

Aptitude Writing Test for Freshman Students at Arab Open University – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Aptitude test was used in this study to predict freshman students' success at the university level of Arab Open University – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Data for 20 freshman students who enrolled at Arab Open University – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were analyzed. All of these students were male students. Percentage analyses were conducted to find out band of each student separately from band 1.0 to band 9.0. The results show that the best predictor of student success at the university was aptitude test, which is used to measure level of freshman students. The study points out that aptitude is one of the most influential psychological factor that hinder freshman students' writing performance at Arab Open University in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: University, aptitude test, writing skills, freshman students.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definitions and Importance of Aptitude

According to Richard and Renandya (2008:205), “Lack of Aptitude” is influenced by a number of factors. Age is one of the most commonly cited determinant factors of success or failure in Second Language (henceforth L2). This shows that the aging process itself may affect or limit adult learners' ability to pronounce the target language fluently.

Adult learners do not seem to have the same innate language – specific endowment or propensity as children for acquiring fluency and naturalness in spoken language.

Littlewood (2008:62) proposes to use ‘ability’ in a broader sense than is often the case. The term is often restricted to cognitive aspects of a person’s ability to learn, notably intelligence and a set of more specific language-learning abilities called ‘language aptitude’. Here Littlewood uses it to refer to a broader set of factors which – given similar motivation and opportunities – make some people better at learning than others.

People greatly differ in how fast, how well and by what means they learn an additional language. The variability in rates, outcomes and processes can be strikingly large, particularly for people who begin learning an L2 later in life (Ortega 2009:145).

Aptitude is an important psychological factor. It is the student’s ability in learning a language. According to Griffiths (2009:142), language aptitude is defined in terms of speed in language learning.

According to Carroll (1981:84), aptitude refers to a disposition to be able to do something well and perfectly.

Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics states that aptitude is the relationship between a learner’s personal strengths and weaknesses in learning and the learning situation, including the type of programme one enrolled in (Richard, 2002:31).

According to Ortega (2009:158-165), language aptitude is the psychological formulation behind the intuition that some people have a gift for additional language learning while others seem to struggle. Language aptitude partially overlaps with traditional intelligence and with early first language ability. Many SLA researchers believe that children learn their first language so well because they have the cognitive and linguistic endowment to learn it entirely implicitly.

In addition, aptitude seems to operate independently of many of the affective variables involved in Second Language Learning (SLL). Several studies suggest that aptitude and intelligence are the most stable predictors of learning a language or other subjects.

The Ability Differentiation Hypothesis claims that some L2 learners may have more clearly differentiated abilities – and strengths in corresponding aptitude complexes – than other learners

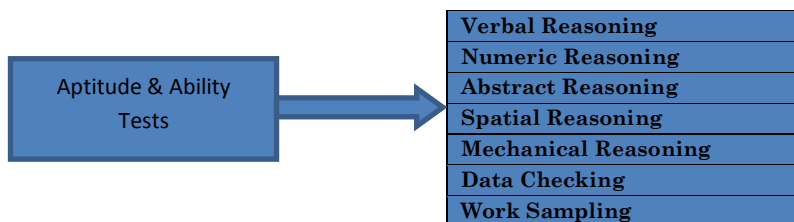
and further that it is particularly important to match these learners to conditions of practice which favor their strengths. This is in contrast with other learners who may have less differentiated abilities and equivalent strengths and aptitudes for learning under a variety of conditions of exposure and classroom practice (DeKeyser, 2008:278).

Manjula and Priyanka in a presentation state that value of aptitude testing can be classified into four categories:

1. They are excellent predictor of future scholastic achievement.
2. They provide ways of comparing a learner's performance with that of other learners in the same situation.
3. They provide a profile of strengths and weakness.
4. They assess differences among individuals.

Therefore, Lack of aptitude causes anxiety as one of the major psychological factors that affect students L2 Learning. In addition, there are different types of aptitude test that can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 1. Types of Aptitude Test



Manjula and Priyanka online slide

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This time through out the world numbers of students apply for university admission alleviated every year. Tertiary institutions in a critical decision by admitting some students and rejecting others that is considered a strong decision. So, admission from academic affairs is decision that in light of one variable or criterion, such as high school grade point average alone are unfair and needs to be justified. Therefore, standardized tests either in general education or higher

education have become crucial factors in admission decisions specifically at universities in many countries (Alnahdi, 2015).

