Examining the Implementation of Different Test Tasks in Assessing EFL Learners' Use of English Tenses

Abstract

This study examines how different tasks assess learners' use of English tenses. EFL teachers use test tasks such as gap-filling, multiple-choice and grammaticality judgment tasks. To check how these three types of tasks assess the uses of tenses, three tests about present, past and future tenses –each including the three tasks- are given to 29 second year EFL learners at the Teachers' Training School Assia Djebar, Constantine, Algeria. The results reveal the highest scores are in the multiple-choice task and the lowest in the grammaticality judgement task, and that the high scores obtained in the multiple-choice task do not reflect mastery of the uses of English tenses because there is no agreement between all the scores obtained. The results show that assessment of the uses of tenses should include different task types to have a comprehensive view of learners' knowledge of English tenses.

Keywords: English tenses; grammar assessment; gap-filling task; multiple-choice task; grammaticality judgment task

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Résumé

Cette étude examine comment différentes activités évaluent l'utilisation des temps anglais par les apprenants. Les enseignants d'anglais utilisent des activités telles que le remplissage des espaces, les choix multiples et le jugement de grammaticalité. Pour évaluer comment ces types d'activités évaluent l'utilisation des temps, 3 tests sur les temps présent, passé et futur -chacun incluant les 3 activités- sont administrés à 29 apprenants d'anglais de deuxième année à l'ENS Assia Djebar, Constantine, Algérie. Les résultats révèlent que les scores élevés sont dans l'activité à choix multiples et les bas sont dans celle de jugement de grammaticalité, et que les scores dans l'activité à choix multiples ne reflètent pas la maîtrise des usages des temps anglais vu le manque de correspondance entre tous les scores obtenus. Les résultats montrent que l'évaluation des usages des temps doit inclure différentes activités pour une vision complète des connaissances des temps en anglais par les apprenants.

Mots clés: les temps en anglais ; évaluation de la grammaire ; remplissage des espaces, choix multiples ; jugement de grammaticalité.

ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة كيفية تقييم الأنشطة المختلفة لاستخدام المتعلمين للأزمنة الإنجليزية. يستخدم مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أنشطة اختبار مثل أنشطة ملء الفراغات، و أنشطة الاختيارات المتعددة، و أنشطة الأحكام على القواعد النحوية. للتحقق من كيفية تقييم هذه الأنواع من المهام لاستخدامات الأزمنة، يتم إعطاء 3 اختبارات يحتوي كل منها على الأنشطة الثلاث حول أزمنة الحاضر و الماضي و المستقبل إلى 29 طالب في الإنجليزية في السنة الثانية بالمدرسة العليا للأساتذة آسيا جبار، قسنطينة، الجزائر. تكشف النتائج أن أعلى الدرجات هي في نشاط الاختيارات المتعددة و الأدنى في نشاط الحكم على القواعد النحوية، وأن الدرجات العالية المحصل عليها في نشاط الاختيارات المتعددة لا تعكس إتقان استخدامات الأزمنة الإنجليزية لأنه لا يوجد توافق بين كل الدرجات المحصل عليها. تظهر النتائج أن تقييم استخدامات الأزمنة يجب أن يحوي أنواع نشاطات مختلفة للحصول على رؤية شاملة لمدى معرفة الطلبة بأزمنة اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أزمنة اللغة الانجليزية؛ تقييم القواعد؛ نشاط ملء الفراغات؛ نشاط الاختيارات المتعددة؛ نشاط الأحكام على القواعد النحوية

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I- Introduction:

EFL students at the Teachers' Training School Assia Djebar, Constantine, seem to demonstrate a great mastery of the uses of English tenses through the scores they obtain when they are assessed through grammar tests based on gap-filling tasks. However, they rather fail to demonstrate such mastery when they have to use tenses in discourse. This may lead to questioning the mastery shown through the usual type of test tasks. Therefore, it is vital to ask the question as to whether learners would have similar scores in different types of grammar test tasks used to assess the uses of English tenses. Consequently, a possible way to answer the question posed earlier is to use different types of test tasks –namely the gap-filling task, the multiple-choice task, and the grammaticality judgment task- and check in which type of tasks the learners would score better in order to identify the type of task that best assesses EFL learners' uses of English tenses.

