Performance of Major English Students at King Faisal University: General Trends

Mubarak S. Al-Braik

Dep. of Foreign Languages, College of Education, King Faisal University
Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to investigate the general trends in performance of students majoring in English at the Department of Foreign Languages, King Faisal University. This is done by studying the performance of 197 male and female students (64 male and 133 female) in the modified version of Michigan Test. This is used in the Department of Foreign Languages to admit students majoring in English, and it is called the Department Admission Test.

A number of statistical calculations about the relationships among the Department Admission Test, the university general English course, skill courses and major English courses are carried out. The results show that there is a statistical difference between the scores of the Department Admission Test and those of the general English course. There is also a difference between the scores of each of the above two and the General Point Average (GPA) of skill courses and the major English courses. The trend of the GPA scores shows that the scores of skill and major English courses are relatively high, mainly because the scores of skill courses and the major courses are obtained through achievement tests and continuous assessment, while the Department Admission Test is a general proficiency test.

Introduction :

Performance is the ultimate result of the learner's ability and suitability for learning a foreign language. In addition, performance reveals learners' culture, educational administration, teaching process, and evaluations. Hence, knowing the general trends in learners' performance offers a concrete measurable manifestation of the learning experience. Such knowledge benefits administrators (Illich *et. al.* 2004), program designers (Ali 1995) and teachers (Al-Braik *et. al.* forthcoming, and Free-Weiss 2004).

The use of admission tests to accept students to specialize in English implies that the test has a predicting power (Christopher 1996). Performance is, however, more complex than what a straightforward performance and aptitude tests or an admission test would suggest (Coyner 1993).

The present study attempts to pin down the general trends in performance in the Department Admission Test, general English course, language skills courses and major English courses, by investigating the relationships among these variables.

The department of Foreign Languages, King Faisal University, uses the modified Michigan test plus a writing component for admitting students to major in English and be teachers of English as a foreign language. This proficiency test is used as an admission test and it is called a Department Admission Test in this study.

This study is intended to know whether this test can be used as an indicator of students' future performance. It is also planned to establish the relationships among various English courses offered to major English students. The areas selected for investigation are four which include: (1) the Department Admission test, (2) the general English course101, (3) skill courses in the first and second year, (4) major English courses which start from second semester in the second year. The major English courses focus on introductions to English Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, and English Literature. The following abbreviations are used in this study to denote these variables:

1. Department Admission Test: DAT
2. General English course 101:   GE101
3. General point average skill courses in the first year: GPA1
4. General point average of skill courses in the second year: GPA2
5. General point average of all skill courses in the 1st and 2nd years: GPA3
6. major English courses: GPAMJR
7. King Faisal University   KFU

There are eight language skill courses which concentrate on the intermediate level: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, structure and writing. At higher level, more grammar and reading and writing courses are included.

The DAT is a general proficiency test and students take it without any formal preparation. But the GE101 is evaluated by using continuous assessment and achievement tests. Being a general university requirement, the GE101 is taught to all the students of the university as well as English major students.

GPA indicates the general point average obtained by the student as a result of the evaluation of the course including the final examination. GPA1 is the total score of the four skill courses in the first year. GPA2 is the total score of all skill courses in the second year. GPA3 is the total score of all skill courses in the first and second year.

Statistical Calculations :

In order to obtain the performance of students in the four areas mentioned above, the following statistical calculations will be found out by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the level of significance is 0.05.

1. The correlation of the DAT scores with the scores of GE101.
2. The correlation of the DAT scores with the scores of each of GPA1, GPA2 and GPA3.
3. The correlation of the DAT scores with the scores of GPAMJR.
4. The correlation of the GPA1 scores with the scores of GPA2.
5. The correlation of the GPA2 scores with the scores of GPA3.
6. The correlation of the GPA3 scores with the scores of GPAMJR.

The first statistical correlation seeks to discover the relationship between students' performance in GE101 and the DAT. This relationship between GE101 and DAT reveals the performance in this general course.

