

Towards Quality Assessment in an EFL Programme

Holi Ibrahim Holi Ali¹ & Ahmed Ali Saleh Al Ajmi²

¹ School of Education & Professional Development, University of Huddersfield, UK

² Department of English Language & Literature, Rustaq College of Applied Sciences, Oman

Correspondence: Holi Ibrahim Holi Ali, Rustaq College of Applied Sciences, Rustaq, PO Box: 10, PC 329, Oman. Tel: 968-2687-5244. E-mail: howlli2@yahoo.com

Received: July 14, 2013 Accepted: August 5, 2013 Online Published: September 4, 2013

doi:10.5539/elt.v6n10p132 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n10p132>

Abstract

Assessment is central in education and the teaching-learning process. This study attempts to explore the perspectives and views about quality assessment among teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and to find ways of promoting quality assessment. Quantitative methodology was used to collect data. To answer the study questions, a questionnaire was distributed to 37 EFL teachers at a public college in Oman. The findings show that the majority of teachers are not satisfied with the current assessment practices and they believe that much effort is needed to promote quality assessment. Furthermore, the vast majority of teachers assume that using alternative assessment tools such as moderation, building an item bank, having tight exam policies and procedures, providing clear exam instructions, training teachers on quality assessment, and aligning assessment with teaching would help in fostering quality assessment. Based on teachers' views and findings from the literature, the study proposes a multidimensional model for quality assessment which may help in achieving and promoting quality assessment.

Keywords: quality assessment, EFL context, multidimensional model, moderation, item banking

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Testing and assessment are indispensable and important part of education. Lombardi (2008) claims that assessment is a vital element of any successful educational work and that "the type of assessment student know will becoming determines when they tune in to [a class] and when they tune out" (p.2). Test is usually used by policy makers as tools to manipulate the educational system, to control curricula and to impose the introduction of new teaching materials and methods (Farhady, 1999). However, language assessment experts admit that there are many factors that could affect performance on language tasks and test quality, including the characteristics of both the testee and the task. Scoring procedures on the assessment also can affect the reliability and validity of the scores awarded (Stoynoff, 2012, p. 525). In addition, research shows that the construct of language ability is too complex thing to be measured and defined (Farhady, 2005). Therefore, learning should be a part of effective teaching and planning learning. The aim of the assessment is usually constructive and it should aim to help students rather than to sentence them (Gipps & Murphy, 1994, p. 261 cited in Buhagiar, 2007, p. 42). Assessment should be done in a way that provides opportunities for both learners and teachers to obtain the information that will help them progress (Leung, 2007, p. 266). However, "questions about the quality of teacher-constructed assessments continue to be debated" (Stoynoff, 2012, p. 525). Some argue that we can improve quality of classroom assessments by applying psychometric principles and test quality considerations used with large-scale, standardized assessments and aligning assessment procedures with curricula and teaching pedagogy. Therefore, Rustaq College of Applied Sciences strives to ensure quality assessment in all of its programmes. Two of the main programmes at this College are run by the Department of English Language and Literature (DELL): are the ELT programme and the National Foundation Programme. This study was encouraged by the need of the College to promote quality assessment in the DELL, because teachers have a professional responsibility to ensure that a student performance is assessed on appropriate tasks and procedures (Buchan, 1993, p. 173). The study tries to solve some problems conceived as practical experience in the field of teaching English as Foreign Language (EFL): inconsistency between teaching and assessment, gaps between current assessment practices and the Oman Accreditation Authority (OAAA) assessment standards, challenges in achieving quality assessment, gaps

between quality assessment and current assessment practices, and students' complaints about assessment strategies. The Study aims to support the requirements of Rustaq College of Applied Sciences in order to pass its potential quality audit in November 2013. "Assessment that involves teachers in making subjective decisions of quality of a response is usually considered to have a low reliability" (Adie, 2012, p.224). Teachers seem to have different views and knowledge about quality assessment and how quality assessment can be fostered or achieved within the College. Stoyhoff (2012) claims that teachers' assessment knowledge, abilities, and beliefs affect their assessment practices and this paper attempts to explore their beliefs about quality assessment which might have implications for their current and future practices. Moreover, there is a paucity of data about quality assessment within the region in general and Oman in particular.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Language assessment is believed to involve highly abstract theoretical conceptualization about the nature of the language to be measured and the way in which the outcomes of measurement should be interpreted (Farhady, 2005, p. 161). Therefore, the current study is significant due to the fact that it attempts to propose a multi-dimensional model for quality assessment which would help the DELL improve its assessment practices by using suitable measurement tools and exam procedures. Moreover, it is the first study of its type to be devoted to quality assessment in this particular context.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are: to explore teachers' views about what constitutes quality assessment; to investigate teachers' views about the current assessment practices; to discover the challenges; and to suggest possible strategies and a model for promoting quality assessment at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences and in the DELL in particular.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) What constitutes quality assessment?
- 2) What are the teachers' views about the current assessment practices?
- 3) What are the challenges for implementing quality assessment?
- 4) How can quality assessment be achieved?

1.5 Context of the Study

This study was conducted at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences which is located in Rustaq, South Batinah in the sultanate of Oman. This College used to be the 'College of Education', which offered bachelor degrees in education and other subjects such as Islamic Studies, Math, Arabic Studies, Physics, Geography, and History. In 2007 it was converted to the College of Applied Sciences, which affiliated with the ministry of higher education. Currently, it offers diploma and bachelor degrees in Information Technology (IT); International Business Administration (IBA); and English Language and Education (B.Ed). It is worth mentioning that the foundation English language exams are national exams and they are prepared and run centrally by the ministry, but ELT exams are prepared by the College staff and they undergo a review process which is usually carried out by recently established independent exam review committee. Therefore, this study strives to discover what teachers think about their current assessment practices, what constitutes quality assessment, and how quality assessment can be promoted within the College and the DELL in particular. "Assessment should be used to maximize learning services for all students rather than to legitimize minimal learning services for many of them" (Buhagiar, 2007, p. 47). This can only be promoted through quality assessment and teaching.

