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## Classroom-Based Assessment Practices of EFL Students' Grammatical Ability at the American-Mideast Educational and Training Services (Amideast): An Insight

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### Abstract:

The aim of the current study is to provide an insight into the assessment practices used by a group of EFL teachers when teaching grammar at the pre-intermediate level (A2) in the intensive English Language program at Amideast-Yemen in Aden. The present study used both descriptive qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data was collected through semi structured interviews conducted with 11 teacher-participants as well as through the analysis of six grammar quiz papers prepared by the teachers. Furthermore, to investigate students' perception toward how they were assessed, quantitative data was obtained through a questionnaire administered to 72 EFL students. The research results revealed that teachers had a good understanding of what effective assessment practices were and they used their knowledge to track their students' grammatical ability progression. Analysis of the grammar quiz papers showed that there is some need for improvement in the design of the questions. Finally, the questionnaire administered to the students indicated a level of satisfaction among the students regarding the way their teachers assessed their grammatical ability.

**Keywords:** *grammatical ability; assessment; quizzes; EFL teachers; Aden.*

### 1. Introduction

The past sixty years have witnessed major shifts in grammar teaching. For example, earlier language teaching approaches, such as Grammar Translation Method, strongly advocated teaching the form of the language (Hien, 2021; Almaamari, et al., 2021; Freeman & Anderson, 2013; Crawford, 2012). On the other hand, Direct Method and Natural Approach discouraged explicit instructions of language structure (Amiruddin & Jannah, 2021; Toprak, 2019; Batool et al., 2017). The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), however, appearing in the 1970s, sent mixed messages regarding the place of grammar in the communicative classroom (Paul, 2022; Santos, 2020; Rambe, 2017). Some supporters of CLT advocated teaching of grammar just in passing (Gloriez, 2022; Fathurrochman, 2019), whereas others called for an explicit inclusion of techniques that focused on language structures in the communicative curriculum (Schurz, 2022; Roeder et al., 2020; Brown, 2007).

Today, there is a consensus among the majority of English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners that a focus on both form and meaning of language structures benefits learners more (Fakazlı, 2021; Larsen-Freeman, 2014; Crawford, 2012; Savage, et al., 2010; Purpura, 2004; Brown, 2007). In other words, it is generally believed that the primary aim of grammar teaching is to enhance learners' communicative competence (Sanabria, 2022; Badash et al., 2019). Such developments in language teaching theories have also reflected in the way learners' grammatical ability has been assessed over time (Katz, 2014; Sujana, 2000). For example, traditional testing was normally done by means of decontextualized, discrete points items, like sentence combination, fill-in-the-blanks, and error correction. Such test format measured test takers' knowledge of grammar but not the real life usage of grammatical structures (Sönmez, 2021; Darmawan & RW, 2017; McNamara, 2000). In recent times, however, students' grammatical knowledge is assessed through their use of grammar correctly in the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, or speaking (Communicative Language Testing, 2019; Rukminingsih, 2016; Purpura, 2014). Hence, effective classroom-assessment practices should align with the instructional goals and for this reason, it is essential that the instructors be familiar with a range of assessment practices.

However, although teachers have always assessed students, systematic study of classroom-based assessment has only recently come into the forefront (Lewkowicz & Leung, 2021). There is dearth of research that relate teachers' attitudes to assessment to their actual classroom practices (Berry, et al., 2019). The authors suggest, for

a better insight into teachers' assessment practices, more research is needed. Since in the Yemeni (Aden) educational contexts not many studies have focused on teachers' classroom-based assessment practices, there arises a need for this type of investigation.

The context chosen for this study is the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at the American-Mideast Educational and Training Services (Amideast) in Yemen (Aden). Amideast appeared to be an ideal context as its EFL program aims to develop learners' ability to communicate confidently and effectively in real-life situations. Both language fluency and accuracy are emphasized in the program. The English language courses are in line with the internationally recognized Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and cover six proficiency stages, from beginning to advanced (Amideast-Yemen Website).

The instructors teaching within the EFL program at Amideast are provided with job-embedded professional development opportunities through regular observations carried out by the academic and teacher coordinators and through encouraging the instructors to self-reflect on their teaching. In addition, in-service training, the form of workshops and group discussions are also delivered regularly on topic of immediate relevance. Further, the instructors are required to take online training courses and participate in webinars as part of their professional development plan. Recently, 10 instructors participated in the virtual TESOL 2022 convention (EL Teacher Coordinator at Amideast). The coursebook used in the EFL program is *World English* National Geographic series. The coursebooks correlates to the CEFR.

This research seeks to provide insight into the assessment of grammar in the EFL program run by Amideast-Yemen (Aden) to highlight the extent to which the assessment reflects the communicative goals of the program. The study first sheds light on how a group of 11 teachers assess their students' grammatical ability; next, it analyzes six grammar quiz papers prepared by teachers who teach in this language program; finally, the study highlights students' perception of the way their grammatical ability is assessed in the language program.

