

Full Length Research Paper

The attitudes of students and faculty members towards using achievement tests as a part of entrance requirements to King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Tomather Alomari

Jeddah - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Author' email: tomatheralomari@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Recently, the procedure for accessing higher education in Saudi Arabia has been changed. It now includes students taking an academic achievement test in order to access most Saudi universities. Therefore, the focus of this research is to study the attitudes of students and faculty members towards using achievement tests as a part of entrance requirements for King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The tools applied in this research are questionnaire and interview. Questionnaires were distributed to ninety-two students and faculty members in the School of Arabic at King Abdul-Aziz University, and interviews were conducted with a selection of those students and faculty members at the same school. Most participants agreed that the achievement test helps the admissions departments of higher education institutions to indicate the student's academic level when finishing high school. However, it is necessary to develop the test in several aspects, such as not including questions on subjects that were studied before the final year at high school because students are most likely to forget them. The curriculum and teaching methods used in the final year should also be modified and the test should not depend on memorization. In the interviews, several different views were expressed; for instance, a few first-year students said that it is difficult to obtain a high mark in the achievement test because there is not enough time to answer the questions. However, one of the teachers disagreed with that point, saying that the short time given is to measure students' speed in reading the questions, thinking and writing their answers. The most significant problem was found to be that most participants had forgotten the courses previously studied and the greatest benefit was believed to be that taking the achievement test is a good indicator of students' academic level when finishing high school which, in turn, was thought to be the main reason for changing the university admissions system to include the achievement test.

Keywords: Achievement Test, Assessment, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I focus on studying the attitudes of students and faculty members towards using achievement tests as a part of entrance requirements to

King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The chosen research methodology is a case study.

The participants of the research are first, second and

third year students and faculty members in the School of Arabic in the above-mentioned university. The concept of achievement tests will be explained in depth in the review of literature. Recently, the achievement test has become part of the process for students who want to access some universities in Saudi Arabia. Many students are being negatively affected by this test, but some of the participants thought that achievement tests can measure the students' skills. It seems to me that, although the achievement test is important to predict students' eligibility for university education, there are still some questions to be asked about its effectiveness.

The aim of this study was to study people's attitudes at King Abdul-Aziz University towards the use of the academic achievement test scores in order to predict their eligibility for university education, and to investigate whether achievement tests should be applied in all Saudi universities by looking at the benefits and the problems in their use, by answering the following questions:

-What is the purpose of changing the admissions system to include achievement tests, by looking at both the old system and the new system in Saudi Arabian higher education?

- What are the benefits and problems of using achievement tests as a part of King Abdul-Aziz University's entrance requirements?

The dissertation consists of five chapters: chapter one is the introduction and it describes the context, and the focus of the research; chapter 2 is the literature review, which presents and reviews different studies from different contexts; chapter 3 explains and justifies the choice of research methodology; chapter 4 presents the data analysis, and discusses the findings and the results of the study; chapter 5 presents the conclusions of the study and the possible implications for future research.

Purpose of the study

The main aim of this research is to study people's attitudes at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia towards the use of academic achievement test scores in order to predict their eligibility for university education, and to investigate whether achievement tests should be applied in all Saudi universities by looking at the benefits and the problems in their use.

Research questions

There are two main questions which this project hopes to answer, and these are:

- 1 -What is the purpose of changing the admissions system to include achievement tests?
- 2 -What are the benefits and problems of using achievement tests as a part of King Abdul-Aziz

University's entrance requirements?

Brief overview of university entrance requirements in Saudi Arabia

Widespread changes to the assessment of students wanting to access higher education in Saudi Arabia (KSA) took place in 2008, and now students must achieve high scores in three test before going on to higher education. This change was decreed several years previously, in 19 May, 2002 by Royal Order number 471 / 8, which was issued after being approved by the Council of Higher Education, and supported by the Council of Ministers. The order stipulated that: "Part of the admission requirements for university entrance is testing using specific outcome criteria used along with standard high school marks, and the testing is conducted according to the following: The first test is to measure students' abilities, skills and aptitudes, which is an Aptitude Test. The second test is to measure educational attainment. This test is standardized for all disciplines that fall in one area – Science or Arts, which is the Achievement Test" (National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education, 2007). The third procedure in university entrance is the percentage from the final high school examinations, which has been the only benchmark before the introduction of the aptitude and achievement tests.