1.6 Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) Views on Assessment

This study is motivated and informed by (OAAA) policies and stipulations for the quality control of teaching, learning and assessment in higher education in Oman. The (QAAA) was established by Royal Decree No 74/2001 and is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. Its responsibilities include external quality assurance and quality enhancement of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Based on the rules, the HEIs provide the OAAA with the information which required assisting this authority in performing its job. The OAAA has established a Quality Audit process to provide a level of assurance to the public and constructive feedback to the HEIs. The OAAA is structured and organised around three main parts. First is a board of 10 members who are appointed by Royal Decree and have governance responsibilities for the OAAA (see Quality Audit Manual-Institutional Accreditation, 2008). The OAAA advises the National Foundation Programme (NFP) in Oman to follow certain procedures and practices regarding assessment as outlined in the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes. Upon their entry

to College, students are given some form of needs analysis, which consists of a written test, interview, and/or self-evaluation questionnaire. Regarding the assessment students during the NFP, OAAA maintains that variety of formative and summative assessment methods should be used. These include: standardised tests/quizzes, comprehensive exams, observations, portfolios, research projects, oral presentations and evaluation of post-programme success. Table 1 shows the inductive assessment schedule for English language learning outcome as set in the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes (p. 12).

Table 1. Inductive assessment schedule for English language learning outcome

Learning outcome	Teacher observation	Project	Presentation	Class test
Actively participate in a discussion on a topic relevant to their studies by asking questions, agreeing/disagreeing, asking for clarification, sharing information, expressing and asking for opinions.	✓		✓	
Paraphrase information (orally or in writing) from a written or spoken text or from graphically presented data.		✓	✓	✓
Prepare and deliver a talk of at least 5 minutes. Use library resources, speak clearly and confidently, make eye contact and use body language to support the delivery of ideas. Respond confidently to questions.			✓	
Write texts of a minimum of 250 words, showing control of layout, organisation, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary.		✓		✓

It is worth highlighting that the OAAA describes a good assessment practice as one which focuses on benchmarking, double marking of assignments, and inviting external assessors to moderate exam papers before and after examination. It also underlines the paramount importance of a transparent and consistent mechanism for providing feedback through advising sessions and written assessment. After all, if the students are not able to pass the NFP, they are granted some time to undergo an alternative assessment. This alternative assessment, according to the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes, could be an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) band 5 (with none of the four skills below 4.5) or a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of 500. Therefore, the proposed multidimensional model attempts to take into consideration the of the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes as well as quality assessment principles across disciplines for use in promoting quality assessment practices for both the ELT teacher training programme and the NFP.

1.7 Types of Assessment Used at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences

Two types of assessment are used in DELL at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences (Rustaq CAS). The first is formative assessment which is, according to Brown (2004), “evaluating students in the process of forming their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process” (p. 6). Examples of formative assessment at Rustaq CAS are quizzes, presentations, individual and group projects, classroom participation, and midterm exam. The other type of assessment used at Rustaq CAS is summative assessment. Brown (2004) points out that this type of assessment “aims to measure, or summarise, what a student has grasped, and typically occurs at the end of a course or unit of instruction” (p. 6). Examples of this type of assessment at Rustaq CAS are final exams and projects. However, more efforts need to be exerted to improve assessment practices in order to shape quality learning and teaching. Therefore, investigating teachers' views and beliefs about quality assessment could help by providing insights into quality assessment practices.

2. Theoretical Considerations

2.1 *Strategies towards Quality Assessment*

There are many purposes and uses for assessment. Gipps and Stobart (1993) identify six uses of assessment which are: screening, diagnosis, record keeping, feedback, certification, and selection. Screening refers to the process of testing students at the entrance level, to identify who needs special help. Diagnosis serves to discover students' strengths and weakness. Record keeping means that assessment records can be used to help students transfer from one school to another. Assessment can provide feedback about the progress of individual students, and the success of teachers' and schools. Assessment can be used for certification purposes, indicating a learner's competence in a particular subject or field. Finally, assessment can be used to select students into different institutions and streams for further education (Buhagiar, 2007, p. 46). All of these purposes can be achieved through quality assessment. Quality assessment depends mostly on the impact of assessment on learning rather than the accuracy of assessment (Broadfoot, 1996, cited in Buhagiar, 2007). According to Buhagiar (2007) the qualities of a trustworthy assessment include: (a) credibility, which comes from regular ongoing assessment in the classroom, and the inclusion of parents in the assessment dialogue; (b) transferability, which demands the assessor to specify the context in which a particular achievement is demonstrated, so that others may judge whether this is transferable to the other contexts; (c) dependability, which makes the assessment process open to scrutiny, and subject to an audit process of quality control; and (d) authenticity, depends on the extent to which the relevant constructs are fairly and adequately covered in the assessment (p. 44). The DELL faces a number of challenges with regard to quality assessment procedures and implementation. Stoyhoff (2012) asserts that the "most vexing issues in classroom-based assessment has to do with the quality of assessment procedures" (p. 530). These challenges can be summarized as a number of lack or deficiencies of efficient training about quality assessment, on the part of teachers, of an exam review committee, of comprehensive moderation, of tight exam policies and procedures, of item banking, of attention to validity and reliability issues, and of clear assessment standards for the ELT programme. Overcoming such challenges involves two main obstacles. One is time constrain and the other is teachers' personal conflicting views about what constitutes quality assessment. The DELL also faces difficulty in assuring a nexus between assessment and the learning and teaching process: that is, a means of meeting all the above mentioned points and the assessment standards set by the OAAA. Stoyhoff (2012) recommends that teachers need to attain and sustain sufficient expertise in assessment to fulfill their professional responsibilities and they need to investigate their classroom-based assessment practices and share their findings. Therefore, this study may help in fostering and sustaining quality assessment practices and finding further ways to improve them.

2.1.1 Controlling Assessment Quality in the Department of English Language and Literature (DELL)

Controlling assessment quality is not as easy task but it can be done through a variety of approaches. Pennycook (1991) acknowledges that assessment can be controlled firstly through syllabuses by stating clear learning objectives that will ensure that the candidates are being assessed on the same objectives. Secondly, indicating the weighting for practical work, oral work, project and other requirements or over the syllabus content as a whole, as well as any rules should not be complicated for teachers and students to implement. Thirdly, standardisation of assessment items and item banking can improve assessment quality and aid comparability of results. Fourthly, recording and reporting procedures need to be standardized not only for the sake of comparability but also to ensure administrative efficiency, such as using both numerical and grade marks. Finally, in-service training for teachers on issues such as marking, moderation, how to use item banks, how to ensure the reliability of individual marks as well as comparability across parallel sections and classes, and how to write a good test could help in achieving the desired results and promoting quality assessment. There are number of procedures which have been identified for attaining quality assessment, such as moderation, establishing an exam review committee, establishing reliability and validity, train teachers on quality assessment, having tight exam policies and procedures, providing clear exam instructions, building item banks, and using alternative assessment, etc.

