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INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER

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The Use of English Placement Test (EPT) in Assessing the EFL Students' Language Proficiency Level at a Saudi University

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Abstract

Purpose: In order to ascertain EFL students' characteristics (English proficiency, fluency, critical thinking, and communication), educational context, level of competence, professional goals, and pursuits for future endeavors, English Placement Tests (EPTs) are conducted in several academic contexts (Lamb, 2017; Taşpinar & Külekçi, 2018; Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019; Alrabai, 2021; Yuan, 2022). An EPT is a standard test used to determine students' levels and abilities in *English*. It assesses how different their skills are in English before registering for English language courses in schools, universities, and companies. This research lends credence to the EPT's reliability and validity in determining students' course enrollment in university education.

Design/methodology/approach: This study implemented a hybrid research design. At the start of the second semester in December 2021, 136 students took the placement test. A t-test was used to compare the students' pre- and post-test results in order to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of the EPT. Five instructors also took part in a semi-structured interview to discuss their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences related to their teaching-learning enhancement of English programmes at the time the EPT was completed.

Findings: The EPT results show students' proficiency levels in three main areas: grammar, reading, and listening. After knowing the results of the EPT and the student's performance, the weak areas were worked on. After one semester's intervention, the test scores finally resulted positively, showing the students' improvement. Since the results were statistically positive and significant, the study strongly suggested that EPT must be conducted at the beginning of the semester at the university level. Furthermore, based on the qualitative analysis and the comments and suggestions of the instructors, the idea of having an EPT for English foreign language (EFL) first-year students who want to take English language courses at universities was also strongly favored. The study supports the EPT's validity for EFL students at college enrollment requirements according to English skills competency levels for English language courses.

Keywords: EFL, EPT, language proficiency, placement, testing, course programs.

1. Introduction

The Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia all have communities that are dynamically evolved, and Maurais & Morris (2003), Tollefson (2012), Bolton & Ng (2014), and Khalid et al. (2019) have all noted that English proficiency is a creative and critical element of these communities. English proficiency has many competitive and strategic advantages. First and foremost, English is the language of education, business, development, success, and prosperity. It provides people access to the latest science, technology, and innovations and has a global impact

(Runde, 2017). Nowadays, English proficiency is regarded as a distinct didactic and pecuniary advantage (Alharbi, 2015). It is rapidly becoming an essential skill required for the entire workforce. So, to figure out how well English-foreign language learners (EFLLs) understand the language, different tests are made to assess a person's ability, knowledge, or performance through questions or practical tasks. The method must be explicit and well-structured. Furthermore, a test must be measurable (Sato & Ikeda, 2015).

The term "assessment" in the context of education refers to the vast range of methods or instruments employed by educators to evaluate, track, and record students' academic preparation, growth as learners, acquisition of skills, and educational requirements. Assessments are also used by educators to determine each student's weaknesses and strengths in order to provide each student with individualized academic assistance, educational programmes, or social services (Phongsirikul, 2018). Based on their results on a placement test, students are "put" into a particular course, level, or academic programme (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Barnett & Reddy, 2017; Bahr et al., 2019). Placement exams are frequently administered prior to the start of a course or programme in order to properly place students in classes that would best suit their unique educational needs (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Hamdan, 2014).

Placement tests measure how good the learners are at English, math, reading, and other skills. The goal is to provide students who are not doing well in school classes alternatives to help them prepare for regular classes. Placement assessment tries to ensure students do well by giving them practice problems, review packets, or workshops. Instead, the results of writing, math, and reading tests show a student's current skill level and are used to help them choose suitable classes that build on what they already know and will help them succeed in the future. (Cruz et al., 2021).

Hence, educational institutions require English professional and proficiency developmental education programs to improve the student evaluation process, an individual learning plan for students whose skills are not up to the level, and a minimum college preparation state standard (Brady et al., 2016). In addition, to motivate and train aspiring teachers to follow curriculum standards, analyze and respond to test results, meet the educational needs of their learners, and instill a lifelong love of learning in EFL learners. Every student's success and progress in the achievement of learning skills is the responsibility of every institution (Ganga et al., 2018). Simply put, placement tests among these programs check the current proficiency level in language skills, which is assessed by placement testing. With this information, the educational institute can choose the levels that will help the learner achieve his or her goals the most.

If the goal of language teaching is successful language learning, then the outcome must be our primary focus. Placement tests are generally conducted in many institutions for different purposes. On top of that, "tests used by colleges to determine student accomplishment levels to place them in appropriate courses" (Barnett, 2017). In most cases, colleges evaluate entering students to place them in math and different language programs. On the other hand, some institutions are concerned with various placement types, such as certain course types, support, or services. Additionally, the selection of choices, such as co-requisite courses or changes to course sequences, that are best suitable for students in colleges undergoing developmental education reform may be influenced by the placement process. Based on their current skill level, placement exams are intended to place students in the most appropriate courses (Zhao et al., 2022).