The National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education (NCAHE) in KSA was established in 2002 as changes in KSA's education policy, especially regarding the field of assessment, reached across the board, from primary education to higher education. The mission of the Centre is given on its website: "The pursuit of justice and equal opportunities in higher education, and contribution to raising the efficiency of its institutions; based on sound scientific foundations" (NCAHE, 2007). As well as setting up testing in the various institutions of higher education in KSA, the NCAHE also work on developing means of educational measurement and raising the efficiency of higher education institutions. For this, it aims to attract expertise in various areas of interest so that it can provide advisory services to the Centres for Measurement established in various educational institutions by carrying out specialized research in this field (NCAHE, 2007).

This means that, since 2008, students have three test procedures in which they have to achieve high marks, the first being the percentage of their secondary school test, the second is the aptitude test, and the last one is the achievement test. Although this dissertation will only look at using the achievement test as a part of King Abdul-Aziz University's entrance requirements, the following is a brief overview of the secondary school percentage and the aptitude test, in order to provide more complete

background information. (The achievement test is described in detail later in this chapter).

Secondary school in KSA consists of three years, but students only have to have a high percentage in the last two years of secondary school, because the first year contains both arts and science's subjects. When students move to the second year, they have three options: Art, Science, or Religion. The Arts option includes Arabic Language, Literature, Geography, History, English, and Religion. The Science option includes Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, English, a little Arabic Language and Religion. The last one, Religion, is similar to Arts but it focuses on memorizing the holy book 'Quran'.

The goal of the aptitude test is to help students to identify their specialisation in higher education. The test consists of two main parts: a test of mathematical reasoning and a linguistic thinking test. The test of mathematical reasoning requires students to answer questions which test their ability to solve problems, and show common sense. This section of the test focuses on the ability to analyse and draw conclusions. The test of linguistic thinking is concerned with the measurement of the ability to differentiate between the meanings of words, as well as the linguistic relationship between derived words and phrases. Some of the questions ask students to complete sentences and to show their ability to read and understand texts deeply (Kotby and Kotby, 2003). The questions alternate between the two parts and are divided into six sections, with each section being allotted thirty minutes. The verbal sections consist of thirty-one questions, and the quantitative sections have a maximum of twenty-five questions. More details of the aptitude test are given in chapter four, section 4.1.2.

Nowadays, the achievement test is an increasingly popular strategy employed in many countries in order to assess students wanting to access higher education, in an attempt to determine their suitability and eligibility for this educational level. The National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education (NCAHE) in KSA defines achievement test as a test for high school graduates who wish to enrol in university courses. This kind of test was first introduced in KSA as one of the conditions for application to Science and Health colleges affiliated to universities, and the tests were set by the Ministry of Health. The achievement test examines the performance of an individual based on previous learning, therefore testing both general academic skills and the major concepts of all subjects studied in the last three years of high school. The two parts of the test are taken according to the students' subject area, Science or Arts. The Arts test consists of questions on Mathematics, Accounting, Economics, Sociology, Management Science, English, Arabic Grammar, Arabic Literature, Religion, and Computers. The Science test has questions on Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Arabic

Grammar, Religion, English, and Computers.

As the achievement test applied in KSA to measure students' abilities and skills in both general and specific subject areas, it is designed to evaluate factual knowledge as well as the ability to understand, interpret and apply learned knowledge. It is an objective test with multiple choice answers, and the questions are based on the course book for each subject studied during the final three years of secondary school, with different weightings for each year: 20% from the first year, 30% from the second year, and 50% from the third year. It has a total duration of two hours thirty minutes, giving students a maximum of one minute to answer each question. Although the achievement test is divided into science and arts subjects according to the course students want to gain access to in the university, there are questions from both areas in the test since the first year of the high school curriculum is general, covering both science and art subjects.