2.1.2 Moderation

Moderation is used to enhance quality assessment. "Moderation is a key for developing consistency and comparability of assessment judgements across different teachers, classes, and schools" (Maxwell 2002; Matters, 2005 cited in Wyatt-Smith et.al, 2010, p.61). Moderation is important because teachers and students usually have different interpretation of standards and it is possible for a teacher to have different interpretation of the same standards in different context (Sadler, 2009, cited in Connolly et al., 2012, p.596). Consistency in teacher judgements can be achieved when teachers agree on the standard or grade awarded to a student's task (Sadler, 2009, cited in Connolly et al., 2012, p.597). Buchman (1993) claims that when teachers serve as moderators they

have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives and gain a greater perception of examination procedures, and this enhances their professional judgement (p.176). Moderation involves processes of consultation, negotiation and application of standards to achieve consensus or agreement (Klenowski and Adie, 2009, cited in Connolly, 2012, p.597). Moderation helps teachers form new understandings and develop shared meanings through negotiation of standards with other teachers (Adie, 2012). Additionally, moderation as judgement practice is central and it involves opportunities for teachers to share their judgements with their colleagues when they grade their students (Wyatt-Smith et.al, 2010, p. 61). Difference in the marks awarded to candidates in different institutions may depend on factors other than the difference between the examinees. Such factors involve things such as difference in the assessment items used, in the conditions under which assessment takes place, and in marking standards and criteria (Pennycuick, 1991). Therefore, moderation can be used to help teachers deal with these issues in an effective manner by making adjustment to the marks and grades. There are three methods of moderation commonly used: statistical, inspection and consensus. Statistical moderation is the most common: it involves an external examination which is used as a reference test and coursework and continuous assessment marks are scaled to fit the examination marks. The main advantage of the statistical method is its practicality and simplicity. Moderation by inspection is a method in which an external moderator is appointed, and he or she is in charge of ensuring comparability of marks and grades between candidates. Finally, moderation by consensus or social moderation is considered to be a quality assurance process that supports the development of a common understanding of standards (Harlen 1994, Matters 2006; Maxwell; 2006 cited in Aide, 2012). This kind of moderation is usually done by having groups of institutions (6-10 institutions in each group) become responsible for moderation within the group. This type takes place at meetings of representatives from each institution. Samples of students' work and papers, marking schemes and criteria can be discussed and standardized (Maxwell, 2002, Pennycuick, 1991, pp.147-151). There are different procedures for conducting moderation, such as a calibration model in which a facilitator selects samples deemed to be of a certain standard to be used in the calibration process. Teachers grade the samples individually and then compare their judgement. This kind of practice is used in the DELL, particularly in assessing and grading foundation students' papers. This kind of moderation is practical and time-saving and it focuses on establishing a common understanding of the standards in a social context, before marking all of the student papers. Moreover, conferencing is also one of the moderation models by which teachers grades their papers individually and then selects student samples representative of their application or understanding of the qualities of particular letter grades. This kind of moderation enables teachers to share samples and discuss their judgements and the quality of their students' performance. Conferencing encourages teachers to be involved in a professional dialogue with other teachers, but it is time-consuming. Finally, in an expert model teachers grade all student responses and then submit selected samples representative for their application or understanding of the A to E qualities to an expert. After this, consistency in the way the standards are interpreted and applied is assessed, and it is determined whether teachers need to adjust their understanding, and why (Adie et al., 2012, p. 228). This type of moderation is considered an external standards-referenced moderation and has been routinely undertaken in these years as a main means to ensure accountability and to maintain public confidence in teacher judgement (Connolly, 2012, p.595).

In order to bridge the gaps between the current assessment and instruction practices and quality assessment instruction practices, the DELL has established four strategies towards quality assessment. First, an assessment coordinator was assigned. Second, an exam review committee was formed. This committee is responsible for the quality of exams in terms of their content and whether they meet with course objectives or not. Third, there is a movement towards linking and aligning quality assessment with teaching. Fourth, the DELL established new procedures with regard to exam security policies. If all these efforts are used effectively, they will help promote quality assessment within the College in general and in the DELL in particular.

2.1.3 Alternative Assessment

Democratic alternative assessment is needed to replace the traditional approaches of teacher assessment (Shohamy, 2001). Alternative assessment is commonly viewed as any non-formal testing method that is intended to achieve that which has been overlooked by formal tests and examinations (Tan, 2012). Alternative assessment is considered as one of the recent approaches to language testing which is supported by a sociocultural view of learning. The most common and frequently used procedures for alternative assessment are portfolios, projects, journals, conferences, observations, interviews and simulations (Stoynoff, 2012). It is believed that this type of assessment uses a variety of assessment procedures, and it is considered a means of sharing responsibility for evaluating task performance and having learners engage in both self-evaluation and peer evaluation of performance. The advantages of alternative assessment are: it is consistent with emerging perspectives on

teaching and learning which view learning as a developmental, socially constructed, interactive, and reflective process; and it is capable of contributing more information about learners than a single test comprised of selected response items (Fox, 2008 cited in Stoyhoff, 2012, p. 528). A new period of classroom-based language assessment is beginning which views teaching, learning and assessment as interconnected and embedded in socially mediated interaction that occurs in contexts of language development and use (Fox, 2008 cited in Stoyhoff, 2012, p.529). Moreover, alternative assessment is a participative assessment which can empower students to depend on themselves, and promote learner autonomy (Tan, 2012). Therefore, the DELL has encouraged teachers to use alternative assessment as one of the methods of evaluating teaching and learning and as a tool for promoting quality assessment.