I.1. Grammatical Knowledge and the Teaching of Tenses

Ellis (2006) explains that communicative competence includes grammatical competence (knowledge of the language), discourse competence (the ability to use grammatical knowledge to create well-formed texts), sociological competence (the ability to create appropriate language in different contexts) and strategic competence (the ability to deal with weaknesses and use language more effectively). Grammatical knowledge is part of the linguistic knowledge a foreign language learner should have (Canale & Swain, 1980; Richards, 2006). Furthermore, grammatical knowledge is seen as "knowledge of the rules that account for grammatically correct language" (Richards & Reppen, 2014, p. 6), which means that it is the set of principles that determines the grammaticality of language –that is, its accuracy.

Grammatical knowledge is needed by learners to understand the grammatical aspects they are exposed to and to produce correct language (Ellis, 1995, 2009). Ellis (2006) further contends that "a conscious understanding of how grammatical features work facilitates the kind of processing […] required for developing true competence" (p. 90).

I.1.a. Implicit Versus Explicit Grammatical Knowledge

Second/foreign language learners face two kinds of difficulty with grammatical items: difficulty to understand the items and difficulty to internalise them (Ellis, 2006). The former kind of difficulty is related to the challenge learners have to deal with comprehension of the grammatical items; this is linked to explicit grammatical knowledge. The second kind of difficulty is the challenge that learners face when they are required to appropriately use the grammatical items; it is associated to implicit grammatical knowledge. In fact, grammar is considered implicit knowledge when it is unconsciously drawn upon while using the target language, which happens after one has *acquired* the language; on the other hand, grammar is regarded as explicit when it is consciously applied as a result of memorisation and internalisation after one has *learned* the language (Krashen, 1982).

Implicit knowledge is "knowledge *of* grammar that is intuitive and allows correct grammatical forms to be deployed automatically, without the user being aware of why a particular form is correct" (Klapper, 2005, p. 67). It is the kind of grammatical knowledge that is usually possessed by native-like or native speakers. It is the feature that makes language users produce sentences/utterances without thinking about which grammatical elements to use; however, their performance is grammatically flawless and –most often- they are unable to explain why they used specific grammatical structures or items instead of others. Furthermore, Ellis (2006, 2009) describes implicit knowledge in terms of specific characteristics. It is implied and unstated, mechanical without necessarily being accurate, automatically and unconsciously accessed and processed, observable in learners' verbal performance, and its acquisition is limited.

Conversely, explicit knowledge is defined as the amount of knowledge about grammar a learner learned, that s/he is aware of having, that s/he can describe through

formulae, and that s/he uses intentionally to understand and produce language (Ellis, 1995, 2006, 2009). This means that this kind of knowledge consists of information and details that can be formulated and described. The learner decides to use it whenever s/he feels the need to do so, and when there is enough time to draw on that knowledge. Explicit knowledge is beneficial for both teachers and learners. First, it helps teachers because it is considered a vivid description of what they teach and, together with examining it, they will make their teaching more effective (Andrews, 2007). Second, explicit knowledge generally affects learners' overall performance with the target language and, more specifically, it helps learners "to edit or monitor production, a process that is only possible in those types of language use that allow learners sufficient time to access the relevant declarative facts" (Ellis, 2009, p. 12), and that will affect their overall performance with the language (Andrews, 2007). However, the major benefit of explicit knowledge is that "it may assist language development by facilitating the development of implicit knowledge" (Ellis, 2006, p. 96).

According to Ellis (2006), what decides about which grammar to teach is "the inherent learning difficulty of different grammatical structures" (p. 88). Customarily, grammar teaching consists of making learners correctly reproduce a grammatical structure to learn it (a)through activities that required the learners to automatically practise the structure under study or (b)through activities that provided the learners with situations requiring him/her to use the target structure (Ellis, 1995). However, Hinkel and Fotos (2002) explain that the first method produced learners who possessed a good knowledge of grammar rules but who were unable to use them to communicate in the target language.

The grammar being taught in most Algerian schools and universities is what may be labelled traditional grammar. Gebhard and Martin (2011) describe this grammar as follows:

> It consists of the study of parts of speech and prescriptive rules regarding correct usage. […] Some versions of school grammar, especially those used in teaching second languages, retain additional categorisation such as voice (active/passive), tense (present progressive, past progressive) and even more exotic phenomena such as gerunds and participles. (p. 297)

This kind of grammar came to be known as pedagogical grammar. The broadest definition of pedagogical grammar considers it a description of the target language for the sake of teaching and learning it (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill & Pincas, 1980; Kennedy, 2003; Klein, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Purpura, 2004; Richards & Schmidt, 2010, Taylor, 2008). Pedagogical grammar describes the language items that are taught and how they are taught, their place in the language course, and the materials required for teaching them (Pachler & Field, 2001; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). This kind of grammar does not address teachers only, but it also addresses learners who are willing to understand the intricacies of the language at hand to be able to use it later.