The achievement test is now taken by almost all those who want to enter university in KSA, whether in science or arts courses (NCAHE, 2007). However, some universities have not yet adopted this assessment tool as part of their entrance requirements, partly because there is a belief that the achievement test in KSA is difficult for students to pass. Given that of the purposes of the present study is to investigate the reason for changing the admissions system to include this test, particular attention will be paid to the potential benefits and problems inherent in the use of achievement tests.

Statement of the problem

Currently, students in Saudi Arabia are not able to access higher education without first taking an achievement test and aptitude test, and obtaining high marks in both of them. The previous requirement had been for students to graduate from secondary school with marks of 80% and above in their final year tests. Now, as a result, students are complaining because the further tests they have to take reduce their opportunities to access higher education without paying any fees. On the other hand, educators think that achievement tests can predict students' eligibility for university education, so the issue of payment of fees is not foremost in their minds. Moreover, there is another issue that would seem to be problematical both in the achievement and aptitude test that is, science students have to answer arts questions and arts students have to answer science questions.

The role of achievement tests in KSA

The main objectives of the achievement/aptitude tests developed and administered by the NCAHE which is

explained above was established to oversee this problematic situation, are several:

- i) To select students who deserve to gain access to higher education, according to their eligibility because there is an increasing number of students who wish to enrol in this level of education who cannot be accommodated due to a hostage of places.
- ii) To reduce the dropout rates of higher education resulting from the weakness of the educational level of some students.
- iii) To reduce failure rates and subsequent delay in graduation within the period specified, which automatically leads to fewer places becoming available to new applicants.
- iv) To reduce the number of students who often move from one major to another within a single institution or between institutions, and who continue to specialize due to the lack of scientific relevance of their eligibility.
- v) To raise the level of efficiency of institutions of higher education, so that those institutions do not have to spend so much time and effort addressing the defaulters and, as a result, they will be able to keep pace with educational developments (NCAHE, 2007).

Therefore, with the introduction of achievement and aptitude tests as part of entrance requirements to some Saudi universities, including King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU), the final percentage which determine access is divided in the following way: the mark from secondary school is within 50%; the aptitude test counts is within 30%; and the achievement test counts for the remaining is within 20%. The minimum percentage overall which students have to obtain in order to access KAU is 83%. However, this percentage can fluctuate slightly, mainly due to the number of students who obtain that mark in a given year. On the other hand, students whose percentage is less than the required percentage still have an opportunity to access KAU by paying tuition fees (Umm Al-Qura University, 2001).

The Symposium for Admission and Standards in Saudi Universities, under the auspices of the Saudi Minister of Higher Education and the Rector of UMM Al-Qura University (2001) agree on the importance of aptitude and achievement tests alongside students' secondary school marks for acceptance in university in Saudi Arabia. The NCAHE and universities determine the percentage of each test's total, and they believe that this will achieve the following advantages: the students who will be able to continue in university successfully, to reduce educational and financial wastage, and also to identify the subjects most suitable for students' abilities and aptitudes. However, Alsaed (2010) argues that the factors that affect the stability of the test must also be considered:

1. Probability of guesswork: those questions which allow speculation, such as YES/NO questions, must be

eliminated because the results will not have much validity.

2. Psychological and physical conditions of students: any conditions affecting the health of students and their performance in psychological testing can lead to a lack of reliability, and high anxiety and tension affect the stability of the test.

There is also an emphasis on employing methods to detect trends and development, starting from secondary school, to help students choose the appropriate specialization upon finishing secondary education. On the other hand, Kohn (2000) states that the crucial point is that standardized tests do not offer such objectivity, although it is easy to assume when the exact numerical score is given to the student or school.

Despite the importance of achievement tests, there are some disadvantages. Alsaed (2010) summarizes some of the disadvantages as follows:

Psychological effect

1. They can generate a kind of anxiety and fear in students, leading to a possible nervous breakdown for some who may feel a certain helplessness and lack of confidence given that achievement tests will identify if students can access university or not, a very important step.