The second statistical correlation investigates the relationship between DAT and each of the GPA1, GPA2, and GPA 3. Like all other formal courses, skill and major English courses, the passing score of GE101 is 60%. Skill courses are taught by different staff members in the department and they are scored by using continuous assessment and a final examination. Major English courses are taught by specialized faculty members and their evaluations depend on the nature of the course and the method of evaluation used by the faculty member. However, normally a midterm examination and a final examination account for 70% of the total grade. All the scores used in this study were obtained from the department records. It is desirable to know how students are doing in these sets of courses compared with their score in the DAT. This reveals students' achievement in these skills. The third statistical calculation aims at discovering the relationship between the DAT and the performance of students in the major English courses. This will also give us a specific idea about the level of students' achievement in the major English courses compared with the DAT.

The fourth statistical calculation identifies the relationship between the scores in GPA1, and GPA2. This tests the consistency of the achievement of skill courses in the first and second years. The fifth statistical calculation examines the relationship between GPA2 and GPA3. This tests the performance of the skill courses in the second year compared with the total performance of all skills. The sixth statistical calculation identifies the relationship between GPA3 and GPAMJR. This probes the performance in all skill courses on the one hand, and all major courses on the other. Each of the six statistical calculation taps the performance of the major English students at different intervals and in different aspects of the program offered by the Department of Foreign Languages at King Faisal University. It should be noted that male and female students are dealt with as one sample since no significant difference is found between them as a whole. The statistical information of males and females will be discussed under "results and discussion".

Results and Discussion :

The general statistical information reported in Table (1) show the general trends represented by the mean of the scores. The DAT scores are very well below in comparison with the GE101 scores. The GPA in the skill courses and major English courses is calculated out of 5. The GPA score 3 is equal to 60%. The GPAs 1,2,3 and Maj are in the middle between GE101 score of (89.1) and DAT score (49.8) for 197 male and female students.

Table (1)
General Statistical Information of
GE101, DAT, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3, and GPA MJR.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
GE 101	197	89.1777	6.9285
DAT	197	49.8731	15.3410
GPA1	197	3.0457	.8606
GPA2	197	3.0459	.7985
GPA-3	197	3.0382	.7995
GPA-Maj	197	3.0143	.7267

Table (2) reports the results of different correlations for male and female students. The correlation between GE101 and DAT is (.483) which is weak. Hence, **there is no statistical relationship between the scores of DAT and those of GE101.** The other correlations between DAT and GPA1 is (.667); between DAT and GPA2 is (.565); and between DAT and GPA3 is (.637). These correlations are higher than 50% and less than 68%.

Table (2)
Pearson correlations among the variables of
GE101, DAT, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3, and GPA MJR.

Variable	GE	DAT	GPA1	GPA2	GPA-3	GPA-Maj
DAT Pearson Correlation	.483	1.000	.667	.565	.637	.465
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	197	197	197	197	197	197
GE Pearson Correlation	1.000	.483	.583	.570	.606	.434
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	197	197	197	197	197	197
GPA1 Pearson Correlation	.583	.667	1.000	.833	.948	.759
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	197	197	197	197	197	197
GPA2 Pearson Correlation	.570	.565	.833	1.000	.962	.868
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	197	197	197	197	197	197
GPA-3 Pearson Correlation	.606	.637	.948	.962	1.000	.856
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	197	197	197	197	197	197
GPA-Maj Pearson Correlation	.434	.465	.759	.868	.856	1.000
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	197	197	197	197	197	197

Since the correlations are less than 70%, there is no significant relationship between the results of the DAT and each of GPA1, GPA2 and GPA3.

The correlation between DAT scores and GPAMJR scores is (.465), and it is weak. Thus, there is no significant relationship between the scores of the DAT and those of the GPAMJR. The results relating to the first three calculations about the relationship between the DAT scores on the one hand, and the scores of each of the GE 101, each of the three sets of skill courses, and the major courses on the other hand, one can safely conclude that the DAT is not an indicator of the performance of students at the department. However, GE101 scores are higher than those of the skill and major courses. This may be due to the assessment methods of GE101, skill courses and major courses. It could also be influenced by the fact that major courses are not assessed on language alone, since content in Linguistics and Literature is a major factor in these courses. The fourth

statistical calculation states that the relationship between scores of the GPA1 and GPA2. The correlation here is (.833), which is quite high. This means that there is significant relationship between the scores of GPA1 and those of GPA2. The fifth statistical calculation shows the relationship between GPA2 and GPA3, we find that the correlation is (.962). This shows that there is a very strong relationship between the scores of GPA2 and GPA3. The fourth and fifth statistical calculations show that the performance of students in skill courses in the first year and second year is homogenous. This raises the question of the relation of skill courses to the major English courses, which is investigated in the sixth calculation. The correlation between GPA3 and GPAMJR is (.856). This is a strong relationship between the performance in all skill courses and the performance in all major English courses.