To make sure that students receive the support they require, certain institutions use the assessment and placement process. This testing "diagnoses" a student's knowledge. Diagnostic testing usually occurs when students start a new course or unit. However, low community college graduation rates, especially among college-ready students, imply that students require well-designed, focused assistance (Barnett & Reddy, 2017). Furthermore, assistance must begin as soon as possible. Most universities provide various services, although they typically cater to a small number of students. An evaluation system, particularly non-cognitive measures, may result in better support targeting and use (Hammond et al., 2020).

2. Statement of Problem

Most of the current literature has revealed that teaching English in Saudi universities is challenging (Alrabai, 2016; Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018; Al-Seghayer, 2022; Alawfi, 2022). Besides, Arabic students experience serious educational and linguistic challenges due to the change of language from Arabic to English at the university level. Therefore, the tertiary year aims to prepare high school graduates to succeed in English studies and become fluent in communicative skills. Moreover, to face other entrance exams in the future for higher studies (Kadwa & Sheik, 2021).

Second, while English is taught in Saudi high schools, there are no standardized tests to evaluate students' skills, English proficiency and aptitude (Alha et al., 2019). Students struggle with English in their first year of university due to this. This is one reason for the high dropout rate among Saudi first-year university students (Alabdulkarem et al., 2021). Third, university English language instructors struggle because secondary and higher education institutions don't work together to share information about students' English proficiency. As a result, pupils with different levels of linguistic proficiency are put in the same class (Macaro et al., 2017; Tang, 2021). According to Aldurayheem (2022), in response to the high volume of applications for university admission in Saudi Arabia, increased scepticism regarding the validity of high school exams, and grade inflation, the Saudi government commissioned the National Centre for Assessment (NCA) to "provide comprehensive and integrated solutions that scientifically measure and evaluate knowledge, skills, and aptitude with the purpose of achieving fairness, maintaining quality, and ensuring equity" (NCA, 2018). Fourth, Saudi Arabia's preparation level intense programmes are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), a system used internationally to describe the four language skills and degrees of English language competency of learners. The levels, however, are problematic because they have been proven to be occasionally unclear and constrictive in describing the highest levels (Papageorgiou & Cho, 2014).

3. Hypotheses

However, many problems are generally faced in such a field but are not always obvious. The main question is: how can exams reliably estimate a student's language level? What is the link between what was tested and taught earlier and what is to come up for teaching ahead? However, high reliability does not always imply that a test is good or that interpretations of the results are correct. We must consider validity. Is the test assessing what we would like it to measure? These placements and proficiency tests lead the institutions and the EFLLs' future endeavors. The

rationale stated above gives the reasons why the study is being conducted and directed. Moreover, EPT proves its importance in different situations in compliance with the student's needs and the institutions' requirements (Collie et al., 2016).

4. Research Objectives

Noting the issues mentioned above in the Saudi Arabian setting, this study seeks to evaluate the efficacy of administering EPT to first-year students. EPT could be one of the methods and approaches for determining and evaluating a student's level of English proficiency in order to help them overcome the difficulties of entering college and studying English at the university level. In addition, using EPT the paper identifies the learners' strongest and weakest skills to provide remedial instructions to them.

5. Literature Review

For centuries, English as an International Language (EIL) has flourished across several industries worldwide. Effective English acquaintance impacts a person's professional opinions and ideals in trade, governance, society, politics, and education. (Yuyun et al., 2018). They necessitate various tests as part of the recruitment process for studies, jobs, scholarship programs, etc. In addition, universities educate their graduates for global challenges by administering the English Proficiency Test. The test result should reflect that students' English ability is equivalent to or greater than CEFR levels (Hernandez-Nanclares & Jimenez-Munoz, 2017; Yao, 2020). Placement tests' main objective is to assess students' language proficiency and place homogeneous language-ability students in the proper classes or sections of language courses (Brown, 1989; Sohn & Shin, 2007; Massler et al., 2014; Long et al., 2018; Ockey & Gokturk, 2019; Ghanbari, & Abdolrezapour, 2020; Chapelle, & Voss, 2021; Liao, 2022;.

Previous and recent studies on EPT

Accurate and effective assessment is a key factor in successfully learning a foreign language (Nikolov & Laughlin, 2020). In order to enroll EFL students at the right level for their current language skills, the placement examinations are used to assess language and linguistic proficiency in the target language. Numerous scholars (Hung & Huang, 2019; Karolina et al., 2021) have favored and argued for the importance of evaluating the effects of testing on students, as they are directly impacted.