Educational implications

2. The Achievement Test changes the focus of students to preparing a person to face the future through achieving the goal that is success in the test.
3. The tests in their current state are not conducive to innovation, but to memorization.
4. The tests focus on some subjects and leave out others such as art and physical education, despite their importance for individuals and cultures.
5. When students fail in the Achievement test, this may result in them feeling like failures in the society and end up unemployed. (Alsaed, 2010)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Case studies

The case study took place in the female section of the School of Arabic at King Abdul Aziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and it look at the use of achievement tests as a part of KAU's entrance requirements. One of the main advantages of the case study is that the researcher can focus on one aspect of a problem in detail from different views. Therefore, in this

Table 1. Number of students who completed questionnaires, and who were interviewed.

Students in School of Arabic, KAU	Questionnaire	Interview
First year	52 students, including 8 who study through distance learning	8 students
Second year	15 students	3 students
Third year	17 students	7 students
Total	84	18

Table 2. Number of lecturers who completed questionnaires, and who were interviewed.

Lecturers in School of Arabic, KAU	Questionnaire	Interview
	8 lecturers	5 lecturers

study, both students and faculty members from the School of Arabic at KAU took part in questionnaires and interviews. Through these instruments, which would facilitate gathering the information needed to support this study, and which are particularly relevant for investigating sociological studies, I wanted to explore the attitudes and opinions of participants about achievement tests. They would allow me to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data. Thus, I will be able to fulfil my research aim, to study students' attitudes towards the use of the academic achievement test in order to predict eligibility for university education.

The participants

The participants in this case study include female faculty members and students from the first, second and third year of the School of Arabic at KAU, in order to identify whether their perception of the achievement test changes in terms of their experience and perspective on its relevance to their academic careers. The students' experience and views can change in the first year, all students follow a foundation course, and they do not study their specialization until the second year.

The first step in the case study was that the above-mentioned students and faculty members were given a questionnaire and the quantitative data from this was compiled in order to identify general trends in their responses. After that, A selection of students and faculty member from the same department to interview in order to gather detailed qualitative information about their attitudes towards the achievement test, as well as their opinions on the problems and benefits of these types of test, and their opinion on the purpose of changing the admissions system to include this test.

In order to gain access to KAU, a permission was obtained to start my research from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia by submitting

my research proposal and other relevant documents (See Appendix A). A proposal was also send to the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London so that I will be given a letter to facilitate the task in KAU (See Appendix B). Finally, these were sent to my father to be delivered to the director of KAU, along with a letter requesting the cooperation of the faculty members (See Appendix). One month later, a permission to access KAU and the faculty members was received, and the fieldwork began.

METHODS

The data for my research project was collected from the female section of the School of Arabic at King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU) over one month. A distribution questionnaires written in Arabic was done and an interviews section was done for both students and faculty members. The tables 1 and 2 below show the number of students from different years, and the faculty members, who were given a questionnaire, and who were interviewed.

Research tools

Two main research tools was use on this study, which are questionnaires and interviews. Each of these is described in detail in the following sections.

Questionnaire

In this study, a designed questionnaire with open questions to fit qualitative methodology. The participants are eighty-four female students and eight faculty members at the School of Arabic at King Abdul-Aziz University, and the students were from the first, second and third years. A self preparation regarding the design of the questionnaire was done by reading some samples of

questionnaires in the field of education in general to have an idea about the different kinds of questions, such as open and closed questions. Furthermore, A careful examination of the policy of the Saudi Ministry of Education with respect to the academic achievement test, and thought about what data can be use to obtain response from the participants in the study and this aided the designing of two questionnaires, one for the students and the other for the faculty members (See Appendix D), taking into consideration the aim of the research and the research questions. A feedback on the form with changes made by my supervisor was received.

In order to identify whether their perception on the academic achievement test had changed, the questionnaire focused on asking the participants about their attitudes towards this test as part of university entrance requirements. The students were also asked about their problems in taking this test to give them the opportunity to determine the drawbacks of test in their opinion as well as to identify any benefits of this test. The questionnaire contained some questions with some optional answers, to be chosen as they see fit. One of these, for example, was: 'What are the obstacles that hinder students in passing the achievement test?' and the optional answers were: 1-Not having courses at high school to introduce the achievement test and its aim to students; 2-Lack of training of students with sample questions from the achievement test; 3-Finding the wrong answer in some of the books that students use to revise and prepare for the achievement test. Questions 1 to 6 had options in order to encourage students to provide answers. However, there were also two open questions which asked for YES/NO answers, and for them to give the reason(s) for their answer so that they can express their opinions freely.