2.1.4 Using Summative, Formative, Dynamic and Authentic Assessments

Assessment is of utmost and central importance in education, and yet there is a lack of uniformity in the relevant literature regarding the definition of terms relating to it. Assessment refers to judgements of students' work (Taras, 2005, p. 466). There are two common ways to carry out assessment, either during the life of the course (formative), or at the end of the course (summative) to provide information about students' learning (Chisga-Negril, 2011, p. 735). Furthermore, formative assessment is used to identify what students have learned, what they have not learned and where they are having difficulty, and this can support the teaching-learning process (Gipps & Murphy, 1994 cited in Buhagiar 2007). According to Crooks (2002 cited in Ali 2011, p.11) summative assessment provides a well-founded, clear and up-to-date picture of students' current capabilities and progress over time and enhancing their development. However, formative assessment deals with how the quality of student responses can be used to improve students' competence (Sadler, 1989). On the other hand, dynamic assessment (DA) is a type of assessment which is a theory-based framework that integrates assessment and instruction by combining the two in a single activity that both diagnoses and develops the learner's ability by providing a key form of support whereby the learner is made aware of his problems and assisted in overcoming these learning problems (Stoyhoff, 2012). DA is based on the idea of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the belief which supports the importance of the cognitive functions and social interaction in learning. If teachers were trained in using these types of assessment and techniques effectively, linking them to instruction, such methods would definitely lead to quality assessment. Finally, authentic assessment is a type of assessment centered on intellectual tasks that have educational merit, tap into students' cognitive abilities and support the needs of the learner (Wiggins, 1990). Therefore, all types of assessment summative, formative, alternative, dynamic, and authentic should be adopted for the sake of sustaining quality assessment and quality instruction.

2.1.5 Establishing Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important for attaining and promoting quality assessment. There are many types of validity such as face validity which refers to the way the physical appearance of the test corresponds to what it is claimed to measure. Test physical appearance includes quality of paper, quality of font size and type, layout, accuracy. Content validity refers to the way in which the content of the test represents the materials to be tested. Finally, criterion-related validity refers to the correspondence between the results of the test in question and the results obtained from outside criteria. This type of validity is determined by correlating the scores on a newly developed test with scores on an already established test (Farhady, 1986). Elliot (1995, cited in Joyner, 1997) claims that in order to sustain quality assessment teachers need to deal with assessment as a curriculum event by relating the assessment to the content taught in class and the way in which it was taught in class, because assessment will not provide a true indication of student ability. Furthermore, aligning the material taught and tested would help in sustaining the validity and reliability of the assessment tool. The DELL needs to put more effort into validity and reliability issues which could help in promoting quality assessment.

2.1.6 Forming an Exam Review Committee

The processes of pre-establishing exam item writing guidelines and establishing an exam review committee could promote quality assessment (Wallach, 2006). One of the reforms which the DELL has currently witnessed is that of forming an exam review committee. The main job of this committee is to check exam quality in order to sustain and foster quality assessment in all exams and exam practices. The review committee includes the four ELT coordinators in addition to the department assessment coordinators. The prime responsibility of this committee is to review exams by checking them against the stipulated learning outcomes stated in all the course descriptions, correcting typing errors in exams, checking the clarity of the exam instructions and formatting, changing items deemed ambiguous, flawed and irrelevant and giving suggestions for improvement and deletions to the course teacher or coordinator who wrote the questions. The faculty members have the choice of making changes and revisions based on the committee's suggestions and thus they can learn from their mistakes. This

kind of review and feedback could help in promoting quality assessment within the department and across the College.

2.1.7 Item Banking

An item bank is believed to enhance the practice of academic measurement in positive ways (Sukamolson, n.d, p.2). Item banking could be one of the methods which can be adapted to promote quality assessment within institutions. An item bank is simply a collection of items that can be used to create new assessment at a later stage (Anzaldúa, 2002; Bloom, Hastings, and Madauas, 1971; Leclercq, 1980; Nakamura, 2001; Rudner, 1998; Smetherham, 1979; Burghof, 2001; Thorndike, 1971 cited in Pearson Inc, 2005). Moreover, "item bank means a collection of test items organised and catalogued in a similar way to books in a library, but also with calibrated data on their measurement characteristics" (Choppin, 1976, p. 216). Item banking is believed to include flexibility, security and consistency (Ummar, 199 cited in Burghof, 2001). However, it takes a considerable amount of time to assemble the items. Anzaldúa (2002, p.15) points out that item banks require much more effort to construct than the normal way of developing test does. In developing item banks we need to consider these questions: who wrote the items, and what training did they receive? Were the items field-tested? Are the items aligned to state standards at the appropriate level? And have the items been reviewed for quality and potential bias? Nowadays, technology has affected language instruction and assessment and can be used in item banking (Sukamolson, n.d, p. 1). However, in order to have a computer-based testing system, instructors need to have a computer item bank, know some concepts of item banking, and have computer testing software or programme (Sukamolson, n.d, p. 1). A good item bank should include a number of items which can faithfully reflect the knowledge domain being tested and sufficient items which can be used interchangeably. In addition, items should meet the accepted standard of content validity and should measure what is supposed to be measured, and the item bank should be user-friendly and easy to maintain by the concerned authorities. The DELL could have an item bank of the kind described by Burghof as an item bank that stores test items that can be reused, and is easily accessible, and durable and ready in an instant for computerised testing (Burghof, 2001). Choppin (1976) views item banking as being extremely valuable to teachers who want to design their quality assessment instruments, easily adaptable for meeting the needs of criterion-referenced evaluation strategies and principles, and cost effective and affordable for many countries and institutions around the globe. Moreover, Weis (2011) describes the major cycle of test development from an item bank as follow: building the item bank, designing the test, delivering the test collecting test data, analysing test data and importing statistics into the item bank. The DELL teachers need to be trained in how to use an item bank and this process would help promote quality assessment in its practices.

2.1.8 Teacher Training

Writing good tests is always challenging and time-consuming for English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Most of the teachers are often busy with teaching and they have little time to dedicate to the construction and writing of exam items that would evaluate their students' true learning outcomes and provide future directions for them and their students (Wallach, 2006, p.62). Moreover, teachers hold different beliefs about assessment which are largely based on their beliefs about language learning (Yin, 2010). Therefore, teachers need to be trained in quality assessment and what constitutes quality assessment, such as moderation, item banking, how to write clear test instructions, how to use different types of assessment to evaluate their students' learning, how to link assessment into instruction, and how to establish and deal with validity and reliability issues. The DELL needs to take initiatives by bringing experts on testing, assessment and benchmarking issues to train all staff in quality assessment.

2.1.9 Proposed Multidimensional Model for Quality Assessment

Research has shown that multidimensional frameworks for language assessment are needed (Farhady, 2005). This study is designed to study teachers' perspectives about quality assessment and to propose a model which could help teachers and practitioners in promoting quality assessment in the DELL and across the College. Figure 1 represents the proposed multidimensional model, which is based on teachers' responses and literature.