A placement exam is an assessment that evaluates a person's previous knowledge of a subject to establish the appropriate level at which to begin coursework in the new field. It also examines a person's capacity to write or converse effectively and adequately in everyday situations. When a learner starts in middle and high school, or college in many countries, it is common for them to take a placement exam in a discipline such as English, mathematics, and other subjects to determine what coursework they must take (Murphy et al., 2020). There are numerous distinct types of tests, including linguistic aptitude tests, progress tests, summative tests, entry/placement exams, diagnostic tests, and competence tests for various purposes, according to Harris and McCann (1994), Brown (2018), and Alderson, et al. (1995).

According to Weiping (2016) and Liao (2022), placement exams may be divided into two types: tests that are based on language courses and proficiency tests. Since the primary goal of a placement test is to put a student in a suitable class (Sen et al., 2012; Saxon & Morante, 2014; Liao, 2022), it is essential to look at how well it does that by looking at how reliable and valid placement decisions based on test scores are (Brookhart, 2003; Brown, 2004).

According to Mellati & Khademi (2018), language proficiency had a marginal effect on students' academic success. Suyansah & Gabda (2020), on the other hand, found that pupils who speak multiple languages and those with diverse degrees of English competence perform significantly differently academically. Additionally, Adarkwah & Zeyuan (2020) claimed that kids perform better academically the more fluent they are in English. Al-Harbi & Mahfoodh (2021) concluded their argument by saying that students' pragmatic competency is influenced by their language proficiency. Furthermore, the EPT wash back has an impact on learners' self-image, learning motivation, emotions, and future employment chances, according to a study done at a national university in Taiwan (Hung & Huang, 2019). However, a statistically significant link between proficiency level and wash back was found. Some institutions develop placement exams to match the objectives of language programmes and the content of the curriculum. However, other research questioned the value of these commercially available placement tests and raised issues with score-based inferences, which jeopardise placement decisions (Bunch, 2011; Winke, 2011; Sato, 2012; Golubovich et al., 2018; Nasem & Mohammed, 2019; De La Garza Cano, 2020; Pomroy, 2020; Grissom et al., 2021; Shijun, 2022). To serve the goals for which they were designed, these high-stakes assessments must be reviewed, it might be said..

Challenges to EPT

The factually incorrect placement has a detrimental effect on teaching and learning, called detrimental washback or backwash, which is related to construct validity (Manjarrés, 2005; Siddiek, 2018). Differences in exam objectives, course objectives, and academic expectations lead to misplacement. In order to counteract construct under-representation and concept-irrelevant variation, Kane and Bridgeman (2021) showed that a placement test must include test activities that enable precise inferences about mastery of course knowledge, abilities, or skills. Furthermore, Green & Weir (2004) note that the degree to which test task components, such as text and task features, align with instruction, is a significant factor of placement decision efficacy.

The attitudes of students toward post-entry placement tests present another challenge. Students who cheat on placement exams to earn high marks or breeze through them draw attention to issues with test fairness (Li, 2015; Dimova et al., 2020; Lee, 2022). A quality placement test requires time and resources to develop. It's challenging for a local language programme to administer an effective placement test without sufficient funding and study (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2004; Wiggins, 2011). This is predicated on the notion that the majority of commercially available standardized examinations have been crucial in helping people make informed decisions. Papageorgiou & Cho (2014) looked into the growth of commercially available placement exams.

According to Al Saud (2009), schools should employ examinations to gauge their pupils' aptitudes, know-how, and situational awareness. The significance of tests, however, differs depending on their goal. For example, an entrance test could determine if someone is qualified

to go to college, move up a level, or be used as a tool in experimental research. Khan (2011) revealed that teaching English in Saudi starts at the school level. But the results aren't as good as expected, even though there is good overall planning, a purposeful curriculum, integrated textbooks, and qualified teachers. So, diagnostic studies should be done in different areas and skills of language so that the teacher can know what kinds of problems are happening and what causes them.

Alhareth and Dighrir (2014) said that assessments are important parts of programs for teaching and learning and help shape how each student learns. The assessment doesn't look at how well students can plan and carry out experiments or how well they understand math and science concepts. Instead, it gives information about the quality of assessment practices. The history, politics, and discourses surrounding English language instruction in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were highlighted by Mahboob and Elyas (2014). Kabouha and Elyas (2015) said it was important for the institutions and English language center to use the constructive alignment framework to improve teaching, learning, assessment, and inconsistencies between the program objectives and the intended learning outcomes.

Alrabai (2016) explained why Saudi students struggle with EFL. Gender, age, motivation, attitudes, aptitude, anxiety, autonomy, learning strategies, and learning style are some of these factors. The majority of these factors are out of the learners' control. Sociocultural factors include things like Arabic as the L1, religion, culture, and society. According to Alotaibi et al. (2016), because the current admission system is inadequate and out-of-date, it must be replaced with a framework for developing a suggested admission system utilising modern DSS-related methodologies. This would boost the effectiveness of the admission system in Saudi universities.