All students in the first, second and third years had the same questions in the questionnaire, whereas the faculty members had a slightly different questionnaire, including questions such as: 'Is there a difference between the level of the students who have taken this test and students who did not undergo this test in the past to enter the university?', 'Do you think that the achievement test is valuable?', 'Does the achievement test improve the standard of students?', and 'In what way does the achievement test cause problems with students?'. Faculty members were asked these kinds of questions in order to explore their opinions about the achievement test as lecturers, so they could have a different perspective to that of the students. (See Appendix D).

Interviews

In this study, the interviews were conducted with two groups of participants: the first group was the students from in the School of Arabic at KAU; and the second was

the lecturers of Arabic in that School. I chose the students who had expressed their agreement to be interviewed according to their marks in the achievement test, which they had given in the questionnaire. Some of them had high marks and others had not got such good marks; this allowed me to collect data from different perspectives. In-depth interviews was chosen because it will give the interviewees more space to express their opinion, so that they could provide me with a good amount of information. An avoidance of holding the interviews when participants were in a hurry; therefore, if they said they about had five minutes before going to a lecture, The interview will be preferred on telephone in their free time, this alternative arrangement was accept in most cases. Six students was interviewed by telephone and twelve face-to-face, three lecturers was interviewed face-to-face and two by telephone.

In order to provide a more accurate rendition of any interview, the best method is to record it. However, Yin (2009) argues that recording an interview should be avoided in some cases; for example, when the interviewee is not comfortable or if she/he refuses permission, or if the researcher has no plan to transcribe or listening systematically to the recorder. Other reasons for not recording interviews include if the recording creates a distraction during the interview itself, such as when the researcher is clumsy with mechanical devices and has problems with the recording equipment. Finally, if the researcher thinks that the recording device is a substitute for listening closely throughout the course of an interview, then it should not be used, as it is essential for the researcher to listen because the recording does not always reflect accurately any feelings shown by the interviewee. All the interviews were recorded even those by telephone because they were in Arabic so I needed to transcribe and translate them later in order to analyse them. It took four weeks to transcribe and translate all of them, but this was a necessary step to carry out the subsequent analysis.

Data analysis

In order to begin the data analysis, the responses of the participants' was first read and the lecturers questionnaires was separated from those of students. The students' questionnaires was also separated according to their year, in order to attempt to identify whether their perception of the achievement test had changed, in terms of their experience and perspective on its relevance to their academic careers. After that, I held the interviews where I asked them why they had chosen their particular optional answers in the questionnaire, as well as whether they had anything to add, such as another possible option or reason. As the interviews were recorded, I transcribed them and translated them into English.

Summary of Main Findings

The present results are significant in at least two major respects: the reasons why some students and lecturers think the achievement test is a good idea, and the reasons why they think it is not. One of the reasons that support the idea of the achievement test is that it is believed that there are some benefits of the test for which some are: firstly, it help to indicate whether a student deserves to enter a university or not, and it can predict the level of those students who gain access to university courses. In this way, the test will provide a university with able and qualified students if it also satisfies the third reason why study participants think that it is good, that it helps to indicate the academic level of high school students. This will also help to evaluate the standard of education in schools in general.

On the other hand, it could be argued that, although the achievement test helps universities to determine the level of the applicants' academic knowledge, there are some problems when applied to access to Kind Abdul-Aziz University. In fact, the most interesting finding was that most participants believe that the achievement test is not a good assessment tool in its current form. The reason for this is that they believe there are many problems with the test itself. First of all, it reduces the chances of acceptance at university due to the large number of students who apply for limited university places, and also because students forget the curriculum and courses previously studied by the time they take this test (there could be a three-year gap between studying a subject and being tested on it in the achievement test). Furthermore, there are no specific official courses developed and offered by high schools to introduce the achievement test and its aim to students. Moreover, the lack of training in sample questions from the achievement test is another reason why there is a lack of support for this test.