**The research questions underpinning this study are:**

**Teachers:**

- How do teachers assess their students' grammatical ability?
- How do they approach the preparation of their quizzes?
- What feedback do they provide their students with?
- Do the teachers have any concerns regarding the way they assess their students' grammatical ability?

**Teacher Prepared Quizzes:**

- To what extent do the teacher prepared grammar quizzes actually test students' communicative ability?

**Students:**

- What are students' perceptions of the way their grammatical ability is assessed?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Classroom-Based Assessment

Classroom-based assessment involves methods and instruments used by teachers to collect information to make decision about their students' learning (Katz, 2014). Assessment conducted by teachers has only recently begun to come into focus in the language testing literature. The shift has come as a result of the dissatisfaction with standardized testing in providing accurate and useful information about learners' progress and achievement (Cheng, 2013; Brindley, 2007; Dickins, 2004). Due to the newness of the field of classroom-based assessment, there is evidence that novice and experienced teachers' assessment practices seem to be inadequate in comparison to their other professional areas of practice such as lesson planning and classroom management (Gareis & Grant, 2015). Research conducted by Alsamaani (2014) involving 50 novice Saudi EFL male middle school teachers who teach in twelve middle public schools in Qassim region confirms the existing gap between teachers teaching and their classroom assessment practices. Alsamaani found in-service teachers to be inadequately prepared in the area of testing and assessment; the teachers could not use information collected from tests to inform their decision making.

Similarly, Firoozi, et al. (2019) reveal a mismatch between the new assessment policies in Iran and the teachers' assessment practices. Although the Iranian reformed curriculum focused on listening and speaking, the teachers' assessment practices did not seem to change from the previous Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The authors called for teacher training in both knowledge and teaching skills to improve teachers' assessment as well as suggested there be clear assessment guidelines. Gareis and Grant (2015) state that "improving teachers' classroom-based assessment practices could have an impact on student learning equivalent to a year of "instruction" and explain that there is lack of clarity about the nature of these assessment practice and an absence of good teacher preparation to engage them in assessment practices. It is to be noted that designing a good test involves fundamental qualities to be taken into consideration such as test validity, reliability, practicality and authenticity (Genesee & Aupshur, 1996). Otherwise, Giraldo (2019) rightly points out in his article that if crucial qualities and technicalities of test design are not met, then a poorly designed language assessment may have detrimental effects on the test takers. In other words, poor tests can have harmful washback on the test takers. When there is a positive impact, washback is said to be positive; when the impact leads to negative results, washback is said to be negative. However, washback's effects, according to Alqahtani (2021), are an under

researched area and need further investigation because studies show that the impact of a test is based on its purpose, nature, and other complex features.

## 2.2. Communicative Language Testing

Teaching and testing are so closely related that the development of different theories and approaches in language learning and teaching has also, undoubtedly, affected the history of language testing. Experts in the field of language teaching have emphasized that for beneficial washback, classroom assessment should reflect classroom teaching. So, language programs designed on a communicative approach curriculum have to adopt a communicative approach to language testing. Miyata and Langham (2000) define communicative language testing as a means that provides the evaluator with information about the test taker's performance in areas pertinent to the target language. In other words, it serves as a measurement of learners' ability to participate in communication which includes reading and listening (Hughes, 2003). Rafajlovičová (2009) points out that there has been improvement in how language is being tested in the past three decades. This shift to communicative competence has also impacted language testing. Phan (2008) contends that communicative testing poses a challenge for test makers and the one possible issue is related to predictive validity. It is difficult for test designers to foresee the test takers communicative needs. However, Phan also mentions that the implementation of communicative tests is possible and promises results in EFL contexts such as Vietnam. Phan, nevertheless, appears to be hopeful about the implementation of communicative tests in the Vietnam context as the authors say in most college level, in Vietnam, English is taught using the communicate approach. Communicative tests, according to Palmer (2012), can be a good addition to teachers teaching skills and a way toward improving students' communicative skills; however, its challenges need to be addressed first.

## 2.3. Grammar Teaching and Assessment/Testing

For efficient communication to take place, grammar is an important skill for learners to develop. Incorrect grammar can lead to miscommunication in other areas of language such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Savage et al., 2010). Larsen-Freeman (2014) proposes a model for grammar teaching that takes the form of a pie chart and shows an interconnected three-dimensional framework consisting of: 1. Structure or form 2. Semantics or meaning, 3. Use of the pragmatic conditions governing appropriate usage (refers to the use of language in context). Larsen-Freeman also suggests that to become competent users of the language, learners need to be introduced to grammar in "meaningful and psychologically authentic ways," for drilling of forms on their own does not provide students with opportunities to communicate in real life situations as they "cannot activate the forms that are appropriate for the context" (p. 257).