Another dimension of pedagogical grammar is assessment (Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Purpura, 2004). Larsen-Freeman (2009) stipulates that pedagogical grammar represents "the structures and rules compiled for instructional and assessment purposes" (p. 518). She also draws a distinction between pedagogical grammar and teacher's grammar, which is collected for teaching only. Pedagogical grammar does not simply describe the mechanics of the target language so that teachers teach it more easily and learners learn it better, but it also provides perspectives and tools to assess how successful both teaching and learning the target language are (Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Purpura, 2004).

I.1.b. Teaching English Tenses

English tenses have two dimensions. The first is tense/time and it indicates how the time of the event is related to the present moment (Comrie, 1985; Cowan, 2008). Accordingly, there are three time frames described as the past (the time before the moment of speaking), the present (the time at or around the moment of speaking) and the future (the time after the moment of speaking). The second dimension is aspect; it concerns how the language user perceives the event (Comrie, 1985; Cowan, 2008).

English consists of the perfect and the progressive/continuous aspects. The combinations of time frames and aspects produce English verb forms such as the past perfect, the present continuous, and the future perfect continuous.

The major reason behind the challenge facing EFL learners learning English tenses is the influence of the mother tongue (Cowan, 2008). In the case of Algerian learners of English, for example, the absence of aspects seems to be problematic. In both the Algerian dialect and standard Arabic, the perfect aspect does not exist. On the one hand, this causes learners of English to struggle trying to understand the meanings related to the perfect aspect –mainly the present perfect and the future perfect- and, on the other hand, they tend to form erroneous utterances and sentences when required to produce it.

I.2. Assessing Grammatical Knowledge

The assessment of grammar is problematic because of the difficulty to classify it as implicit or explicit knowledge. Furthermore, when assessing grammar, teachers need to make distinction between grammatical knowledge and grammatical ability. The assessment of grammar has always gone hand in hand with its teaching; however, it is the means of assessment that have changed.

In fact, most existing grammar tests are competence-oriented tests that assess learners' grammatical knowledge (Canale & Swain, 1980; Larsen-Freeman, 2009). Grammar tasks may be categorised under different labels. They can be referred to as objective and subjective/constructed tasks (Nilson 2010; Purpura, 2004). Purpura (2004, p.4) explains that grammatical knowledge "might be inferred from the ability to select a grammatically correct answer from several options on a multiple choice test, to supply a grammatically accurate word or phrase in a paragraph or dialogue, to construct grammatically appropriate sentences, or to provide judgments regarding the grammaticality of an utterance." He identifies grammar test tasks as selected-response tasks, limited-response tasks, and extended-production tasks. In fact, most teachers implement types of tests they themselves had when they were learners (Pierce, 2002). Those tests are either limited-response tasks –such as fill-in-the-gaps, cloze and short-answer tasks- or selected-response tasks –like true/false, grammaticality judgment, and multiple-choice tasks (Purpura, 2004, p.127).

_ *Gap-filling Test Tasks*

One of the types of tasks used traditionally to assess grammar are gap-filling tasks. Also called cloze procedure, this type of tasks consists in asking the learner to provide the deleted part of a piece of writing (sentence, paragraph, or dialogue) (Oller & Jonz, 1994, p.3). In this type, according to Purpura (2004, p.135), learners are asked to provide specific items that fill in blanks and correspond to the context given in a piece of writing to assess their "knowledge of grammatical forms and meanings". In the context of EFL teaching and testing of English tenses in Algerian, teachers tend to measure the learners' ability to provide the appropriate form of verbs; that is, the form that is acceptable in terms of its form and its relation with other elements in the text. Learners' grammatical ability is usually assessed through the use of "cued gap-filling task […] [where] the gaps are preceded by one or more lexical items, or cues, which must be transformed in order to fill the gap correctly" (Purpura, 2004, p. 136).

However, Nilson (2010, p. 284) claims that these tasks do not serve as practical means to identify learners' learning difficulties and weaknesses, that the texts used may consist of hints that would help the learners guess the answer, and that they do not "assess higher levels of cognition".