In this study, the students commented that the achievement test causes them some problems, including the fact that it is time-consuming, it has different question types than those they are used to, and there are no free preparation courses. There are several possible explanations for this finding, given the lack of time for revision and the inadequate preparation offered. In addition, there is the issue of the fact that many questions on the test are not relevant to the students' subject specialization. This means that art students have been asked science questions, and vice versa. It is true that these are common subject areas in the first year of high school, but that curriculum was applied three years before they take the achievement test. Finally, another possible explanation for this might be that there are some private schools, such as IT schools, who arrange expensive courses to prepare their students for the test. These students think that these courses exploit them

because the courses, and the teachers who impart them, are not adequate for the preparation needed, and they are in fact business ventures.

One of the problems that it was believed students face is that the question style of the test is of 'multiple-choice' which, according to one lecturer's comment, helps some students to obtain a high mark by luck. This means that there are students who can access KAU not because they have achieved good marks at the secondary school level but because they have been lucky in their answers on the achievement test. However, most students preferred this style of question as it helped them to overcome the obstacle of limited time for revision for the achievement test. A greater problem is that the testing process is both stressful and time-consuming. As mentioned above, before accessing KAU, students have to take three tests. The aptitude and achievement tests take place approximately one week after the final tests at secondary school are completed. This means that students have very little time to rest and prepare for tests which will decide whether they will the enter university or not, and also whether they will have to pay fees. Another aspect which can cause stress is the fact that state schools do not generally prepare students well enough for the aptitude and achievement tests. Therefore, students buy books which introduce the test format and help them to become familiar with the type of questions they might face, and the issue of time management. Other students pay to attend courses that prepare them for the tests. Apart from the stress of preparing for these tests, students also have to find time to study for themselves, and these are not the most favourable conditions in which to prepare for entrance into higher education.

Yin (2009) point out that analyse data should address the most significant aspects of the case study. Therefore, in the way of summary, the following figures present the responses to the research in the form of pie charts. Figure 1 identifies the significant benefits that participants believe taking the achievement test brings.

Figure 2 below identifies the significant problems caused to students by taking the achievement test with regard to the participants' responses.

These still need correcting in figure 2

- Students forget the curriculum and courses previously studied
- The chances of acceptance at university are reduced due to the large number of applicants for over-subscribed places
- There are no courses created by high schools to introduce the achievement test and its aims to students
- There is a lack of training for students in sample