Similarly, Brown (2004) states that appropriate grammar-focusing techniques speed up learning process if they:

- are embedded in meaningful communicative contexts
- contribute positively to communicative goals
- promote accuracy within fluent communicative language
- do not overwhelm students with linguistic terminology
- are as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible (p. 421)

The findings of the research conducted by Bancolé-Minaflinou (2018) in Benin showed that not many teachers use the communicative approach to grammar teaching, and teachers who claimed doing so had a somewhat unclear idea of communicative grammar. The researcher suggested the inclusion of real-life tasks that engage students. In the EFL context, grammar plays an essential role in language teaching. The traditional approach to grammar teaching has focused on teaching students about grammar. For instance, research carried out by Abduh and Algouzi (2020) in Saudi EFL contexts to investigate teachers practices of teaching grammar revealed that although teachers believed in the effectiveness of communicative activities and considered that practicing grammar in a meaningful context is useful, their classes tended to be teacher centered and did not have communicative activities. There appeared a clear gap between teachers' beliefs and practices. Mendelsohn (1989) had observed that although the teaching of second language methodology has witnessed numerous changes and has been updated in many programs, language testing has not kept up with the changes: "In many places the teaching is now communicative, but the testing is not," (p. 97).

Some research done in different EFL contexts indicates a mismatch between the communicative approach and testing. For instance, research conducted in Oman during the second semester of grade 10 where final tests from 2011 to 2016 were analyzed using a framework and a checklist indicated that the communicative competence was not fully addressed in the English final tests (Al Mamari et al., 2018). A similar conclusion was reached in a research study conducted by Nguyen and Le (2013) in Vietnam where five tests of each type were collected from five schools in different districts of four provinces in Mekong Delta in Vietnam and the results showed that they could test students' language focus but failed to measure their real communicative competence. Pham's (2021) research conducted in four tertiary institutions in Vietnam on grammar assessment showed that only the learning of grammatical forms and semantic meanings is assessed, and in terms of task types selected response and discrete-items were mainly used to assess learners. Pham suggested that as one of the goals of instruction is to develop learners' communicative competence, learners' grammatical forms, semantic meaning, and pragmatic meaning should be assessed and various tasks should be used to assess students' grammatical

ability. Saenghoon's (2017) research conducted in a Thai context compared the participants scores in grammar in two tests: one test focused on grammar production and the other one consisted of recognition items. It was noted that the score on the objective test was higher than that of the grammar production test. The author mentions that "As could be expected, the grammar production test turned out to be somewhat difficult for the participants. In some of the items, none could get the right answers," (p. 25).

Studies that have analyzed question types have found that students found open questions to be more difficult in comparison to multiple-choice questions (Polat, 2020; Karadag, et al., 2020). Polat explains that factors such as guessing made multiple choices easier whereas the open questions required more complex cognitive skills. Setting good questions on the quizzes is an important skill that instructors need for their students' responses to the questions that give insight into their learning. Hamad's (2019) research on designing test questions revealed a weakness in the questions designed by the instructors involved in the research. This weakness emerged from the instructors' lack of knowledge of question making criteria and Bloom's Taxonomy, which according to the researcher is necessary in informing the test designer of the learning area or domain to be tested. Other areas that the instructors need knowledge about are types of questions, their advantages and drawbacks, validity, reliability and their connection with learning outcomes of the course, table of specifications, and test questions level of difficulty.

As mentioned above, effective assessment should reflect classroom teaching; a mismatch between teaching and assessing as well as poorly constructed questions mean students will lose a lot in terms of effective learning. Therefore, in contexts that adopt a communicative approach to grammar teaching then assessment and testing of course should be likewise--communicative. According to Rea-Dickins (2003, cited in Rafajlovičová, 2009), there are five characteristics to measure communicative grammar:

- there is more context to the test, and that it is not limited to a single sentence.
- the test taker is aware of the communication purpose of the task.
- the test taker is clear about the audience to whom the communication is addressed.
- the test taker focuses on meaning and not just form when answering.
- the test is not limited to recognition of grammatical forms, but rather enables the test taker to produce responses.

Finally, to boost students' learning, it is imperative to provide them with timely constructive feedback. However, in an overview on corrective feedback, Chen (2020) states that research that investigates teachers' beliefs about corrective feedback in grammar teaching is lacking. The author emphasizes the need for more studies that focus on highlighting the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of corrective feedback and the factors that influence those beliefs in grammar teaching. Zhang's (2020) review on grammar corrective feedback proves that learners benefit from effective grammar correction and teachers should use proper strategies to correct students. Like Chen, Zhang also believes more research is needed to detect the extent to which different subjective corrective feedback methods will influence students' learning outcomes.