_ *Multiple-Choice Test Tasks*

It is a common objective test task used by teachers to measure learners' grammatical knowledge that belongs to the selected-response task type (Nilson, 2010; Purpura, 2004). It consists in asking the learners to choose the most appropriate answer placed among distracting answers to replace an underlined item or fill in a gap in a sentence or a longer piece of writing (Purpura, 2004). Nilson (2010) explains that this

kind of tasks is very helpful to teachers since it identifies learners' weaknesses and it measures different aspects such as comprehension, knowledge and analysis.

Nevertheless, multiple-choice tasks do not reflect the reasons behind the learners' choice of the answer; it may be due to guessing using cues, to eliminating distractors, or simply to luck (McKay, 2006; Nilson, 2010; Purpura, 2004). McKay (2006) further explains that familiarity with this type of test tasks may influence the way learners answer.

_ *Grammaticality Judgment Test Tasks*

Grammaticality judgment tests are often used to measure grammatical knowledge. They are tests were learners engage in tasks that require "deciding whether a sentence is well-formed or deviant" (Ellis, 1991, p. 162 as quoted in Loewen, 2009, p.94). This means that the learners are provided with sentences and they have to identify them as grammatical or not. Ellis (1991, as cited in Loewen, 2009, p.95) suggests a variant of this type where the learners spot the errors, correct them and then explain them which requires a certain level of awareness when analysing the sentences. Ellis (2004) explains that the learners go through three phases when dealing with these tasks: first, they try to understand the sentence; second, they try to spot any anomalous element(s) in the sentence and, finally, they think about the element they identified as incorrect and why it is so.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to say whether grammaticality judgment test tasks measure implicit knowledge or explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2004; Loewen, 2009); that is, do they measure learners' acquisition of the language (automaticity) or their knowledge and application of the rules (processing)? Therefore, variants of this type can be found in the literature. They are Timed-Grammaticality Judgement Test (TGJT) –which is presented as a measure of implicit knowledge, and Untimed-Grammaticality Judgment Test (UGJT) –which is described as a measure of explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2004).

II– Methods and Materials:

A group of 29 participants belonging to a population of 115 EFL second year students at the Teachers' Training School Assia Djebar of Constantine have been given three tests about tenses; the first test concerns present tenses, the second test is about past tenses, and the third test deals with future tenses. Each test consists of three tasks and was administered after explaining and practising the different meanings and uses of the relevant tenses. The first task requires the learners to provide the appropriate form of the verbs in parentheses to fill in a paragraph. In the second task, the participants are required to choose the most appropriate verb form among the options provided for each verb in order to complete a passage. In the third task, the participants are asked to identify errors related to English tenses in a paragraph and provide the correction for each case. Each test lasts for 45 minutes.

The first test is related to the present simple and the present continuous. The first task in this test consists of 10 blanks in a paragraph to fill with the appropriate form of the verbs in parentheses. The second task requires the participants to choose the suitable verb form in each of the 10 pairs of options to complete a passage. The third task asks the participants to spot and correct 10 errors in a paragraph.

The second test concerns the past simple and the past continuous, the past perfect (simple and continuous) and the present perfect (simple and continuous). In this test, the first task is made of a paragraph containing 10 blanks to fill with the appropriate tenses of the given verbs. In the second task, the participants are expected to select the most suitable verb form in each of the 16 pairs of options to complete a dialogue. The third task requires the participants to spot and correct 07 errors in a paragraph.

The third test is related to the future simple and the future continuous, the future perfect (simple and continuous). The first task is made of a paragraph consisting of 12 to fill with the appropriate form of the verbs in parentheses. In the second task, a paragraph is to be completed by choosing the suitable verb form in each of the 8 sets of

three options. The third task requires the participants to spot and correct 8 errors in a paragraph.

III- Results and Discussion:

The results obtained through the three tests have been compiled and are analysed and discussed hereafter.

III.1. Analysis of the Results
a. Present Tenses

The results obtained in Test 1 related to present tenses are shown and discussed below.

Correct Answers (Out of 10)	Gap-Filling Task		Multiple-Choice Task	
	N°	%	N°	%
0	01	3.45%	00	00%
1 – 4	08	27.59%	02	6.90%
5	02	6.90%	06	20.69%
6 – 9	18	62.07%	20	68.96%
10	00	00%	01	3.45%
Total	**29**	**100%**	**29**	**100%**

Table 1: Participants' Scores in the Gap-Filling Task and the Multiple-Choice Task of Test 1

Table 1 shows that there are 18 participants (62.07%) who have between 6 and 9 correct answers out of 10 possible correct answers in the gap-filling task and 20 participants (68.96%) in the multiple-choice task. One participant (3.45%) does not have any correct answer in the first task while only one participant (3.45%) has all 10 correct answers in the second task. In the gap-filling task, there are 8 participants (27.59%) who have between 1 and 4 correct answers out of 10 possible answers and 2 participants (6.90%) have 5 correct answers out of 10. On the other hand, only 2 participants (6.90%) have between 1 and 4 correct answers in the multiple-choice task and 6 participants (20.69%) have 5 answers out of 10 possible answers. What is worth noticing is that the majority of participants have scored above the average in both the gap-filling task and the multiple-choice task.