A brief look at tables (3), (4), (5), and (6) shows that the difference between male and female students' performance is very slight. A look at the means reported in Tables (3) and (4) shows a slight difference between male and female with reference to the mean scores.

Table (3)
General Statistical Information of Male student scores of
GE101, DAT, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3, and PA MJR

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
DAT	64	47.5781	16.6334
GE	64	87.8125	8.8243
GPA1	64	3.1178	.9171
GPA2	64	3.0428	.8715
GPA-3	64	3.0759	.8561
GPA-Maj	64	3.0420	.7594

Table (4)
General Statistical Information of Female student scores of
GE101, DAT, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3, and GPA MJR.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
DAT	133	50.9774	14.6159
GE101	133	89.8346	5.7250
GPA1	133	3.0111	.8333
GPA2	133	3.0474	.7643
GPA-3	133	3.0200	.7735
GPA-Maj	133	3.0010	.7130

he correlations among the research variables for male and female students are shown in Table (5) and Table (6).

Table (5)
Pearson correlations of male students' scores among the variables of GE101,
DAT, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3, and GPA MJR in Male students' scores

Variable	GE101	DAT	GPA1	GPA2	GPA-3	GPA-Maj
DAT Pearson Correlation Sing. (2-tailed) N	.486 .000 64	1.000 .000 64	.649 .000 64	.478 .000 64	.582 .000 64	.281 .000 64
GE101 Pearson Correlation Sing. (2-tailed) N	1.000 .000 64	.486 .000 64	.597 .000 64	.621 .000 64	.653 .000 64	.413 .000 64
GPA1 Pearson Correlation Sing. (2-tailed) N	.597 .000 64	.649 .000 64	1.000 .000 64	.810 .000 64	.934 .000 64	.718 .000 64
GPA2 Pearson Correlation Sing. (2-tailed) N	.621 .000 64	.478 .000 64	.810 .000 64	1.000 .000 64	.960 .000 64	.850 .000 64
GPA-3 Pearson Correlation Sing. (2-tailed) N	.653 .000 64	.582 .000 64	.934 .000 64	.960 .000 64	1.000 .000 64	.838 .000 64
GPA-Maj Pearson Correlation Sing. (2-tailed) N	.413 .000 64	.281 .000 64	.718 .000 64	.850 .000 64	.838 .000 64	1.000 .000 64

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table (6)
Pearson correlations of female students' scores among the variables of
GE101, DAT, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3, and GPA MJR

	GE101	DAT	GPA1	GPA2	GPA-3	GPA-Maj
DAT Pearson Correlation	.477	1.000	.695	.623	.683	.580
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	133	133	133	133	133	133
GE101 Pearson Correlation	1.000	.477	.612	.548	.602	.479
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.025
N	133	133	133	133	133	133
GPA1 Pearson Correlation	.612	.695	1.000	.849	.957	.782
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	133	133	133	133	133	133
GPA2 Pearson Correlation	548	.623	.849	1.000	.964	.879
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	133	133	133	133	133	133
GPA-3 Pearson Correlation	.602	.683	.957	.964	1.000	.867
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	133	133	133	133	133	133
GPA-Maj Pearson Correlation	.479	.580	.782	.879	.867	1.000
Sing. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	133	133	133	133	133	133

The correlation between DAT and GE101 is 0.486 for males and 0.477 for females. These correlations are almost similar and they are weak. The correlation between DAT with other variables of male and female are as the following:

Male students: GPA1 (.649), GPA2 (.478), GPA3 (.582), and GPAMJR (.281)
Female students: GPA1 (.695), GPA2   (.623),   GPA3 (683), and GPAMJR (.580).

These correlations are all rather low, but the last one, the correlation between DAT and GPAMJR shows a difference between Males and Females scores: (.281) for Males and (.580) for Females. This is the only noticed significant difference between Male and Female students' performance. At the same time, it does not affect the homogenous assessment of the courses offered by the department because the

discrepancy is in relation to the scores of the DAT, which is external to the department operation.