### 3. Method

This research uses qualitative descriptive and quantitative method in its design. The study was conducted at Amideast-Yemen, in Aden. The participants of this study are 11 Amideast teachers (Appendix A) and 72 students enrolled in level A2 on the CEFR scale (equivalent to a pre-intermediate) during the session 2204. The A2 (pre-intermediate) level was chosen because it was necessary to start from the beginning and find out what the assessment situation is at this level. The participants were selected as a "sample of convenience" which is defined as those participants who the researcher can have easy access to (McKay, 2006). The researcher works as a part time instructor at Amideast and so this made it easy to reach out to the participants. It is to be noted that the total number of English language instructors at Amideast is 20. However, the 11 participants involved in this study are those who were available for the interview as well as had taught at the pre-intermediate level. Data were collected through three sources. First, semi-structured interviews were used. Interviews seemed an appropriate procedure for garnering answers to the questions posed in this research as they "allow researchers to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable, such as learners' self-reported perceptions or attitudes," (MacKey & Gass, 2005, p. 173). A pre-determined set of questions was finalized and follow up questions were also asked during the interviews (Appendix A). The interviews were first transcribed and then analyzed by means of coding that is identifying, categorizing, and labelling patterns and themes pertinent to the first four research questions related to the teachers' views. Each interview lasted between 8 to 10 minutes.

Second, six quiz papers were collected from the teachers teaching A2 level and analyzed by identifying the types of questions used in the quiz. In analyzing the data, the researcher examined whether the questions on the quiz assessed students' ability to recognize grammatical structures or produce the structures (Appendix C). In other words, were the quiz questions mostly communicative in nature or not?

Third, to highlight students' perception of how their grammatical ability is assessed in the EFL program, a written questionnaire was designed using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of a total 15 closed-ended items that were written both in English and Arabic. The questionnaire link was sent to the students by their class teachers. 72 students enrolled in the A2 level responded to the questionnaire. To ensure credibility, the



questionnaire was piloted to six students (not part of this study). Discrepancies and ambiguities in the questionnaire were fixed before sending it out to the participants. Results obtained from the questionnaire are presented in table formats.

#### 4. Results

##### Interviews:

##### *Type of Assessment:*

The following responses from teachers indicate their awareness that grammar assessment is not about assessing students' knowledge of grammar, but rather it is the use of grammatical structures in various real-life situations.

Teacher AM, for example, stated, *"I give them [students] some tasks where they can use the target language in speaking or writing. For example, if I want to test students' use of the present continuous tense, I ask them to write sentences about what they are writing right now"*

Another teacher, NA, said, *"I assess students' grammar through writing, situations, conversations, group, personalization of the grammar point being taught."*

Although the instructors did not use terms such as communicative testing, it can be claimed that their assessment approach was within a communicative framework.

##### *Question Types on Quizzes:*

The types of questions included in the quizzes range from the objective to subjective questions as can be seen in the following responses.

Teacher FA indicated that *"when preparing the questions, I make sure to include both controlled and open questions."*

Another teacher, RA, said, *"I used to put objective questions. But the teacher coordination in the program pointed out to me that I need to put subjective questions as well. So, now, when I put subjective questions, I can see their progress."*

Teacher NA, reflecting on the types of questions she includes in her quizzes, said, *"Students are good in objectives questions. I give them subjective questions and here I get to assess them better."*

It can be said that by including objective and subjective questions in their quizzes the teachers made a deliberate effort to assess both their students' grammatical knowledge and competency. The support provided by the EFL administration (teacher RA) as well as the assessment trainings they had had (Appendix A) seem to play an important role in shaping their understanding of what constitutes a communicative test.

##### *Feedback:*

Teachers made sure to follow up the activities and quizzes with explicit feedback on their students' errors and help them work on their accuracy. The following are some quotes from the teachers in this regard.

Teacher RA said, *"If I notice mistakes, I write them on the board and ask students to self-correct."*

Similarly, teacher NF mentioned, *"I ask myself how I can help them to get over these mistakes. I rely a lot on the oral part before they do the writing, so when I notice any mistakes, I follow up by giving them more activities and exercises."*

Teacher NI had a different approach; she said that *"before returning her students' quiz papers, I put students in groups, gives them a copy of the quiz paper and ask them to try to answer the quiz again as a group, and then I go through the answers."*

The instructors' assessment of their students' ability does not end with the activities or quizzes that they provide them but is followed with feedback. Teachers' feedback can help students notice their grammatical mistakes and then consciously work on improving them. Although different teachers used different feedback techniques, the aim was the same, that is raising students' awareness of their grammatical errors.

##### *Concerns:*

A major concern that the teachers expressed was that students did much better when it came to objective questions, but when they had to produce the language in a conversation or writing, they did not do so well.