There are no major differences between the gap-filling task and the multiple choice task in terms of the tenses where the participants have given wrong answers. In the former, most wrong answers are related to the form of the verbs as they concern missing the third person singular –s, using the present participle without the auxiliary *to be*, providing a form of the auxiliary *to be* that does not agree with the subject. In the latter, the wrong answers are related to the meanings of the options given; they concern using the present simple to describe an event happening around the moment of speaking and using the present simple to describe gradual change in the present.

Answers (Out of 10)	Spotting + Proper correction		Spotting + Wrong correction/No correction provided		Correct cases identified as errors	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
0	01	3.45%	14	48.28%	01	3.45%
1 - 4	09	31.03%	15	51.72%	21	72.41%
5	08	27.59%	00	00%	04	13.79%
6 - 9	11	37.93%	00	00%	03	10.34%
10	00	00%	00	00%	00	00%
Total	**29**	**100%**	**29**	**100%**	**29**	**100%**

Table 2: Participants' Scores in the Grammaticality Judgment Task of Test 1

In the grammaticality judgment task, results are different from the two previous tasks. Table 2 shows that 11 participants (37.93%) have between 6 and 9 correct answers out of 10 possible correct answers and that 8 participants (27.59%) have 5 correct answers out of 10. There are 9 participants who have between 1 and 4 correct answers and one participant (3.45%) has no correct answers at all. Moreover, Table 2 clears shows that 15 participants (51.72%) have identified between 1 and 4 errors but have given the wrong correction of errors or have not provided any correction at all. It is also noticeable that a majority of 21 participants (72.41%) have identified between 1 and 4 cases as errors and have provided corrections to them while they are not errors, 4 participants (13.79%) have done the same thing with 5 cases and 3 participants (10.34%) have dealt with cases between 6 and 9 as errors. Only one participant (3.45%) has not included any correct case as an error.

Further analysis of the participants answers in this task shows that the present continuous is the most problematic tense. It is shown through the number of cases where the verbs in the present continuous either are unidentified as errors, are identified as errors but the correction provided was wrong, or are correct cases identified as errors and corrections provided to them. Another remark related to these results concerns the forms of the verbs in both the present simple and the present continuous. Just like in the gap-filling task, the grammaticality judgment task shows that participants do not add the third person singular marker and use the present participle without providing the auxiliary *to be* when forming the present continuous.

b. Past Tenses

The results of Test 2 are given in the tables below and discussed.

Correct Answers (Out of 10)	N°	%
0	01	3.45%
1 - 4	17	58.62%
5	08	27.59%
6 - 9	03	10.34%
10	00	00%
Total	**29**	**100%**

Table 3: Participants' Scores in the Gap-Filling Task of Test 2

Table 3 describes the results of participants in the first task (gap-filling) of Test 2. It shows that 17 participants (58.62%) have between 1 and 4 correct answers, 8 participants (27.59%) have 5 correct answers out of 10 possible correct answers, and 3 participants (10.34%) have between 6 and 9 correct answers. However, a participant (3.45%) does not have any correct answer at all. This means that the majority are below the average.

Correct Answers (Out of 16)	N°	%
0	00	00%
1 - 7	00	00%
8	00	00%
9 - 15	29	100%
16	00	00%
Total	**29**	**100%**

Table 4: Participants' Scores in the Multiple-Choice Task of Test 2

Table 4, on the other hand, describes the results of the multiple-choice task as quite the opposite of the first task as it shows that all the participants (100%) have between 9 and 15 correct answers out of 16.

The reasons behind that great discrepancy in the scores between the first task and the second in Test 2 can be due to two factors: (1) the participants have to think about the correct form of the verb and its appropriateness for the context before writing

it in the first task while the form is provided and they have to think of its appropriateness for the context only in the second task; (2) the participants cannot rely on guessing in the first task because they have to think carefully -while it plays an important role in the second task as participants may choose an answer among a limited set of options and may get it right *by chance*.