EPT at Saudi Arabia

Alrabai (2018) pointed out that students' confidence in their ability to learn English was related to how well they learned English. In their study published in 2020, Althewini and Alkushi looked explored the correlation between GAT section scores and students' English language competency who were enrolled in a health sciences programme at a Saudi institution. In 2020, Aldurayheem studied Arabic, a Semitic language with a different alphabet than English. He looked at motivation and learning techniques, which impact language learning motivation. GAT determines who goes into university English courses.

One study at King Faisal University looked into whether taking the IELTS exam had a detrimental effect on the participants' financial situation. The exam is expensive, according on the findings of the questionnaire and interview. Additionally, the cost of the test is rising. The most financially impacted individuals were those who were required to retake the exam because their total or sub-scores did not reach the minimum requirements. Investing in education and using competency assessments can enhance the calibre of instruction (Alsagoafi, 2018). According to one of the most recent studies, the GAT is a decent predictor of English performance for level 2 students, and the mistake detection task is the best predictor of English reading performance (IMSIU, 2018). The research strengthens the validity of the GAT as a requirement for enrollment in colleges offering English language programmes in Arabic-speaking nations (Aldurayheem, 2022).

It benefits policymakers at Saudi institutions and compels educators to reconsider the applicability of admission standards and how they are applied to the evaluation of a student's English proficiency, according to the conclusions of one study (Almossa & Alzahrani, 2022). To forecast and monitor students' progress through their English courses, educators may think about incorporating an EPT into their admission criteria. However, by standardizing and rethinking admissions criteria and approaches for gauging the success of present and future admissions criteria, the study provides data that may be used to save resources like money, time, and effort.

Kadwa and Sheik (2021) looked into the fundamental need to test the English skills of Saudi Arabian college applicants before letting them in. Jawhar et al. (2021) said that the purpose of an exam has a lot to do with its validity. They made this statement to assist teachers at universities of health sciences in developing their own entrance exams as opposed to adopting standardized assessments, which frequently fail to account for the context, curriculum, or programme objectives. Alshammari's (2022) research showed that only a small number of participants' high school and preparatory year grades matched their college grades. Unfortunately, earlier grades could not be used to predict how well students would do in college. Language evaluation is crucial to the abilities, competencies, and overall results of second-language learners in Saudi Arabia, according to Al-Seghayer (2022), who summarized it as a way to help teachers guide students in learning a language.

EPT Issues and Lacunae

The attention of researchers has grown in response to conflicting findings in earlier studies. Since many institutions and corporations still utilise proficiency tests to evaluate applicants' language abilities, proficiency tests (like the IELTS) continue to predominate in advertisements for ELT institutes (Shabani, & Panahi, 2020). As a result, the institutes offer an instrumental strategy for teaching English language proficiency with a secondary goal in mind. They promote themselves to perform well on these exams, serving as gatekeepers for university admissions. However, using proficiency test results to promote English language acquisition is reductive. Our concept of FL acquisition is constrained to the decontextualized language of competence assessments as a result (Alfallaj & Al-Ahdal, 2017).

However, there hasn't been enough discussion of the possibility of employing college entrance examinations as placement assessments. The efficacy of English entrance exams, which do not include listening or reading components and are used to place students in reading and listening classes in English someplace else in the world, has been questioned. Validity was a great method to divide off the reading and listening lessons for the pupils. But the use of cut scores and how well these tests and courses match up in content were not thoroughly examined.

So, it is unclear if a college admissions test could be used to place EFL students, and there has not been enough research. As a result, we do not yet have a complete picture of how accurate placement is regarding the relationships between college admission tests, commercial or in-house problems, and student academic success. Few studies have examined how worries about using English placement tests to improve EFL students' language skills are related.

As was discussed above, one of the most important things rested in still that makes ability grouping and section- classes instruction work is the proper use of entrance tests to make fair

and correct placement decisions. The effectiveness and validity of high-stakes English college entrance exams, particularly in EFL, have received very little investigation despite the fact that they are frequently used to place students. In this approach, certificates from English proficiency tests are frequently used in advertisements as proof of English competence and help students decide what and where to study.