Teacher NS said, *"Students are good with the objective questions, but forming situations and using the grammar point is challenging for them."*

AM pointed out, *"Students find difficulty applying the grammar rules."*

The concerns expressed by the teachers reiterate what they had mentioned earlier when talking about students' difficulties in using grammatical structures spontaneously in freer activities. Students, as the teachers observed, may be good at recognizing different structures or even explaining grammatical rules and their usage; however, the application of the structures in oral and written tasks seemed to be a challenge for students and a matter of concern for teachers.

### Teacher Prepared Quizzes:

Results (Appendix C) from the six-quiz paper analysis show the types of questions that appeared in the quizzes ranged from those that were discrete-item questions to open-ended questions. Quizzes 1 and 4 had more open-ended questions, whereas quizzes 3 and 6 had more closed questions, and Quizzes 2 and 5 had a balance of closed and open questions. Grammatical accuracy is important and including some questions that draw students' attention to the linguistic forms may be useful; nevertheless, the aim of language learning is developing students' communicative competence, and so there is a need to have more open-ended subjective questions so that students can produce original ideas. The students' ability to use the grammatical structures can be assessed through their responses. It seemed that some teachers still needed to enhance their quiz preparation skills.

### Students' Questionnaire:

The following section presents results obtained from the questionnaire administered to students to find out their perception toward how their grammatical ability was assessed.

**Table (1): The Quiz Content**

	Yes	Somewhat	No
1. The grammar exercises and activities in class prepare me well for the grammar quiz.	57 (79.2%)	12 (16.7%)	3 (4.2%)
2. The grammar quiz assesses what was taught in class.	55 (76.4%)	13 (18.1%)	4 (5.6%)
3. I can answer most of the grammar quiz questions easily.	38 (52.8%)	30 (41.7%)	4 (5.6%)

The majority 57(79.2%) of the students expressed that they felt prepared for the grammar quizzes administered in the class. Similarly, 55(76.4%) indicated they were assessed on what they were taught. Regarding their ability to answer the grammar quiz questions, the response seemed almost equal between Yes and Somewhat. Apparently, the effort that the teachers put in their classroom assessment practices is reflected in the students' responses, where the majority could clearly see the link between their classroom instruction and the way they were assessed. Such a realization can be motivating for students as they can compare their achievement (or not) on the quizzes against the instructional goals and work toward improvement.

**Table (2): Washback**

	Yes	Somewhat	No
4. The grammar quiz makes me study more.	59 (81.9%)	10 (13.9%)	3 (4.2%)
5. Having grammar quizzes is useful.	64 (88.9%)	8 (11.1%)	
6. The grammar quizzes we do in class helps me improve my English language.	63 (87.5%)	8 (11.1%)	1 (1.4%)
7. I learn from the mistakes I make in my grammar quizzes and try to improve them	56 (77.8%)	11 (15.3%)	5 (6.9%)

Table 2 indicates that the majority of the students perceived a positive washback of the quizzes on their learning. As the teachers mentioned, the tests that they designed included both closed and open questions where the latter question types allowed students to produce new language and original ideas. In light of this, it can be claimed that the quizzes had a beneficial effect on the students by promoting and enhancing their communicative competence.

**Table (3): Number of Quizzes**

	Three	More than three	Fewer than three
8. I would like to have ____ grammar quizzes during the session.	42 (58.3%)	24 (33.3%)	6 (8.3%)

In fact, when asked whether students would like to have more, three, or fewer quizzes, most 42(58.3%) of the students chose three quizzes, followed by those 24(33.3%) who stated more, and only a small number 6(8.3%) said fewer as shown in the table above. The students' response seemed to be surprising as generally students shy away from tests; however, it can be inferred that the positive effect of the quizzes on their learning may be the reason behind their wanting to have three or more quizzes.

**Table (4):** Familiarity with Quiz Questions

		Yes	Somewhat	No
9.	The teacher tells us about the kind of questions we will have in the quiz.	4 (5.6%)	15 (20.8%)	53 (73.6%)

To statement 4, the majority 53(73.6%) of the students responded that they were not told by their teachers about the types of questions they will have on the quizzes. To maximize students' success on a quiz, students need to be familiar with the types of questions that appear on a quiz in advance. Not only that, but, whatever questions are used, students should have received enough practice with those types of questions. So, for instance, if teachers will include in context or open questions, then students should be exposed to those questions during the lessons. This point is supported by Swain's (1984, cited in Phan, 2008) third principle of communicative test design; according to Swain, an assessment procedure that is created based on the biased for best principle provides students with opportunities to do well and be better prepared for the test.

**Table (5):** Test Taking Environment

		Yes	Somewhat	No
10.	The classroom environment is appropriate for taking the quiz.	67 (93.1%)	3 (4.2%)	2 (2.8%)

The majority of the students 67(93.1%) stated that the atmosphere in which they took the test was appropriate. Taking a test is critical; therefore, having a good testing environment helps students perform better; otherwise, distractions and a poor environment can interfere with students' performance.