The answers of the participants in the gap-filling task in Test 2 also show that the participants face most difficulties when they have to deal with the present perfect simple, the past perfect simple, and the irregular past participle forms of verbs. These results correspond to what is observed in the multiple-choice task in Test 2 as participants' wrong options are related to whether to use of the present perfect simple or the past simple, and when to use the past perfect. Since the options presented the forms of the verbs, the participants in the second task did not have the difficulty of dealing with irregular verbs.

Answers (Out of 7)	Spotting + Proper correction		Spotting + Wrong correction/No correction provided		Correct cases identified as errors	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
0	07	24.14%	06	20.69%	02	6.90%
1 - 3	19	65.52%	23	79.31%	16	55.17%
4	01	3.45%	00	00%	05	17.24%
5 - 6	02	6.90%	00	00%	06	20.69%
7	00	00%	00	00%	00	00%
Total	29	100%	29	100%	29	100%

Table 5: Participants' Scores in the Grammaticality Judgment Task of Test 2

Table 5 refers to the results obtained in the grammaticality judgment task of Test 2. It shows that a majority of 19 participants (65.52%) have spotted and properly corrected between 1 and 3 errors in the paragraph out 7 errors. There are 7 participants (24.14%) who have spotted any error at all. One participant (3.45%) has spotted and corrected 4 errors and only 2 participants (6.90%) have spotted and properly corrected between 5 and 6 errors out of 7. Table 5 shows also that 23 participants (79.31%) have spotted between 1 and 3 errors but have not provided any corrections to them or the provided corrections are wrong. Moreover, Table 5 reveals that there are 16 participants (55.17%) have identified between 1 and 3 corrected cases as errors, 5 participants (17.24%) have identified 4 correct cases as errors and 6 participants (20.69%) identified between 5 and 6 correct verbs as erroneous.

A large majority of 27 participants has difficulty distinguishing between correct and erroneous uses of past tenses. This concerns mainly the uses of the present perfect simple and continuous and the past simple. The difficulty that the participants have faced can be due to their inability to internalise the uses and meaning of the present perfect because this tense is not found in the participants' mother language nor in standard Arabic, which leads to being unable to deciding about whether to use the past simple or the present perfect.

c. Future Tenses

The results obtained in the gap-filling task, the multiple-choice task and the grammaticality judgment task are shown in the tables below.

Correct Answers (Out of 8)	N°	%
0	01	3.45%
1 - 5	12	41.38%
6	03	10.34%
7 - 11	13	44.83%
12	00	00%
Total	29	100%

Table 6: Participants' Scores in the Gap-Filling Task of Test 3

Table 6 reveals that 13 participants (44.83%) have between 7 and 11 correct answers out of 12 possible correct answers in the first task related to future tenses while 12 participants (41.38%) have between 1 and 5 correct answers. One participant (3.45%) has no correct answers at all. There are 3 participants (10.34%) who have 6 correct answers out of the 12 possible correct answers.

Correct Answers (Out of 8)	N°	%
0	01	3.45%
1 - 3	05	17.24%
4	08	27.59%
5 - 7	15	51.72%
8	00	00%
Total	**29**	**100%**

Table 7: Participants' Scores in the Multiple-Choice Task of Test 3

Table 7 shows that 15 participants (51.72%) have between 5 and 7 correct answers out of 8 possible correct answers in the multiple-choice task while one participant (3.45%) has no correct answer at all. 8 participants (27/59%) have 4 correct answers and 5 other participants (17.24%) have between 1 and 3 correct answers.

The majority of participants in the gap-filling task and the multiple-choice task have at least half the number of correct answers. In the former task, a majority of 16 participants (55.17%) have between 6 and 11 correct answers out of 12 possible correct answers. In the latter task, 23 participants (79.31%) have between 4 and 7 correct answers out of 8 possible correct answers. This reflects a good mastery of the future tenses by most of the participants. However, it is clear that the number of participants who have at least half the correct answers in the multiple-choice task is more significant than the number of participants who have at least half the correct answers in the gap-filling task of Test 3. Moreover, the scores obtained in the first task reveal that the future tenses with which participants have faced difficulties with the future perfect, the future continuous and describing future plans and arrangements using the present continuous or the form *be going to*. On the other hand, the scores obtained in the second task show that the participants have difficulties with the uses of the future perfect simple and the future continuous.