Figure 1. Proposed multi-dimensional quality assessment model

The model proposed in Figure 1 is based on the theories and teachers' views found in the relevant literature which underpin quality assessment and allow practitioners and teachers to develop their own assessment models and frameworks to fit their teaching and learning contexts. The paper argues that if this proposed model is perfectly and wisely operated in the DELL it may help to promote quality assessment.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a descriptive study which aims to investigate the need for quality assessment in English Language programmes. Quantitative methodology is used. The study seeks to elicit teachers' views and understanding about their current assessment practices, what constitutes quality assessment, and how quality assessment can be achieved in the DELL. A questionnaire was designed to collect data from 37 EFL teachers in the DELL.

The questionnaire contains four parts, with the first three parts using a 3-point Likert scale starts from (agree to disagree), and the fourth part open ended (see Appendix A). The rationale behind the open-ended part of the questionnaire was to generate qualitative data to support the quantitative data which are elicited from the first three parts of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated through expert-validation, and then reworded and irrelevant items were taken out. Further, Cronbach's Alpha was used to calculate the questionnaire's internal reliability and items consistency and it was found to be .716. The participants in this study were 37 multi-nationality teachers who have been teaching EFL for a couple of years. The basis for selecting these people in this particular number (37) was a practical one. The questionnaire items were categories and were presented in graphs and tables. The quantitative data were analysed using some basic descriptive statistics as well as frequency and percentage, while qualitative data were analysed using themes that emerged and were relevant to the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

This study attempts to explore teachers' views about current assessment practice, what constitutes quality assessment, the challenges involved in implementing quality assessment, and how quality assessment can be achieved. The findings are presented here in the form of both descriptive statistics (Tables 2-4) and graphs (Figures 2-4).

Table 2. What views do teachers hold about the current assessment practices in DELL?

Questionnaire Item	M	SD	N
1. Our current assessment practices are of high quality.	2.35	.676	37
2. Assessment quality in our department needs further improvement.	1.14	.419	37
3. English Language teachers need to be trained in quality assessment issues.	1.28	.566	36
4. Quality assessment shapes and aids quality teaching and learning.	1.19	.467	36
5. Current assessment strategies need to be revised and updated.	1.62	.442	37
6. Our current assessment practices consider the stipulated learning outcomes.	1.97	.654	36

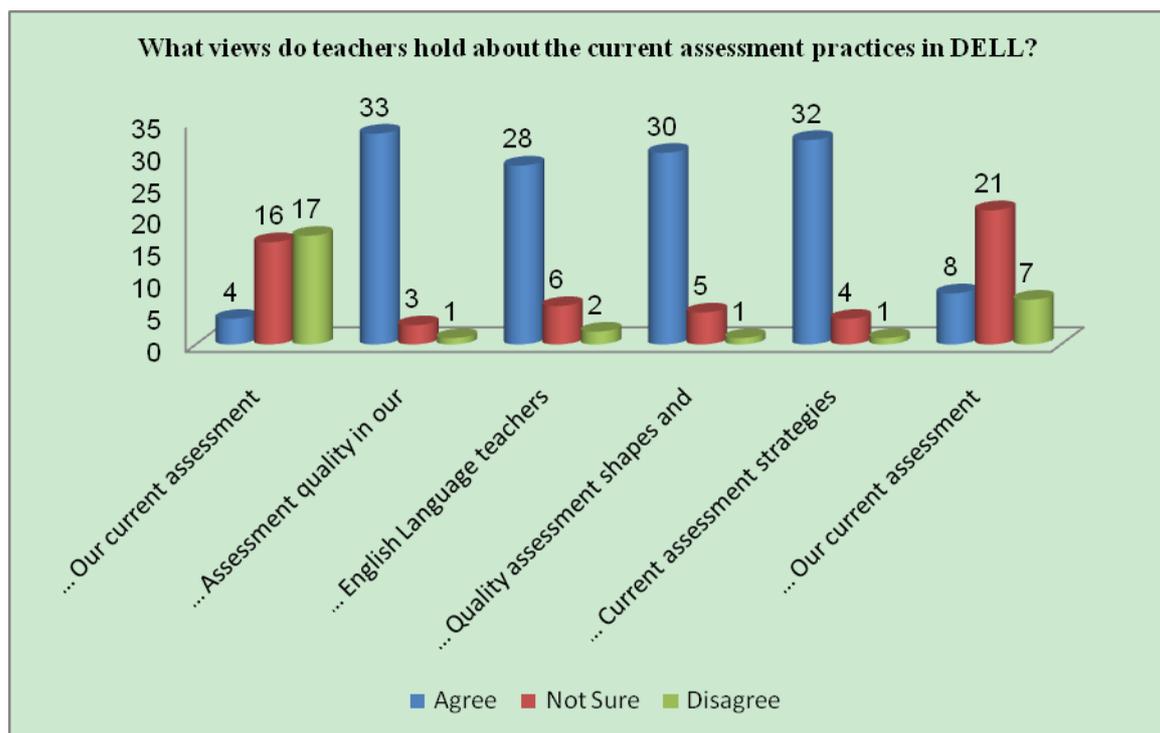


Figure 2. Teachers' views about their current assessment practices

This graph in Figure 2 shows teachers' views with regard to the current assessment practices in the DELL. For question 1, whether the DELL's current assessment practices are of high quality or not, four teachers 'agreed', 16 teachers 'were not sure' and 17 teachers 'disagreed' with the statement. It is quite evident that a considerable number of teachers are not satisfied with the current assessment practices. Regarding question 2, the vast majority of teachers (33) 'agreed' that assessment quality in the DELL needs further improvement, three teachers 'were not sure' and only one teacher 'disagreed'. It could be argued based on the teachers' responses that assessment quality is desperately needed. In this regard one teacher said: *"we need to convince our leadership to spend a lot of money on assessment"*. Another teacher claimed that: *"course descriptions don't include appropriate assessment tools"*. Concerning question 3, 28 teachers believed that English language teachers need to be trained in quality assessment issues, 6 teachers 'were not sure', and only two teachers 'disagreed' with the statement. This is in accord with Wallach (2006) who believes that most of the teachers are often busy with teaching and they have little time dedicated to the construction and writing of exam items that would evaluate their students' true learning outcomes and provide future directions for them and their students (p, 62). For question 4, the vast majority of teachers (30) believed that quality assessment shapes quality teaching, 5 teachers 'were not sure', and only one teacher 'disagreed'. As for question 5, 32 teachers 'agreed' that the current assessment strategies in the DELL current assessment strategies need to be revised and updated, four teachers 'were not sure' and only one teacher 'disagreed'. It is quite obvious that, according to teachers' perspectives, the current assessment practices

in the DELL need further improvement. Regarding question 6, eight teachers believed that the current assessment practices consider the stipulated learning outcomes, 21 teachers 'were not sure', and only seven teachers 'disagreed' with the statement. It could be argued that quality assessment can be promoted when the assessment reflects and maps the actual prescribed learning outcomes.