6. **Research Questions:** The study focuses on the following research questions-

   I. EPT administration at the beginning of the term and assessment of students' language skills.

   II. How does the EPT affect students' test results—both midterm and final—?

   III. What are EFL instructors' suggestions in support of the effectiveness of the conduction of the EPT?

7. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methodology to answer the research questions. The investigation started in December 2021 with the administration of an EPT to assess EFL learners' receptive skills (grammar, reading, and listening) performance at KKU's Applied College for Girls. The paired sample t-test was used to determine the significant difference between the means of the two tests' scores. Consequently, non-random samples of students' midterm and final tests were collected during the semester and analyzed statistically. The qualitative technique of interviewing supported the investigation's quantitative conclusions

Instruments of Data Collection

Two different tools were employed to collect the data. First, a placement test was conducted, which contained 30 items. The test mainly focused on receptive skills, including 14 items from grammar, eight from reading (2 reading texts), and eight from listening skills (4 short audios). The duration of EPT was one hour. The midterm and final test scores were compared using the paired sample t-test. Language proficiency was evaluated in terms of grammar, reading, and listening skills only; writing and spoken communication were not assessed in any way in the EPT. The second tool was a qualitative approach in which the EFL instructors' advice and suggestions were collected in a semi-structured interview.

Participants

The total population varies at different stages, taking EPT and later taking both the tests (midterm and final exam). Therefore, the total number of aspirants for the EPT was 136 at the beginning. The total number of students for the listening exam was 112, and for the grammar and reading exams, it was 123. The students who took no exams were also included in the study for analysis. Hence, the midterm exam results of 112 students are compared to the final exam results of the same number of students. Furthermore, five EFL instructors were selected for a semi-structured interview.

Procedure

This research aims to deploy EPT for first-year students at the beginning of the first semester. Therefore, the method began with identifying, listing, and creating a placement exam paper for diploma students at the Applied College for Girls. During implementation, the assessment methods and techniques were determined. EFL instructors adhered to various scaffolding and self-directed learning strategies. The EPT allowed students to evaluate their current English language skills, goals, and the path that best suits them. The teachers separated the class into three groups, and each group received instruction on the module. The Unlock 1 and 2 textbooks, however, cover four abilities: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. This EPT did not include productive skills due to their complexity and advanced level. This approach was designed to be user-friendly and adhered to language acquisition from simple to complex. Therefore, the final test scores of all EFL students are compared to determine their growth over the semester.

8. Results

i. Assessment of EPT Results:

To assess the proficiency level of the entrants, the conduction of the EPT was performed and language performance was analyzed on the EPT. The test result is represented graphically below and signifies the need for the diagnosed teaching and learning process in the specific field to be competent in language skills. The figure shows a big difference between the prescribed total of marks for each section and the obtained marks by the students in each section.
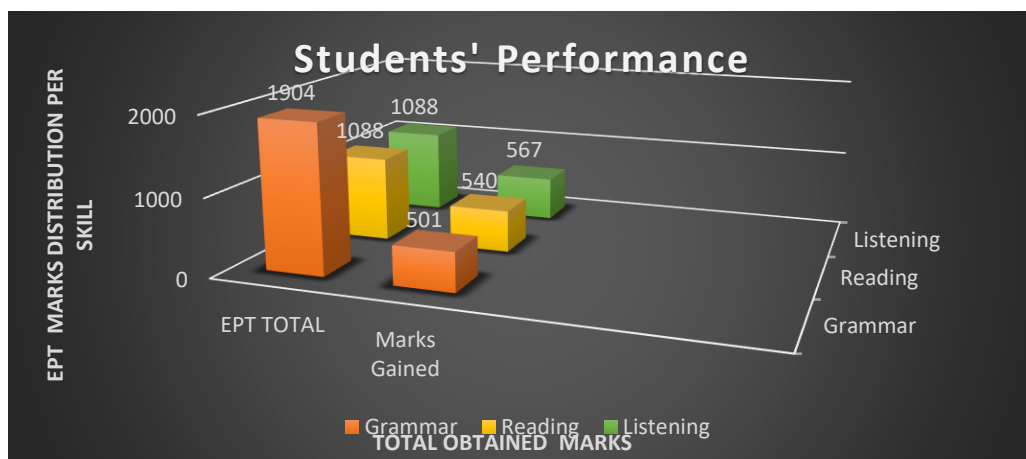
Figure 1: EPT Results Analysis

Evaluating the results of the EPT, out of the total (46.66%), only 26.31% of the marks were obtained in grammar by the students. The bar showed the lowest marks and the deepest block for grammar. The result reveals that it is the most difficult part to focus on during the learning process. Discussing the reading section in the EPT, 49.63% of the marks were obtained by the students, and 52.11% of the marks were obtained in the listening skill. So, students obtained

scores of 46.6% in grammar, 49.6% in reading, and 52.1% in listening in their receptive skills for the EPT. The overall review shows listening as the strongest skill among all the skills.