**Table (6):** Types of Questions

11. Type of questions that the students considered useful

	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful
Matching	43 (59.7%)	21(29.2%)	8(11.1%)
Multiple choice	50(69.4%)	21(29.2%)	1(1.4%)
Correct the mistakes	53(73.6%)	16(22.2%)	3(4.2%)
Fill in the blanks (sentence level)	37(51.4%)	28(38.9%)	7(8.7%)
Fill in the blanks (paragraphs)	36(50%)	23(31.9%)	13(18.1%)
Complete the sentences	35(48.6%)	27(37.5%)	10(13.9%)
Open Questions	43(59.7%)	21(29.6%)	8(11.1%)

Table 6 shows that students found all the different types of questions on the quizzes useful. The majority favored error correct questions 53(73.6%), followed by multiple choice questions 50(69.4%), matching and open questions 43(59.7%). Closed-ended questions may be favored by students because they can guess the answers even when they do not know the answers; on the other hand, students who found open questions useful may be because they can still score some points for attempting to express themselves. In other words, in closed questions, they risk losing all the points allotted for that question if they make the wrong choice; for the open questions, students can still earn some points for trying.

**Table (7):** Feedback

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	never
12. My teacher gives me clear feedback on the mistakes I make on my grammar quizzes.	37 (51.4%)	15 (20.8%)	13 (18.1%)	4 (5.6%)	3 (4.2%)
13. My teacher gives me feedback on my grammatical mistakes when I speak.	42 (58.3%)	12 (16.7%)	11 (15.3%)	4 (5.6%)	3 (4.2%)
14. My teacher gives me feedback on my grammatical mistakes when I write.	51 (70.8%)	12 (16.7%)	8 (11.1%)		1 (1.4%)

The majority of the students indicated that they always or often received feedback from their teachers on their grammatical mistakes. Returning students' quiz with a score is not sufficient students need feedback to improve. Rick Wormeli, a teacher, consultant, and writer (n.d, cited in Scoyoc, 2022), states that "Students can learn without grades, but they can't learn without timely, descriptive feedback". Students' responses to the feedback statements ranged; given the importance of feedback for students' learning and growth, this may be another area, besides quiz preparation, that teachers may need to pay more attention to.



**Table (8): Satisfaction**

	Yes	Somewhat	No
15. I am satisfied with the way my grammatical ability is assessed in the level I am in.	50 (69.4%)	19 (26.4%)	3 (4.2%)

Finally, most 50(69.4%) of the students indicated that they are satisfied with the way their grammatical ability is assessed. 19(26.4%) said they were somewhat satisfied whereas only 3(4.2%) said that they were not satisfied. Apparently, the attention that the EFL program at Amideast gave to assessment practices and the teachers' awareness of effective assessment practices played a significant role in obtaining a positive response from the students.

## 5. Discussion

Based on the findings in the previous sections, the six research questions formulated for this study will be discussed in turn.

### ***Research Question 1: how do teachers assess their students' grammatical ability?***

Results showed that all the 11 teachers, in this study, assess their students' grammatical ability indirectly through oral activities, such as conversations role plays, games, presentations, and written tasks. Through such indirect assessment, teachers encourage learners' communicative competence; use of correct grammar forms is then inferred from the language that the students produce (Purpura, 2014). The professional support that the instructors received at their workplace and the assessment course or workshop they had taken (Appendix A) seemed to strengthen their assessment literacy.

### ***Research Question 2: how do teachers approach the preparation of their quizzes?***

It was found that the teachers assessed students' grammatical ability directly by giving them three grammar quizzes during the session. Testing students' grammatical ability separately can be justified for students appear to be highly motivated in exams as they have a clear goal to achieve (Harmer, 2012); in fact, well-prepared tests can drive students to pay more attention to form, meaning, and use (Larsen-Freeman, 2014; Crawford, 2012; Savage et al, 2010; Purpura, 2004; Brown, 2007) and thereby have a positive washback on the test takers. The teachers also mentioned including both objective and subjective questions in their quizzes. As it is generally agreed upon that the purpose of learning a language is to communicate effectively, the subjective questions appeared to align more with CLT (Communicative Language Testing, 2019; Rukminingsih, 2016; Purpura, 2014) for such questions allowed students to use particular grammar structures.

### ***Research Question 3: what feedback do teachers provide their students with?***

Providing students with corrective feedback is another significant dimension for learning; feedback is necessary for students so that they can distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate language use (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Feedback helps students learn from their mistakes and prevents fossilization of errors. However, one major disadvantage associated with the CLT approach is that when students make mistakes, the teacher should not interrupt to correct them in between activities (Fathurrochman, 2019). However, Larsen-Freeman (2014) suggested different ways that the teacher can use to provide students corrective feedback states, "Which option is exercised will depend on the teacher's styles, the teacher's view of the capacity of the student, the nature of the error, and in which part of the lesson the error has been committed" (p. 267). The important point is that students should be given corrective feedback to improve their language accuracy.