Table 3. What constitutes quality assessment in an EFL context?

Questionnaire Item	M	SD	N
7. Quality assessment takes into consideration students' levels.	1.38	.681	37
8. Quality assessment considers students' cultural backgrounds.	1.51	.692	37
9. Quality assessment is shaped by quality teaching.	1.32	.626	37
10. Different tools should be used for assessing students in order to promote quality assessment.	1.14	.419	37

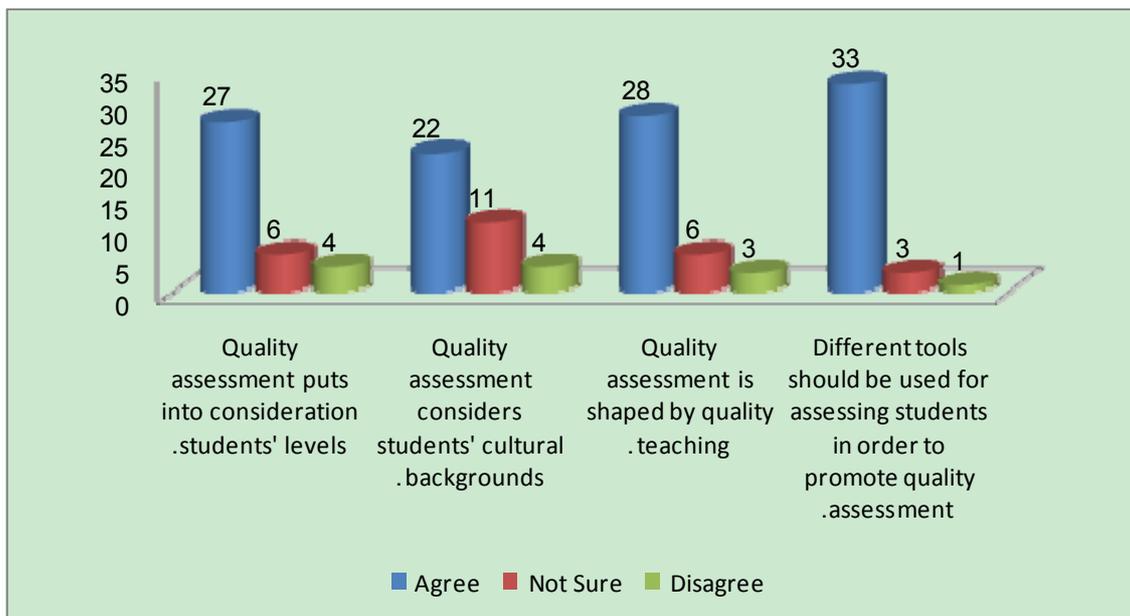


Figure 3. What constitutes quality assessment in an EFL context?

The graph in Figure 3 illustrates teachers' views about what constitutes quality assessment. Concerning question 7, 27 teachers believed that quality assessment considers students' levels, six teachers 'were not sure' and only four teachers 'disagreed'. For question 8, 22 teachers 'agreed' that quality assessment should consider students' cultural backgrounds, 11 teachers 'were not sure', and only four teachers 'disagreed' with the statement. It could be argued that students' levels and cultural backgrounds are important aspects which need to be considered in quality assessment. Regarding question 9, whether quality assessment is shaped by quality teaching or not, 28 teachers 'agreed' that assessment should inform teaching, six teachers 'were not sure', and only 3 teachers 'disagreed'. As for question 10, the great majority of teachers believed that using different assessment tools could promote quality assessment, three teachers 'were not sure' and only one teacher 'disagreed' with the statement. This is consistent with Sadler's view about the importance of formative assessment in enabling teachers to use different tools (Sadler, 1989).

Table 4. Quality assessment can be achieved by having/ using...

Questionnaire Item	M	SD	N
11. Exam vetting committees for all programmes.	1.38	.594	37
12. Item banking.	1.53	.559	36
13. Regular training in quality assessment issues.	1.32	.579	37
14. Different types of moderation strategies.	1.29	.519	35
15. Assessment coordinators for each programme.	1.41	.599	37
16. Using different assessment tools such as quizzes, classroom participation, portfolios, etc.	1.05	.329	37
17. Diversity in exam techniques and questions.	1.00	.000	37
18. Questions which discourage memorization.	1.47	.696	36
19. A link between assessment and teaching through washback.	1.25	.439	36
20. Tight exam security policies and procedures.	1.14	.351	36
21. Students' views about the current assessment practices.	1.46	.730	37
22. A unified assessment strategy across the College.	1.42	.692	36
23. Concerns about validity, reliability and moderation issues.	1.11	.393	37