The findings of the present study can be summarized in the following points.

1. Performance in the DAT is not an indicator of the future performance in General English 101 or other skill and major courses. Students score very much higher in the GE101 than the DAT. They also score relatively higher in the skill courses and major English courses than the DAT. The high performance of GE101 does not reflect the rather low performance in skill and major courses.

2. Performance in the first-year skill courses predicts the performance in second-year courses and the major English courses.

3. Performance in all skill courses predicts performance in major English courses.

4. There are three trends in the performance of students majoring in English at the Department of Foreign Languages, King Faisal University:
    a. The first trend is seen in the performance in the DAT. The performance in this test is low: less than 50%.
    b. The second trend is seen in the GE101. The performance of students is higher than 89%.
    c. The third trend is seen in the skill courses and the major English courses offered by the Department of Foreign Languages to students majoring in English. The performance of students in skill and major courses is quite comparable, about 60%.

At this point it is worthwhile to inquire: why do skill courses and major English courses offered by the department correlate with each other while the DAT and the GE101 do not? The DAT is a proficiency test taken without any preparation. It reflects the level of English in the Saudi public schools which is known to be narrow, textbook-based and evaluated mainly by classroom teachers (Al-Eid 2000). Moreover, the DAT is scored out of 100%, and the evaluators do not know the students. The scores of GE101, GPA1, GPA2, GPA3 and GPAMJR are obtained from actual results where the instructors teach and evaluate their own

students. The examinations are achievement examinations and continuous assessment is used in this evaluation which assigns about 70% for formal examinations and 30% for class-work attendance and participation. It is quite natural to find higher scores with achievement examinations which are based on a well-defined syllabus and classroom assessment. In this situation, the quality of the products hinges on the execution of the curriculum and the dominant classroom culture (see Al-Saadat el. al. 2004). Thus, the research into achievements of Saudi learners, for example, should focus on what goes on in the classroom, in terms of actual teaching/learning and the features of group practices and the values of classroom itself.

The other inquiry is: why are the GE101 scores which are very high in comparison to all other scores in the study? The GE101 is a general university requirement. It is taught by different language instructors and it is based on a highly-focused syllabus. The evaluation practices may be similar to those of public school practices. In addition, some instructors narrow down the objectives of the course so much so that the evaluation reflects examination questions and concerns. Therefore, students depend on the rehearsed formulae and they study for the examination and not for learning the language as such.

Conclusion and Recommendations :

In light of the findings and discussion above, we can reiterate the three main trends in performance illustrated by the present data: (1) low performance in the DAT test (less than 50%), (2) very high performance in the GE101 course (higher than 89%), and (3) moderate performance in the skill and major courses (about 60%). This means that the average student can graduate from the English major with a percentage between 60% and 70%. It would seem that the key to improve the achievement of students in this situation is to demand a higher score for entering the program. This will secure better results for skill and major courses and it will guarantee a higher pass rate and lower attrition rate, since about 20% of male students transfer to the other specializations or leave to take up other careers. To help students achieve a higher score on entry, the department can require a preparatory year during which students take an

intensive English course which prepares them to start the English major program.

The study strongly recommends this course of action. The realization of such a year hinges on the decision of the administration of the university. However, the dictum about the relation between input and output in educational institutions cannot be truer. It is agreed upon that the input of educational program in terms of learners' level, curriculum, textbooks and teaching methods, should be improved. The suggested preparatory year will active in this direction.

References:

1. Al-Braik, Mubarak S., Abdullah I. Al-Saadat, and Omar S. Al-Shabab, (forthcoming). "Teaching Translation at University Level: Planning, Teaching and Evaluation", *Journal of Damascus University*. Damascus, Syria.

2. Al-Saada, Abdullah I., Mubarak S. Al-Braik, and Omar S. Al-Shabab, (2005). "Local Needs and the Characteristics of Local General English Language Programs", *Seminar Proceedings: Teaching English in Saudi Arbia: Opportunities and Challenges*. Riyad, Saudi Arabia, Al-Yamama College,
   pp.(-).