The conduct of EPT at the beginning of the semester showed the language proficiency and performance of the EFL students. Since it was essential to determine the level of the students before beginning the scaffolding to achieve the best results, it was necessary to find out where the pupils were before the instructors start building them up. Theoretically, EPT also recommends the most appropriate and supportive ways and strategies for teaching EFL learners language skills.

ii. Results of research question 2:

What effect does the placement test have on students' ultimate learning outcomes? is the second study issue that needs to be addressed. Again, a Paired Sample t-test is used to examine the data. First, the acquired data's normality is examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) and Shapiro-Wilk (SW) tests, the results of which indicated (Table 1 & 2) that the research data is normally distributed and more than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, d for listening skills (p =.077 > .05) and for another grammar and reading data, d for grammar and reading skills, (p =.138 > .05).

Table-1

Tests of Normality for Listening data

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Differences	.077	112	.102	.987	112	.360

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table-2

Tests of Normality for Grammar and Reading data

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Differences	.138	123	.000	.944	123	.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Then, the Descriptive Statistics of the group is calculated in table 3.

Table-3

Paired Samples Statistics of Listening and Grammar & Reading data

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Listening Skill pretest	3.049	112	.9679	.0915
	Listening Skill posttest	6.888	112	1.5836	.1496
Pair 2	Grammar & Reading Skill pretest	4.6057	123	2.56733	.23149
	Grammar & Reading Skill posttest	7.7398	123	4.35154	.39236

As discovered in table 3, the two variables of the posttest mean, 6.888, and 7.7398, are above from the pretest 3.049 and 4.6057 for both exams. Consequently, to determine whether the variations seen are significant, researchers compared the means through a dependent sample *t*-test, and the measured values are in pairs; the analysis results are displayed in tables 4 and 5.

Table-4

Paired Samples *t*-Test for listening pretest and posttest-

		Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
					The difference is within a 95% confidence interval.				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	df	
Pair 1	Listening Skills test 1 — Listening Skills test 2	-3.8393	1.43 59	.1357	-4.1081	-3.5704	-28.297	111	.000

As revealed in table 4, this is the final statically analysis for *t*-test. The mean difference for pretest and posttest is -3.8393 and from the different scores of both the tests provides the std. deviation 1. 4359.The *t*- test value is -28.297 and the significance of the test is .0001 that is probably not .000, there are some digits right after the value. It is less than the significance level α = 0.05. This *t*-test value shows the statistically significant and reliable results of the study.

Figure 2: Pre & posttest (Listening)

Error Bars: 95% CI
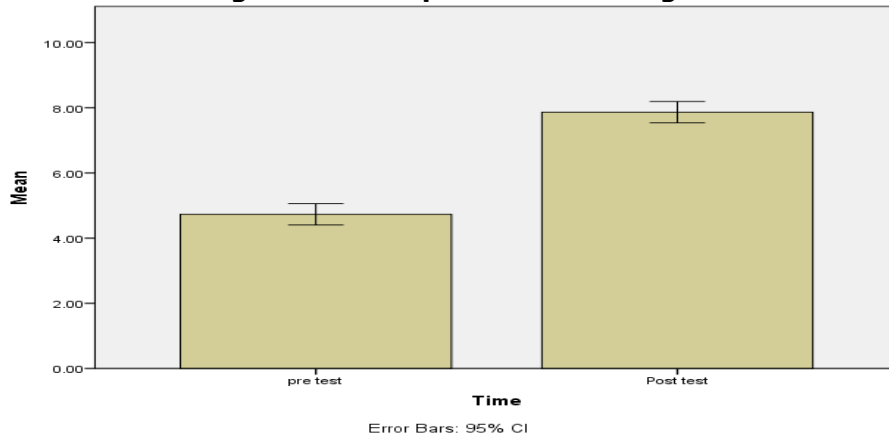
Table 5:

Paired Samples *t*-Test for grammar & reading pretest and posttest-

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Grammar & Reading Skills Test 1 - Grammar & Reading Skills Test 2	-3.13415	3.65246	.32933	-3.78609	-2.48220	-9.517	122	.000

Similarly, it is apparent from the inferential *t* table 5 that the significant value shown in the last column is .000 and some more digits right after it. The *t* statistic value is quite significant in negatives, at -9.517, a minimal negative number. That correlates to a very small significant value (.000). This is not probably .000... there are some digits that are not seen. Therefore, the p-value is less than the significant level α = 0.05.

Figure 3: pre & posttest (Grammar and Reading)
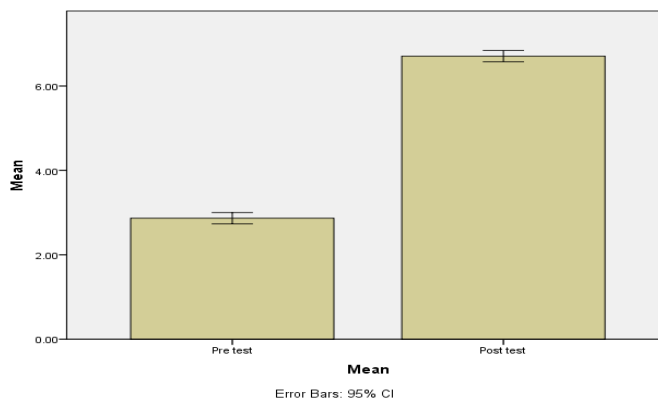
To put it simply, the graph also showed that the means (pre & posttest) were significantly statistically different in the study. The *t*-test resulted in three ways; firstly, the *t* value (-9.517) is greater than the critical value (CV) of 2.262 for the *t* distribution. Secondly, the p-value (.000) is less than .05. Thirdly, the 95% CI does not include 0. Both the lower and upper values are negative. The confidence interval difference -3.7869 & -2.4822 does not include 0. They are on the same side of 0. Therefore, the study concludes that these findings are statistically significant.