### ***Research Question 4: What concerns do the teachers have regarding their assessment practices?***

Teachers' main concern was that students did much better on objective questions than on questions that required them to produce the language in a conversation or writing. This observation aligns with what EL experts have indicated in that there exists a gap between students' grammatical knowledge and the actual usage of that knowledge in real life contexts. Studies that have analyzed question types have found that students found open questions to be more difficult in comparison to multiple-choice questions (Saenghoon 2017; Polat, 2020; Karadag et al., 2020). Ur (2012) explains that despite grammar instructions, students still make mistakes in communicative situations; thus, to enhance students' accuracy and communicative skill, form-focused practice exercises, such as gap fills, and matching should be followed by communicative activities that promote production of the target language. Therefore, there needs to be more focus on communicative activities in class and perhaps for homework.

### ***Research Question 5: to what extent do the teachers prepared grammar quizzes that actually test students' communicative ability?***

Discrete-items questions (Appendix B) are limited and only test students' recognition of grammatical items and not their production. In fact, multiple-choice items leave room for guessing and this does not serve as an

indication of students' understanding. Genesee and Aupshur (1998) explain that students' successful performance on closed-ended tasks cannot be taken as an indication of their ability to produce that target language in open-ended tasks (speaking and writing). Therefore, such questions need to be improved so that they test not only the students' understanding of grammatical forms but also meaning (Pham, 2021). Perhaps, one advantage of closed-ended discrete items is that they are easy to make and score. On the other hand, the in-context questions with choices (Appendix D) appear as a text rather than random isolated sentences, but it still gives students a 50:50 chance to guess the answer and so provided little insight into students' grammatical ability. Questions that require students to write sentences or respond to questions (Appendix D) appear to be more in congruence with the communicative language testing. Teachers can infer from the answers that the students have both grammatical knowledge as well as ability to use that knowledge to construct sentences. In favor of such open questions, Ur (2012) states that making their own phrases, sentences, or longer passages will give teachers a more valid picture of students' grammatical ability. In fact, the drawback of such tasks is that they tend to be time consuming and not so easy to assess. Nevertheless, the benefits of such tasks need to be taken into consideration as they provide a more valid information about students' grammatical knowledge, and not to undermine them for the sake of practicality and reliability in correcting. To sum up, the language quizzes prepared by the teachers demonstrate a balance of questions that focus on form and those that focused on form and meaning; nevertheless, for a more positive washback, it is recommended that the quizzes include more integrative questions, and assessment of grammatical structures can be done through the language produced.

### **Research Question 6: What are students' perceptions of the way their grammatical ability is assessed?**

Overall, the students involved in this study expressed satisfaction with the way they were assessed. The students could notice that they were tested on what they were taught and this in turn had a positive washback on their learning. The multiple number of quizzes conducted gave students different opportunities to reflect on their learning; hence, they appeared to be content with the number of quizzes they had during the session. The environment in which the students took their test seemed to be appropriate. Apparently, the assessment practices utilized by Amideast teachers seemed to be serving the students' learning: when students are able to notice their progress, they can determine how well they understood the material and set appropriate goals for themselves. Outcomes from effective assessment practices helps students keep track of their progress and, in this situation, the response obtained from the students reinforced most of the comments made by Amideast teachers. Perhaps, the two areas that need further attention is providing students with feedback and the types of questions that should appear on the quizzes. From the instructors' point of view, they provided students with feedback; however, the students gave a range of response toward how they were provided feedback. Therefore, there's a need to make feedback sessions more systematic. Secondly, the students' response to the usefulness of the types of questions ranged. Nevertheless, since the aim of language learning and teaching is to communicate effectively, it is advisable to design quizzes that assesses students' communicative ability as well as their accuracy, and not one or the other.

## **6. Conclusions**

Many educational institutions focus on developing instructors' teaching skills but pay little or no attention to improving their assessment practices. To sum up, this study revealed that the teachers at Amideast had adequate knowledge and understanding of effective classroom-based assessment practices. Teacher professional development opportunities at Amideast seem to play an important role in enhancing the instructors' assessment literacy. Hence, it was not a surprise that students seemed to be satisfied with the way their grammatical ability was assessed. Nevertheless, when it came to preparing quizzes, there still appeared to be a need for the teachers to refine their skills there so that the quizzes become a more valid reflection of the communicative approach to grammar teaching and learning. A significant implication of this study lies in realizing that teaching and assessment go hand-in-hand, and therefore, given the small sample of teacher participants in this study, further research, with a larger sample, is needed to explore classroom-based assessment practices in different EFL programs in Aden and in different contexts such as schools and colleges.