3. 3.- Al-Eid, Saleh H. (2000). *The Use of Pictures and Drawings in Teaching Paragraph Writing in Saudi Secondary Schools*. M.A. dissertation, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia.

4. Ali, M. Salaiman (1995). "The Major Quantitative Findings of a Study of the English Language-Based Study Skills problems of Two Groups of Foreign Students at an American University", *ERIC* online Database.

5. Al-Muhaidib, Nouriya S. (1998). *An Analysis of Errors in the Written English of Female Students at King Faisal University*. M.A. Dissertation, King Faisal University.

6. Christopher, Virginia Louise (1996). *Direct and Indirect Placement Test Scores As Measures of Language Proficiency and Predictors of Academic Success for ESL Students*. M.A. Dissertation, The University of British Colombia.

7. Coley, David T. and Christine A. Tell, (1996). *Admission Standards: Content and Process Areas Proficiencies and Indicators*. Oregon State System Higher Education.

8. Coyner, Sandra C. (1993). "Relationship Between Academic Achievement and Preadmission Testing Criteria for Teacher Education Students at the University of Akron". *ERIC* online Database.

9. Dick, Robert (1987). "Teaching Speech Communication to a sub Culture in Saudi Arabia", *ERIC Online Database*.

10. Free-Weiss, Dana (2004). "Community College Freshmen: Last In, First Out?", *Journal of College Students Retention Research Theory and Practice, Vol.6, No. 2*. pp. 137-154.

11. Illich, Paul A., Cathy Hgan, and Lislie McCallister (2004). "Performance in College-Level Courses among Students Concurrently Enrolled in Remedial

Courses: Policy Implications", *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, Vol.28, No.5*. pp. 435-453.

12. Omari, Khalid and M. R. Zughoul (1986). "Towards Formalizing an Educational Admission Policy for English Major at Arab Universities: A Case Study", *ERIC* online Database

13. Sternberg, Robert (2004). "Theory-Based University Admission Testing for a New Millennium", *Educational Psychologist, Vol.39, No.3*, pp. 185-198.

14. Watt, David L. E. and M. Lake, (2000). "Canadian Language Benchmarks-TOEFL Research Project: A Comparison Study of the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment and the Test of English as a Foreign Language". ERIC online Database.

أداء طلاب التخصص في اللغة الإنجليزية
في جامعة الملك فيصل : الاتجاهات العامة

مبارك سالم البريك

قسم اللغات الأجنبية ، كلية التربية ، جامعة الملك فيصل
الأحساء ، المملكة العربية السعودية

الملخص:

يهدف البحث إلى استقصاء الاتجاهات العامة في أداء طلاب التخصص باللغة الإنجليزية في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بجامعة الملك فيصل . ويقوم الباحث بدراسة أداء عينة تبلغ ١٩٧ طالب و طالبة (٦٤ طالب و ١٣٣ طالبة) في امتحان جامعة ميشيغان المعدل الذي يستعمل في قسم اللغات الأجنبية لقبول الطلاب في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية ، وفي امتحان مقرر اللغة الإنجليزية العامة وفي امتحانات مقررات المهارات اللغوية الإنجليزية ومقررات تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية.

ومن أجل رصد الاتجاهات العامة في أداء الطلاب ، قام الباحث باختبار بعمليات إحصائية حول العلاقة بين الأداء في امتحان القبول من جهة والأداء في مقرر اللغة الإنجليزية العام ومقررات المهارات اللغوية الإنجليزية ومقررات تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية من جهة ثانية . وتبين النتائج أنه يوجد اختلاف إحصائي بين نتائج اختبار القبول ونتائج مقرر الإنجليزية العام . وهناك أيضاً اختلاف إحصائي بين نتائج كل من نتائج هذين الاختبارين والمعدل العام لمقررات المهارات اللغوية الإنجليزية ومقررات التخصص في اللغة الإنجليزية. وتبين اتجاهات الأداء في المعدل العام أن نتائج مقررات المهارات اللغوية الإنجليزية ومقررات التخصص في اللغة الإنجليزية هي عالية نسبياً ، ويعود ذلك بشكل عام إلى أنه يتم الحصول على نتائج هذه المقررات عن طريق امتحانات التحصيل والتقويم المستمر ، في حين أن امتحان القبول هو امتحان لقياس القدرة العامة في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.