Answers (Out of 8)	Spotting + Proper correction		Spotting + Wrong correction/No correction provided		Correct cases identified as errors	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
0	05	17.24%	05	17.24%	00	00%
1 - 3	17	58.62%	19	65.52%	19	65.52%
4	03	10.34%	05	17.24%	03	10.34%
5 - 7	04	13.79%	00	00%	07	24.14%
8	00	00%	00	00%	00	00%
Total	**29**	**100%**	**29**	**100%**	**29**	**100%**

Table 8: Participants' Scores in the Grammaticality Judgment Task of Test 3

The scores shown in Table 8 refer to the results obtained in the grammaticality judgment task of Test 3 related to future tenses. Table 8 shows that 17 participants (58.62%) have spotted and properly corrected between 1 and 3 errors out of 8 possible errors while 5 participants (17.24%) have not spotting any error. There are 3 participants (10.34%) who have spotted and corrected 4 errors out of 8 possible errors, and 4 participants (13.79%) have succeeded to spot and properly correct between 5 and 7 errors related to future tenses.

One can also notice in Table 8 that 19 participants (65.52%) have identified between 1 and 3 errors out of 8 possible errors, but either have not provided any correction or their corrections were wrong while 5 participants (17.24%) have spotted 4 errors without providing any correction to them or their corrections were wrong.

In addition, Table 8 reveals that 19 participants (65.52%) have identified between 1 and 3 correct uses of future tenses as errors while 3 participants (10.34%) have identified 4 correct uses as errors. It is worth noticing that 7 participants (24.14%) have identified between 5 and 7 correct uses of future tenses as errors.

The scores obtained in the grammaticality judgment task of Test 3 that concerns future tenses show that the participants face difficulties with the uses and meanings of the future continuous and the future perfect simple. What is also surprising about the participants' answers is that they have made many errors related to the use of the future simple referring to expectations and predictions. This is shown through the inability of the participants to identify the erroneous cases of the uses of the future simple in the paragraph and identifying other correct cases as erroneous instead of them.

III.2. Discussion of the Results

The results show that there are discrepancies concerning the scores obtained in the gap-filling task, the multiple-choice task and the grammaticality judgment task in the three tests.

The results reveal that the scores obtained in the multiple-choice tasks in the three tests are the highest compared to scores obtained in the gap-filling and grammaticality judgment tasks. One of the reasons may be the presentation of the right answers among a limited number of option. This leads the learners to identifying the appropriate form by guessing the right answer, which can be the result of being lucky in choosing what the answer among other options is or the result of eliminating the distractors and being left with the right answer only. Therefore, the learners do not always know what the right answer is since it is enough to know what it is not or having some luck. In such a task, the learners may fail to choose the right answer when they fail to identify the right answer among the distractors. In Test 2 related to past tenses and Test 3 related to future tenses, there are 3 options for each answer. Learners have failed to choose the right answers when the options referred to close uses of tenses. For example, they have faced difficulties deciding whether the present perfect simple or the past simple is appropriate in Test 2, and choosing among the options referring to the future continuous and the future perfect or among the options of the future perfect simple and continuous in Test 3.

The scores obtained in the gap-filling tasks in the three tests are not as high as those obtained in the multiple-choice tasks, but they are much higher than the ones obtained in the grammaticality judgment tasks. The gap-filling task seems to require other skills than identifying the right answer. It requires writing/typing answers after thinking carefully about the form they should have.

In Test 1 related to present tenses, the wrong answers in the gap-filling task concern mainly forgetting the third person singular –s in some verbs in the present simple, and the use of the present participle alone or the use wrong form of the auxiliary *to be* in some verbs in the present continuous. There are few mistakes in the gap-filling task in Test 1, which caused the scores in this task to be the closest to those obtained in the multiple-choice task of the same test in comparison with the two other tests. On the other hand, the gap-filling task in Test 2 has much lower scores because learners have failed to provide the appropriate verb forms. This task is difficult because the learners have to think of the different uses and meanings of past tenses and their relevance to the context provided taking into consideration the regular or irregular past and past participle forms of verbs, and the appropriate auxiliary to use to form perfect and perfect continuous tenses. Consequently, most mistakes are caused by the wrong irregular forms of verbs, and confusing the use of the present perfect with the use of the past simple. Similarly, the scores obtained in the gap-filling task in Test 3 show that learners face difficulties with the future perfect since they have failed to provide the adequate past participle forms of irregular verbs and combining the auxiliary *will* with

the auxiliary *to be* to form the future continuous. However, it is worth noting that learners' familiarity with this kind of tasks has led them to score quite well in the three tests. The gap-filling task is the most common type of grammar tasks that the learners are exposed to in English grammar assessment contexts since they start learning English in middle school, and it is also used to assess learners' knowledge of other grammatical forms such as nouns, pronouns, adjectives, passive and active, and prepositions. It is no surprise then that they do fairly well in this task as they know what they are expected to provide.