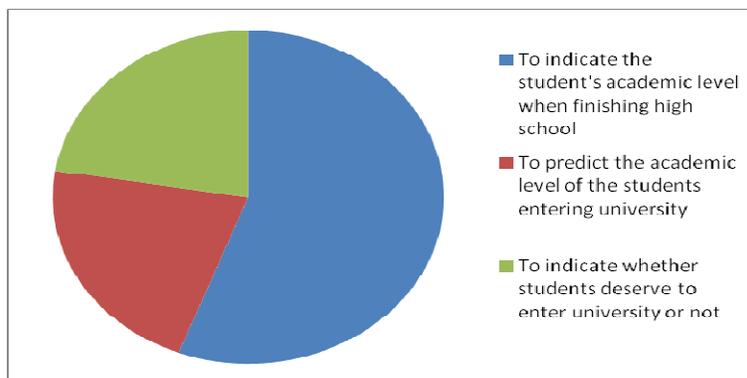


Figure 1. Significant benefits of the achievement test

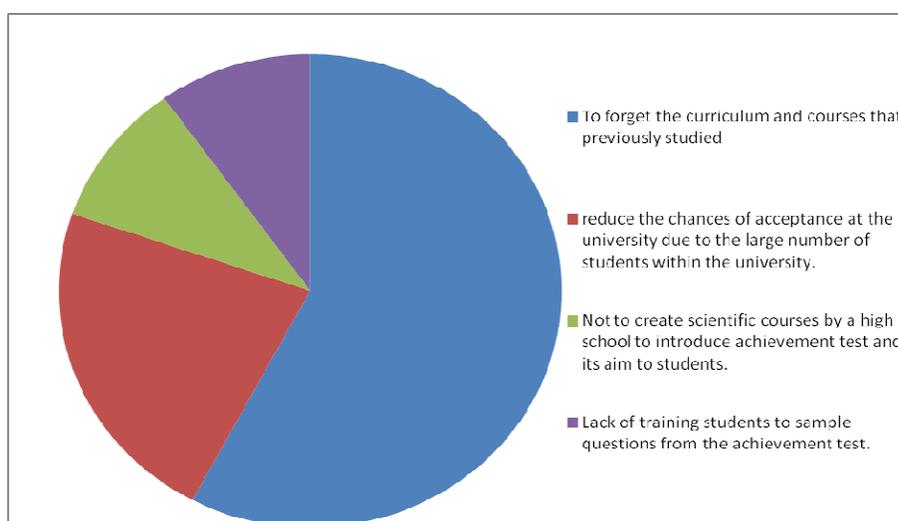


Figure 2. Significant problems faced by students when taking the achievement test, in the participants' opinions.

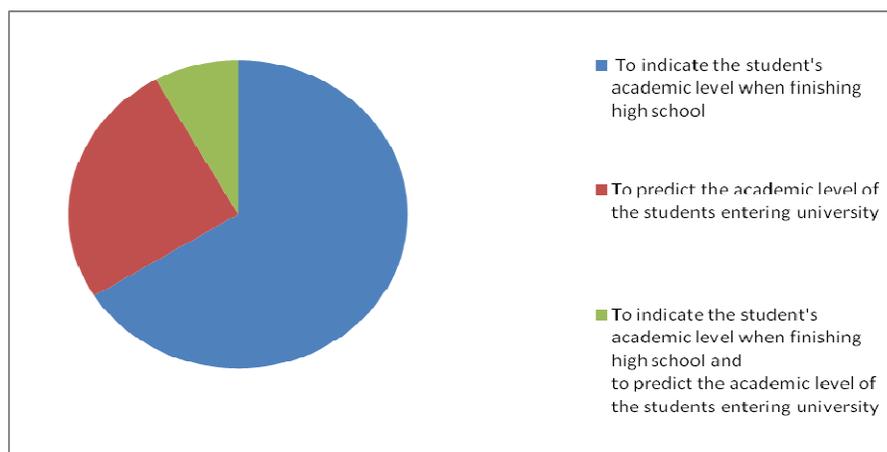


Figure 3. The purposes of changing the admissions system to include the achievement test

questions from the achievement tests
 Figure 3 depicts the purposes of changing the

admissions system to include the achievement test,
 according to the participants' responses.

To sum up, this study has demonstrated the attitudes of the participants-students from the first, second and third year and faculty members of the School of Arabic at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - towards the recent introduction of an achievement test to assist in selecting students for access to university courses. The results of this study found that most participants agreed that the achievement test helps in the admission to higher education by indicating the academic level of high school students. However, it is necessary to develop the test in terms of

- 1) Changing the content covered by the test so that it does not include subjects that were studied three years previously, and are no longer relevant to the courses that students are applying for, and have, therefore, been forgotten.
- 2) Changing the teaching methods used in high school and the curricular content so as not to depend on memorization.

Limitations of the research

The main limitation of this study was the research methodology. Although I choose case study and I collected my data through a total of ninety-two questionnaires and twenty-three interviews, this was still limited in number and scope with regard to the issue of using achievement tests in Saudi Arabian universities in order to select their applicants. There is a need to involve more people who have accessed higher education in different universities in Saudi Arabia through using achievement tests, rather than taking the data from only one university. However, time constraints made this impossible.

In terms of the methods used to collect my data, I found that it was difficult to find students to interview in depth because, during the course of field work in Saudi Arabia, it was the last few weeks for students to prepare for their final exams of the year. This meant that many students did not accept to be interviewed as they did not have the time, and they preferred to be interviewed in groups to save time and also because they wanted to feel more like they were talking, not being interviewed. This situation led me to be a little hasty with my questions at times with those students who did agree to be interviewed.

The study sample is also limited because the study was implemented in just one school at King Abdul-Aziz University. Moreover, due to the fact that female and male students are divided into separate universities in Saudi Arabia, this study has collected the opinions of female students and faculty members only. There is a need to involve male students and faculty members in order for the study to be more reliable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, several recommendations can be drawn regarding how to develop the achievement test so that it is a more reliable and fair selection tool for university entrance.