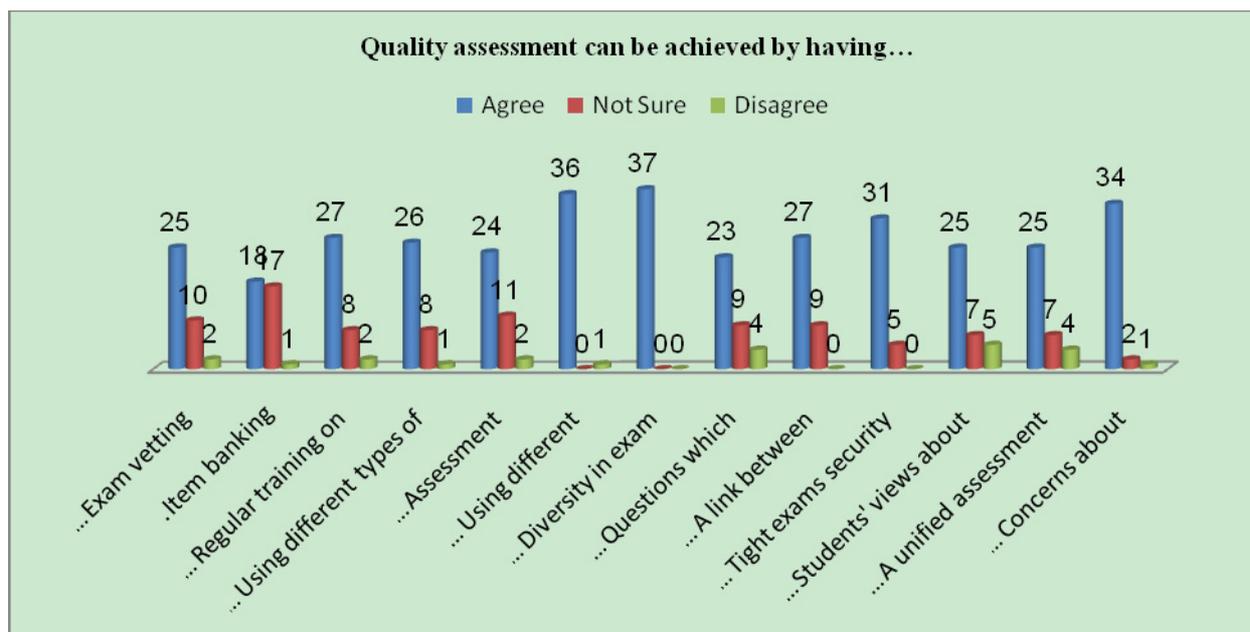


Figure 4. Teachers' views on how quality assessment can be achieved

The graph in Figure 4 displays teachers' responses with regard to ways and strategies for achieving quality assessment. For question 11, whether establishing an exam review committee can help in promoting quality assessment or not, 25 teachers 'agreed' that it could help, 10 'were not sure', and only two teachers 'disagreed' with the statement. It is quite obvious that the majority of teachers are in favour of an exam vetting committee. Regarding question 12, which deals with the idea of building an item bank, 18 teachers 'agreed' with the idea, 17 'were not sure' whether it could help or not, and only one teacher 'disagreed'. Concerning question 13 which deals with the idea of having regular training on current trends of assessment, 27 teachers supported this idea, whereas eight teachers 'were not sure', and only two teachers 'disagreed' with the statement. In this regard, one teacher said: "some inexperienced teachers need to be offered different courses in methodology and testing". Another teacher said that they "need to update courses and assessment techniques". Moreover in order to

improve assessment practices, a teacher said: *"foundation students should be tested on content validity, that is, from the course book for general English and academic skills. Exam papers should be moderated to eliminate inaccuracies"*. Furthermore, another said that: *"previous exams should be made available to new staff as a starting point"*. Finally another teacher said: *"investigation of the current practices through the involvement of teachers and students, as well as assessment practices that totally accord with international standard were necessary"*. As for question 14, whether using different types of moderation strategies can help in achieving quality assessment, 26 teachers 'agreed' with the statement, eight 'were not sure', and only one teacher 'disagreed'. This is supported in the literature, specifically, by Maxwell and others; "moderation is a key for developing consistency and comparability of assessment judgments across different teachers, classes, and schools" (Maxwell 2002; and Wyatt-Smith et.al, 2010, p.61). Moderation is important because teachers and students usually have different interpretations of standards and it is possible for a teacher to have different interpretations of the same standards in different contexts (Sadler, 2009, cited in Connolly et al, 2012, p. 596). Consistency in teacher judgments can be achieved when teachers agree on the standard or grade awarded to a student's task (Sadler, 2009, cited in Connolly et al, 2012, p. 597). Regarding question 15, whether having assessment coordinators for each programme could help in sustaining quality assessment or not, 24 teachers 'agreed' that this could help, 11 teachers 'were not sure', and two teachers 'disagreed'. Concerning question 16, whether using alternative assessment tools such as quizzes, classroom participation, and portfolios can aid quality assessment or not, interestingly, all but one teacher (36) 'agreed' with this idea. This makes it quite evident that those teachers are in favour of alternative and formative assessment techniques, and this corroborates with the OAAA principles which support the idea of formative assessment and the literature which acknowledges that formative assessment is used to identify what students have learned, what they have not learned and where they are having difficulty, and that this can support the teaching-learning process (Gipps and Murphy, 1994, cited in Buhagiar, 2007). Regarding question 17, whether diversity in exam techniques and questions can help in fostering quality assessment or not, all teachers (37) 'agreed' with this statement. It is quite obvious that all the teachers believed that diversifying exam techniques and questions may help in promoting quality assessment practices. Concerning question 18, whether using questions which discourage memorisation can foster quality assessment or not, 23 teachers 'agreed', 9 'were not sure', and only 4 teachers 'disagreed'. As for question 19, if aligning assessment to teaching through washback could be one of the options for improving assessment quality, 27 teachers 'agreed', nine 'were not sure' whether it could help or not, and no one 'disagreed'. This is supported by the fact that quality assessment depends mostly on the impact of assessment on learning rather than the accuracy of assessment (Broadfoot, 1996, cited in Buhagiar, 2007). Regarding question 20, whether having tight exam security policies and procedures can aid quality assessment or not, 31 teachers 'agreed', five teachers 'were not sure' and no one 'disagreed'. As for question 21, whether considering students' views about the current assessment practices could help in promoting quality assessment or not, 25 teachers 'agreed', seven teachers 'were not sure', and 5 teachers 'disagreed'. Regarding question 22, which asks if the use of a unified assessment strategy across the College might help in quality assessment, 25 teachers 'agreed' that adapting this strategy might help, seven teachers 'were not sure', and only four teachers 'disagreed'. Finally, question 23 concerns the importance of validity, reliability and moderation issues in sustaining quality assessment, 34 teachers 'agreed' that such concerns were important, two teachers 'were not sure', and only one teacher 'disagreed'. This view is supported by Elliot (1995, cited in Joyner, 1997) who claims that in order sustain quality assessment teachers need to deal with assessment as a curriculum event by relating the assessment to the content taught in class and the way in which it was taught in class, otherwise assessment will not provide a true indication of student ability. Moreover, Buchman (1993) believes that when teachers serve as moderators they have the opportunity to broaden their perspectives, gain a greater understanding of examination procedures and thus enhance their professional judgement (p.176). Based on both the qualitative and quantitative findings from teachers' responses, the study concludes that the current assessment practices are far behind quality assessment according to teachers' perspectives and they need further improvements.