The grammaticality judgment tasks in the three tests have the lowest scores of correct answers; this is more noticeable in Test 2 and Test 3 than in Test 1, however. In Test 1, the participants are asked to spot erroneous uses of two tenses only –the present simple and the present continuous.

On the other hand, they are asked to spot the erroneous uses of six past tenses in Test 2 –namely the past simple, the past continuous, the past perfect simple, the past perfect continuous, the present perfect simple and the present perfect continuous, and five future tenses in Test 3 – namely the future simple with *will* and *shall*, the future simple with the present continuous and *be going to*, the future continuous, the future perfect simple and the future perfect continuous. The great number of the uses of tenses concerned in Test 2 and Test 3 have probably caused the participants to score lower than in Test 1.

Another quite likely reason is the participants having to consider the uses of perfect tenses. In fact, most of the incorrect answers the participants have given in the grammaticality judgment tasks in Test 2 and Test 3 are related respectively to the present perfect simple and continuous and the future perfect and future continuous. In Test 2, the learners seem to get confused between the uses of the present perfect and the past simple. This can be seen in them identifying correct uses of the present perfect as errors and suggesting to replace them by the past simple forms of the verbs. In other cases, they do exactly the opposite as they replace the correct uses of the past simple by the erroneous uses of the present perfect. Similarly, the learners have difficulty distinguishing the cases of erroneous use of the future perfect simple and the future continuous in Test 3. They tend to identify correct uses of the former as errors and replace them by uses of the latter or uses of the present perfect continuous. Likewise, they replace the correct uses of the future simple by erroneous uses of the future perfect simple or future perfect continuous.

One significant reason why the learners do not do well in the grammaticality judgment task is that they are not accustomed to this type of tasks. Most teachers identify the errors and correct them themselves without giving the learners the chance to think of where the errors are located, why they are considered errors, and how to correct them properly. This is the case in classroom activities and interaction, and in tests as well. Teachers usually justify this attitude by lack of time for such an activity where the learners are given the opportunity to use their knowledge of grammar and their intuition to spot the error, identifying the reasons behind them and suggest a correction to them. In some other cases, teachers do not provide any feedback about learners' errors. They avoid giving lengthy explanations and prefer to give the right answer straight away instead of taking time to explain why a specific form is more appropriate than another.

The most obvious reason behind the learners' incorrect answers in Test 2 and Test 3 seems to be the absence of the perfect tenses in the learners' mother language or in standard Arabic. Some tenses can be found in standard Arabic and dialectal Algerian Arabic; this is the case of the past simple. The present simple in English does not have an exact equivalent in neither standard Arabic nor dialectal Algerian Arabic; however, the notion of present is found in what is labelled المضارع in standard Arabic, which is a combination of present and future, and the existence of phrases in dialectal Algerian Arabic referring to the future. Unlike the other tenses that can be found in the different regional accents of dialectal Algerian Arabic and/or in standard Arabic, the uses of the present perfect, for example, always confuse the learners and they cause them to substitute their uses by the use of the past simple. Equally, the uses of the future

continuous and future perfect simple and continuous are challenging to students because of their absence in the learners' mother tongue or standard Arabic.

IV- Conclusion:

The present study shows that the different grammar test tasks give results that reflect knowledge of the uses of English tenses differently. Learners' knowledge about the uses of English tenses is revealed through the scores obtained in the gap-filling test tasks, multiple-choice test tasks, and grammaticality judgment test tasks. It is impossible to say that each separate task type assesses learners' knowledge of the uses of English tenses properly because the scores of each task type do not agree. One cannot assume that learners have a good mastery of the uses of English tenses based on the high scores obtained in the multiple-choice test task because the scores obtained in the two other kinds of test tasks do not lead to the same assumption. Similarly, it is impossible to say that learners have a low mastery of English tenses based on the low scores obtained in the grammaticality judgment test tasks. It is, therefore, safe to say that any decision about a well-balanced measurement of learners' knowledge related to the uses of English tenses should be based on a careful analysis of the scores of the three test tasks at the same time. It is also possible to include other test tasks that may add more accurate to the assessment of EFL learners' use of English tenses.

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