- 1- The achievement test should give students more time for answering each question than the minute that is allotted at the moment. With the multiple-choice structure that is in place, students often chose any answer without thinking in order not to waste time, and that increases the chances of randomly chosen answers being correct. Therefore, many students who pass the test could be doing so because of luck, and not because they are of the academic level that is required to access higher education. This is not the goal of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education and of the Centre for Measurement and Evaluation in applying the achievement test as part of the university selection process.
- 2- There is a need to arrange some free courses developed and offered by the Ministry of Higher Education that help to prepare students to take the achievement test in a standardised way.
- 3- The students need more time to prepare before the test in order to afford them a better chance of success. The one week that is available to them at present is not enough for them to revise the curricular content of the last three years of high school, which are covered in the test, and this is an even more stressful time because it comes immediately after the students finish their final exam at secondary school, which also counts towards university selection.
- 4- The questions included in the achievement test should be revised as arts students are asked questions about science, such as Mathematics, and science students are asked questions on arts subjects, such as Arabic literature. This means that the test in its current form does not carry out its task of selecting suitable candidates for university courses.
- 5- Students need to be given a chance to re-sit the achievement test if they fail the first time. At present, students are only allowed one opportunity to take it, and failure means that they cannot gain access to higher education other than through the CENTRA distance learning programme, which is too expensive for most Saudi families.
- 6- Resources to help students revise for the achievement test should be identified and made available for all students.
- 7- One of the most important recommendations is that the teaching method used in high school should be changed to focus on understanding not memorisation, in order to implement the achievement test effectively.

Future work

This study has given an overview of the issue of using achievement tests as part of the process for selecting applicants for King Abdul-Aziz University in Saudi Arabia. It can serve as a starting point for the Ministry of Higher Education and the Centre for Measurement and Evaluation to consider the best way to apply such tests more effectively, to meet the needs of students, faculty members and universities. Further research should be done to investigate the effectiveness of the achievement test and how to develop it further, so that it is a reliable and fair assessment tool fit for purpose. Possible studies need to provide more evidence and information by targeting a wider context; for instance, male students and lecturers, as well as involving students from different educational environments, both within King Abdul-Aziz University and in other institutions of higher education.

If achievement tests are to be effective indicators of the suitability of possible candidates for over-subscribed university places in Saudi Arabia, then they have to be studied more closely, and developed so that they fulfil this task as satisfactorily as possible. It is hoped that this small case study will go some way towards providing the basis of essential future research into this issue.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, the research was organized into the following chapters: Chapter one described the context and the focus of the study; Chapter two was a review of the literature, where different studies from wider literature were presented and reviewed; Chapter three described and justified the research methodology of the study, which was case study; Chapter four presented the analysis of the data, and discussed the findings of this research; finally, Chapter five presents the conclusions of the study and possible recommendations for future work.

This study was carried out with students from the first, second and third years in the female section of the School of Arabic at the above-mentioned university, with faculty members of the same school. Case study methodology was chosen and questionnaires and interviews were applied as tools to collect data. The goal was to explore students' and lecturers' attitudes towards using achievement test to select applicants for higher education courses.

It was quite clear from the data collected in the research instruments of questionnaire and interview that most of the participants do not agree with the achievement test in its current form because of the problems mentioned in the data analysis section. The greatest drawback, in the participants' view, is that the test content covers subjects that might not have been

studied for three years, thus causing students to forget this material and have less chance of passing the achievement test with a mark that would guarantee their acceptance on a university course, when put together with the high school percentage and the mark obtained on the accompanying aptitude test. Furthermore, there is a focus on memorization both in the teaching methods at high school and preparation for the achievement test. Coupled with the lack of time and resources available for students to prepare themselves adequately for the test, the overall finding was that the problems caused by the achievement test outweigh the benefits of applying it as part of the selection process for university entrance. Therefore, to ensure the greatest success in terms of using such a test in this process, these problems should be taken into account and possible solutions found to develop the test so that it becomes a fairer, and therefore more widely accepted, form of assessment for university selection.

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