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### Appendix A Teacher Participants Information

Teacher Participants' Acronyms	Years of Teaching English	Educational Background	Formal Training in EL Assessment	Type of Assessment Training
AM	12 years	BA	Yes	Attended an online session on assessment at Amideast as well as attended a session with the British Council; read materials on assessment.
NA AN RA	33 years	MA BA BA	Yes	An online course with the University of Oregon.
NS	33 years	BA	Yes	Attended numerous workshops including those that focused on assessment conducted at Amideast; took TESOL online course which had an assessment component.
FA	4 years	BA	No	Self-learns through watching YouTube videos from the British council channel; discusses with other Amideast teachers.
FR	5 years	BA	Yes	Attended a workshop; read materials on assessment
MO	4 years	BA	Yes	Attends a couple workshops; read materials on assessment; enjoys discussing about effective assessment practices at Amideast.
ND	30 years	PhD	Yes	Attended many workshops, including those that focus on assessment.
HU	15 years	BA	No	read materials on assessment
NI	26 years	MA	Yes	Took an online course with the University of Oregon

### Appendix B Interview Questions

1. How do you assess your students' grammatical ability?
2. How do you follow up your assessment?
3. What kind of feedback do you provide your students?
4. What is your approach when designing your quizzes?
5. What are your concerns regarding assessment?

### Appendix C Question Types

Test Papers						
Question Types	1	2	3	4	5	6
Discrete-item multiple choice			✓	✓		
In context multiple choice		✓				✓
Discrete-item fill-ins						
In context fill-in	✓		✓		✓	✓✓
Unscrambling Sentences						
Transformation						
Discrete Error correction		✓			✓	
Sentence combining			✓			
Writing sentences/questions	✓	✓✓		✓✓✓		
Sentence completion	✓				✓	✓
Short answer questions			✓		✓	
Other	✓					



### Appendix D Discrete-item questions

#### (A): Multiple choice

**Choose The correct answer:**

1. Peter is \_\_\_\_\_ to become a police officer. He's only 1.65 cm tall.  
A) too short      B) short enough      C) not short enough
2. I'd like to buy a new car and a good house, but I'm just not \_\_\_\_\_ to do it.  
A) rich too      B) rich enough      C) enough rich
3. My school is \_\_\_\_\_ from my house to go on foot. So, I cycle to school every morning.  
A) far enough      B) enough far      C) too far
4. Kelly is \_\_\_\_\_ to drive a car. She's only 14.  
A) enough young      B) too young      C) not young enough
5. That skirt you are wearing is \_\_\_\_\_ for you. You need a bigger size.  
A) too tight      B) enough tight      C) tight enough

#### (B): Error Correction

For example,

**Underline the mistake and correct it.**

1. You must to do your homework..
2. Shadi is the most tallest boy in his family.
3. Our restaurant is the goodest in the city.
4. Tina is prittier than her sister..
5. Akram is smartest in the class.
6. Fuad hasn't to arrive early

#### (C) Sentence Combining

For example,

Question 4: Use past perfect and simple past forms of the verbs "after/ before " to combine the sentences:

1. First: I write the test. Second: I feel tired. (After) :
2. First: I go home Second.: My brother arrives. ( Before) :
3. First: The children eat the cake. Second: I make coffee. ( after/ after):

### Appendix E Integrative-item questions

#### (D) In-context questions

Dear Helen,

Thanks **(a lot/much)**<sup>1</sup> for your letter. I'm glad you had a good time in summer. I enjoyed myself in summer too. I spent it with my parents in Italy. In August my family moved to a new flat so I have **(alittle/a few)**<sup>2</sup> things to tell you about my new school. It is a very big school. There are **(a lot of/a little)**<sup>3</sup> students in my class and I have **(very little/ a lot of)**<sup>4</sup> friends. This year we study **(some / few)**<sup>5</sup> new subjects. They are interesting, though quite difficult. I haven't got very **(much/little)**<sup>6</sup> free time because I have **(a lot of/ few)**<sup>7</sup> hobbies. Please write to me soon and tell me **(a little/little)**<sup>8</sup> about your school

Best wishes,  
Ann.

#### Open ended questions

#### (E) Writing Sentences/Questions

**Compare between those places and things. Use comparatives.**

1. Aden – Sana
2. London – New York
3. Yemen – America
4. car – plane
5. shopping online – shopping in stores
6. Samsung phones – I phones

#### (F) Sentence Completion

**Complete the following with sentences about yourself:**

- 1- Last week, \_\_\_\_\_
- 2- In 2017, \_\_\_\_\_
- 3- Two days ago, \_\_\_\_\_

Students who successfully complete these sentences indicate their ability to correctly use the simple past tense.

#### (G) Short Answer response

**Answer the questions below about yourself using well-structured sentences:**

1. What was your best memory?
2. What had happened before you came to the institute?