iii. Results of research question 3:

The effectiveness of having EPT has been suggested by the instructors. Therefore, a face-to-face interview was conducted to collect EFL teachers' opinions and overviews of what they experienced during the pedagogical attempts to conduct the EPT for the entrants. As a result, these may be considered the recommendations in favor of EPT that follow:

Instructor-A: Having sections according to the levels of the students may benefit them in various ways in terms of getting bored of learning the trivial things that they already know about. EFL learners who are above average can be given extra details that may be helpful to them.

In addition, when good students are given a chance to learn extra information along with the course module, they may learn about many educational topics that could be useful in the future. Having the EPT is essential for registration because their knowledge of English is not good, and the EFL learners are not taught properly in their schools. If they have to take the EPT, they will try to improve their English and study for the test. This will help the students, and the teachers will help decide on the material and suitable methods and approaches according to the level of the students.

Instructor-B: I think it's a good idea to conduct EPT in the colleges at the university. Usually, there are different levels of students in a class, which makes it very difficult for the

instructors to give them the same types of learning materials and time as well. Therefore, it is better to have the same kind of student whose level is almost the same. It would make the teaching and learning process easy and effective.

Having the EPT is convenient for both instructors and students as well. The instructor suggested that we have a similar level of students to plan the same teaching material. This strategy will be beneficial for working more with the weaker students. They will improve gradually in this way. Sometimes the gap is too great among the students (i.e., English skills level), and merging them into one section is very difficult. So EPT must be essential for EFL students. The university system of registering can be improved by developing software that can automatically categorize the levels of the students according to their performance in the test.

Instructor-C: If the students have a placement test, they can save their time on different levels that are not up to them after knowing their level. And the needed students can be treated in the way they desire for their improvement. Moreover, EPT will save the teachers' time by being particular about the relevant teaching.

The university's registration system can be changed to make it easier to give the EPT. Instructor said that if students took this kind of test, they would naturally get better at English and be better prepared for international standardized tests like the IELTS, TOEFL, and so on. In addition, EPT would help identify the strong and weak points of the students. In this way, the lowest-level skills can be practiced more than others. The EPT should be conducted uniformly by the English Language Center, which can organize a standard test for all the students.

Instructor-D: Instructor D, who experienced the teaching and learning processes according to their level, shared her experiences that the EPT has benefited not only her but benefitted her students as well. She had adopted the same learning strategies for the students, saving her time. In addition, constructive and scaffolding methods were adopted for two different sections of different levels to make the learning process easier.

She suggested that the university needs to figure out the problematic skills through EPT, which could be considered more important than other skills.

Instructor-E: It's essential to give placement tests to prepare students for what they will learn in college. The placement test provides an idea before proceeding with the course. Moreover, to identify the levels of the students, EPT works very well. It will also be helpful to the teachers to decide the students' level.

The teacher suggested that the online platform of EPT be used for conducting the test.

9. Discussion

i. The purpose of conducting the EPT at the university level

According to the results of the current study, the main reason for taking the EPT at the beginning of the term is to ensure that English skills (grammar, reading, and listening) are accurately measured. The test was based on these three skills: grammar, reading, and listening, which were weighed differently to test the extent to which the learners could answer the 30 items accurately.

The rationale for including the grammar section was to ensure that the learners were aware of the basic grammatical structure and daily language usage. The reading skills allowed the learners to demonstrate their basic reading skills in English, while the listening skills allowed them to demonstrate their entry behavior in terms of comprehension and articulation of words, phrases, and sentences in English. From the analysis, the highest-performing skill was listening skills, with 52.11% of the marks, followed by 49.63% for the reading skills, and the lowest-performing skill was grammar, with 26.31%.

The results of this study are consistent with the idea raised by Aldurayheem (2022) that EPT is significant in measuring the entry-level English skill domains for EFL learners. The study found a strong link between EPT and reading, listening, and grammar skills. This helps EFL students improve their English skills. For example, for a learner to fulfill reading comprehension, they need to be able to transfer about 3,000-word families from their L1 to English. In addition, they are tested to make sure that their level of skill is constant and uniform. This is because the grammar and features of a language are not just based on vocabulary and reading.

