all is to equip the language teachers and the classroom environment with the required technology.

Besides, to involve the students in the instruction and assessment process via technology, the teachers are supposed to know whether all the students have their laptops or any required device to be online for fulfilling the tasks assigned by the teacher.

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Otherwise, the needs analysis reports should be prepared by the teachers and contingency plans should be discussed with the school administrators at the planning phase to design the tasks and activities accordingly.

This study was carried out with a limited number of participants in one ELT department. To provide insight from a much broader perspective, it would have been better if the number of the participants were increased by including participants from the ELT departments of other universities in Turkey. Therefore, more worthwhile results could have been obtained for the researchers who are interested in the area and for the teachers who consider integrating technology to their teaching. Moreover, since the study procedure lasted a semester, it would probably have been ideal to allow the participants longer to get familiarity with Web 2.0 tools since they had no prior experience. Therefore, a longitudinal study is needed to determine the long-term results of participants' perceptions toward Web 2.0 tools and assessment via technology.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the perceptions of 40 prospective teachers at the ELT department in relation to integrating Web 2.0 tools to courses for alternative assessment purposes through pre- and post-surveys, reflection papers, and a semi-structured in-depth interview. Considering that the participants had not been assessed via Web 2.0 tools before, participants found these tasks useful as shown by increased positive responses in the pre- and post-surveys. The advantages stated by the participants in relation to employing technology in ELT classes for assessment purposes were higher in number compared to the disadvantages. Among all the suggestions the participants mentioned, one of the foremost suggestions was the earlier start to technology use for better adaptation and utilization. As the future English language teachers, laying emphasis on the encouraging and engaging effect of the tasks via Web 2.0 tools implemented in the present study, they openly expressed their plan to benefit from technology in the classes they would teach.

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