5. Conclusions

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this research which could help in improving assessment and instruction and thereby fostering quality assessment. However, this study has two obvious limitations which merit acknowledgement. For one, the scope of the study covers 37 teachers out of 64 and Department of English Language and Literature (DELL) only. Secondly, the findings of this study can illuminate only and cannot be generalised. The paper argues that quality assessment can be promoted through teachers' different views and beliefs about what constitutes quality assessment, and can be achieved.

6. Pedagogical Implications, Recommendations and Limitations

The study has pedagogical implications for improving assessment practices which could affect the teaching-learning process. The findings might help teachers, practitioners, and decision makers in adapting strategies such as moderation, building item banks, using different assessment tools, and training teachers in quality assessment, which might in turn lead to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Moreover, the DELL needs to integrate alternative assessment tools such as quizzes, classroom participation, and portfolios into its assessment mechanisms. In addition, using different moderation techniques, building item banking, training teachers on quality assessment, having different exam questions, considering students' views about current assessment practices, and having tight exam policies and procedures can help in attaining assessment practices. Thus, decision makers and teachers need to take all the above mentioned points into consideration in order to achieve quality assessment and quality teaching. This study has several limitations which merit consideration. First, the number of the participants is only (37) teachers which might be a sample which could impede the generalisation of the findings. Second, the scope of the study is limited to one college only; involving more colleges would give a clearer picture about what constitutes quality assessment. Third, the study relies heavily on a questionnaire, whereas using interviews or textual analysis would be a good approach for future studies and might yield more reliable and robust results and findings.

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Appendices

Appendix (A)

Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire intends to investigate the need for quality assessment in English Language programmes. The

questionnaire seeks to elicit your views and understanding about your current assessment practices, what makes quality assessment, and how can quality assessment be achieved. I hope you will be kind enough to answer all the questions to the best of your knowledge and ability to help us create a quality assessment model. You may be assured that your responses will be regarded as confidential information and will be used only for research purposes.

A. What views do teachers hold about the current assessment practices in DELL?				
No	Statement	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
1.	Our current assessment practices are of high quality.	4	16	17
2.	Assessment quality in our department needs further improvement.	33	3	1
3.	English Language teachers need to be trained on quality assessment issues.	28	6	2
4.	Quality assessment shapes and aids quality teaching and learning.	30	5	1
5.	Current assessment strategies need to be revised and up-dated.	32	4	1
6.	Our current assessment practices consider the stipulated learning outcomes.	8	21	7
B. What makes quality assessment in an EFL context?		Agree	Not sure	Disagree
7.	Quality assessment puts into consideration students' levels.	27	6	4
8.	Quality assessment considers students' cultural backgrounds.	22	11	4
9.	Quality assessment is shaped by quality teaching.	28	6	3
10.	Different tools should be used for assessing students in order to promote quality assessment.	33	3	1
C. Quality assessment can be achieved by having...		Agree	Not sure	Disagree
11.	Exam vetting committees for all programmes.	25	10	2
12.	Item banking.	18	17	1
13.	Regular training on quality assessment issues.	27	8	2
14.	Using different types of moderation strategies.	26	8	1
15.	Assessment coordinators for each programme.	24	11	2
16.	Using different assessment tools such as quizzes, classroom participation, portfolios, etc.	36	0	1
17.	Diversity in exam techniques and questions.	37	0	0
18.	Questions which discourage memorization.	23	9	4
19.	A link between assessment and teaching through washback.	27	9	0
20.	Tight exams security policies and procedures.	31	5	0
21.	Students' views about the current assessment practices.	25	7	5
22.	A unified assessment strategy across college.	25	7	4
23.	Concerns about validity, reliability and moderation issues.	34	2	1
24.	In your opinion, what are the possible challenges for implementing quality assessment?			
25.	In your opinion, how can the current assessment practices be improved?			

Thank You for Your Cooperation!

Appendix (B)

Qualitative data

Q1. In your opinion, what are the possible challenges for implementing quality assessment?	
<u>1</u>	-The lacks of a culture of QA .we need to launch a campaign of awareness. Moreover, it has to be practiced on all levels.
<u>2</u>	-Integrity of the assessor, reducing opportunities for plagiarism.
<u>3</u>	(Empty)
<u>4</u>	(Empty)
<u>5</u>	(Inedible)
<u>6</u>	(Empty)
<u>7</u>	(Empty)
<u>8</u>	-Lack of leasing between teachers who teach the some courses.
<u>9</u>	(Inedible)
<u>10</u>	- Quality instructors who have studied assessment. - Protesting students if assessment is too rigorous.
<u>11</u>	-The exams should be regularly modified and updated.
<u>12</u>	-Teachers without knowledge of assessment practice -Course descriptions which do not include appropriate assessment tools.
<u>13</u>	-Some inexperienced teachers need to offer difference courses in methodology and testing.
<u>14</u>	-The innate nature of some student to cheat.
<u>15</u>	(Inedible)
<u>16</u>	Entrenched ideas. Some staff has different experience in quality assessment.
<u>17</u>	-Consistency... continuous assessment not too many written exam
<u>18</u>	-Convincing our leadership that we spend for too much on assessment.
<u>19</u>	-Consistency of staff and procedures
<u>20</u>	(Empty)
<u>21</u>	-The assessment are created by the same sources that are the primary text book, we use in teaching.
<u>22</u>	-Criteria
<u>23</u>	(Inedible)
<u>24</u>	-The single biggest issue is the suitability/ experience of exam writers

<u>25</u>	(Empty)
<u>26</u>	(Empty)
<u>27</u>	(Empty)
<u>28</u>	-Not sure
<u>29</u>	-Culture of memorization trend to make it easy and painful for students the current courses descriptions or syllabus.
<u>30</u>	-Unified assessment
<u>31</u>	-Updating courses, updating assessment techniques.
<u>32</u>	-Not updating courses -No real communication between the course and teachers -The quality of books – are the teachers qualified to teachers the course
<u>33</u>	-Correct preparation in advance with a department that most know the purpose before it introduces new assessment.
<u>34</u>	-Time constraints imposed by student attitudes to holidays which curtail time available for teaching. -Highly dubious policy of not setting aside dedicated week for mid-terms -lack of mentoring training to familiarize new teachers with course specs+exams -Ministry's reluctance to release old exam papers for practice.
<u>35</u>	(Empty)
<u>36</u>	-Rejection from the ministry -Resistance from teacher (senior ones) to any kind of change
<u>37</u>	(Empty)

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