The current study's findings also indicated the necessity of developing teaching methods that are specifically tailored to each learner in order to meet their demands and help them master language proficiency. This viewpoint is in line with the research results presented by Hung and Huang (2019), who claimed that washback and proficiency level have a statistically significant association. According to the study, understanding about the weak points in one's English proficiency can help students concentrate more on those areas in order to close the competency gap. For example, in the current study, the instructors can focus more on grammar to help improve the 26.31%, which is very low compared to reading and speaking, with 52.11% and 49.63%, respectively.

ii. The impact of the EPT on the results of the students

In all three exam domains grammar, reading, and listening the current study showed a statistically significant correlation between the placement test and the students' final scores. Additionally, both tests' significance levels were.000 (p-value), which is below the threshold of 0.05, hence showing that the placement test improves the students' learning outcomes. The current study results are supported by previous studies such as Yan and Cheng (2015), who reported that the EPT impacted the overall academic success of the learners. Moreover, Martirosyan et al. (2015) noted that learners with a high level of English proficiency and who spoke multiple languages achieved higher academic performance than their counterparts who had a low level of English proficiency and did not speak many languages. In the same light, Wilson and Komba (2012) found similar results: students with high English proficiency were better academic performers.

It is worth noting that the level of improvement in the final results of the learners also affects their success outside of school in terms of employability and furthering their education. For instance, it would be difficult for the students to secure slots for further studies or employment opportunities without the ability to speak, listen, or read in English. This view is consistent with the ideas raised by Hung and Huang (2019), who reported that improved English ability resulted in students working harder and performing better on other tests. Moreover, it enhanced the learners' awareness of English proficiency, increasing job opportunities, especially with the high competitiveness in the job market.

iii. Ways of improving the proficiency and learning system to support the EFL learners' performance and achievement in reference to EPT

An interview with five EFL instructors provided the following strategies that present EPT's effectiveness and support EFL learners' better performance in EPT:

a. Customization of the course content according to the levels of the students-

According to teacher A, it is essential to customize the learning experiences of the EFL students according to their entry behavior to ensure that those with low entry behavior are taught the basics. At the same time, those with average or above-average scores do not waste time learning trivial things and instead go into helpful details. The same sentiments were echoed by teacher C and D, who explained that learners should not be exposed to time wastage after learning their level. Moreover, the teacher noted that it is essential to know the strong and weak areas of the learners. According to Cheng (2008) and Spratt (2005), the English placement test is necessary as it provides an accurate and fair reflection of the student's linguistic competency in the target language, thereby allowing them to be placed at their appropriate level.

b. Conducting the EPT in a university setting at the beginning of the term-

The interviewers suggested the need to conduct the English placement tests in a university setting, which helps to ensure that learners at different levels are identified, including their weak areas. According to teacher B, this will provide the institutions time to plan for instructional strategies and learning resources to raise the students' level of English proficiency. The university registration process may be improved, according to teacher C, to give students more time to work on their weak areas. Teacher E even mentioned that a university-level online exam is planned for the students. Jamieson et al. (2013) provided an explanation of the requirement for an internal placement test to determine the various competency levels of the students in the curriculum, which confirmed the findings of this study. Moreover, Hughes (2003) explains that a placement test should serve a specific purpose, hence the need to develop it in-house.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

The statistical analysis of the results provided a clear image of the marks and percentages earned by the EFL students in a variety of skill areas. It compelled the researchers to decide how to reduce the large gap in marks administered through the EPT. The face-to-face interview with the instructors increased the viability of implementing the EPT at the college level with significant practicability. Due to this, it was possible to assess the exact level of EFL students and their strongest and weakest skills, which resulted in adopting appropriate methods and approaches for the students. Due to the positive behavioral changes students underwent due to the end-of-session learning outcomes, the researchers felt compelled to push for the EPT at the university consistently to ensure equality for all students. Students at a specific level would benefit from having the course materials tailored to their skill levels. This would save them time and effort. Therefore, it is necessary to implement and carry out placement exams in-house to produce beneficial learning results and help other researchers in future research.

Despite the immense growth of ELLs in the country and the current state of competition, language skills remain a top priority. So every part of students' educational experience must be scrutinized and improved. Because assessment findings are utilized to make academic decisions (e.g., identification of competence level, educational program placement, inclusion in large-scale examinations), developing a valid and reliable assessment system for EFL students is essential and significant.

Practical implications: The study demonstrates the applicability of the EPT for EFL college admission requirements based on English proficiency levels for English language courses. The study practically favors that using EPTs to register EFL students according to their levels of English skills in colleges, organizations, and other institutions would be advantageous and productive in preparation for English standardized testing, e.g., IELTS and TOEFL.

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