The present study conducted aptitude test into two different ways: first, by examining the freshman students' ability of writing skills in order to predict their ability of writing based on standardized test specifically in English department at Arab Open University (AOU) - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Second, by examining their ability you can realized who is weak to be given a remedial work and improve his level in English writing in addition to those who need intensive orientations to complete a degree program successfully at Arab Open University. In fact, a strategy has been implemented in this study that students submitted Aptitude writing test to measure their ability of academic writing based on their background of secondary education and did not link to the curriculum or hands outs. Time is fixed and a conducive classroom exam had been provided. Aptitude is amount of time students need to achieve a specific task. In other words, aptitude is predictor of the time the learner wants to learn a specific academic task. In addition, aptitude uses a measure to assess student prior knowledge that assists the learners to spend less time in learning a task. According to Carroll (1963), learning lies in aptitude and the quality of instruction. Aptitude is an effective factor to predict students' achievement that measures through prior knowledge. Students who have high aptitude will perform challenge task. Equally, a student who has low aptitude can achieve simplest task. Furthermore, a student who has poorer level to learn the specific task he/she needs more time to achieve the task that is provided. Thus, the student who has high aptitude need less amount of time to complete the learning task (Carroll, 1989). Aptitude tests commonly have been used in the educational, clinical, and industrial settings. The majority of people in these different areas of expertise use standardized aptitude tests (Magno, 2009). Conversely, unfortunately most of colleges marginalized the role and importance of aptitude tests in measurement and assessment specifically in the human sciences discipline they do not provide students with certain needs such as measuring domain specific like potentials of education and languages. This article highlights usefulness of aptitude test at Arab Open University (AOU) -Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to ensure prosperity and propensity among higher institutions. There are many studies have ensured importance of aptitude test which is a key

player in measurement and assessment either in human sciences or applied science for instance study of (Magno 2009), (Alnahdi, 2015), Mcmanus, et al (2005). This study validated the General Aptitude Test (GAT) in Saudi Arabia. While (Koljatic & Cofre, 2015) used aptitude tests to achievement tests in Chile. The study showed that writing is the problem of our students. Therefore, English language tutors need to give it more attention inside the classroom. While Bushiat, (2015), tested students' perceptions towards the SAT in terms of their level of preparedness for taking the SAT, the overall perception of SA.

According to the researcher, aptitude causes anxiety, lack of self-confidence and shyness as they affect negatively toward the students' writing skills.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the current study is to examine learners of Arab Open University (AOU) Kingdom of Saudi by aptitude test predictive validity for success at the university level. This study examines the first freshman in most specific criteria for success at the university level in terms of writing skills and this kind of test ensures their graduation.

3.1 Objective of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Find out the extent of the influence of freshman's aptitude in their written English.
2. Produce some constructive recommendations for English language teachers in order to improve their students' writing skills.
3. Ensure standardization for selecting learners who are willing to pass and success with consistently high band and meet requirements of admission in the English language department at Arab Open University.

3.2 Significance of the Study

The present study differs from the previous studies because the previous studies concentrated mainly on the influence of anxiety, motivation, self-confidence toward writing skills and neglected

aptitude which can be considered as one of the most important psychological factors that affect negatively toward the writing process. Therefore, this study will state the problem to the teacher who is the key of the educational process in order to be aware of this important factor. So, the researcher hopes that this study will contribute in solving this problem that results in low achievement in learning writing as one of the important language skills and one of the most problematic area of our students at Arab Open University in Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Methodology of the Study

The sample of the study was drawn from a writing test of (20) male freshman students from Arab Open University – Saudi Arabia Branch – Riyadh campus. The study conducted aptitude by examining the freshman students' ability of writing skills in order to predict their ability of writing based on standardized test.

3.4 Limitation of the Study

Most previous studies were concentrated mainly about, motivation, attitudes, anxiety, self-confidence in relation with writing. That is why the present study will cover aptitude as one of the important psychological factors that affect negatively toward the freshman students writing performance. The data was a test taken from the intensive English program in the academic year 2019-2020.

4. DATA AND RESULTS

Data collected from freshman learners who were enrolled in fall 2019-2020 at Arab Open University. Data had been obtained from enrolled learners university mid-term writing section code is EL-097 - 1201 records and identification numbers were cleared to ensure the confidentiality of information for 20 male learners. All answers sheet were submitted inside the class examinations. Aptitude test was marked as well as any standardized test. Low band is 0.00 and high band is 9.0. So average of band 2.5 about eight students and the highest mark is 5.4 which was gained by one student out of twenty students, whereas the lowest band is 0.0 which three students had gained and that indicates that some students do not have the ability to write a single sentence. Therefore, Aptitude test has been attached

to experts in assessment and evaluation in writing skills in order to ensure standardization for selecting learners who are willing to pass and success with consistently high band and meet requirements of admission in the English language department at Arab Open University.

Table (1)

Code	Content	Grammar	Punctuation	Vocabulary	Spelling	Band 9
M	1	1	1	1	1	2.5
K	1	1	1	1	1	2.5
B	0	0	0	0	0	0
N	0	0	0	0	0	0
M	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.9
M	2	2	2	2	1	4.0
K	2	1	1	2	1	3.0
A	3	2	3	2	2	5.4
A	0.5	0.5	0	.5	.5	0.9
S	2	.5	2	2	1	3.3
N	0	0	0	0	0	0
A	2	1	2	2	1	3.6
A	1	1	1	1	1	2.5
S	1.5	1	1	1	1	2.2
D	2	1	2	1	1	3.1
M	1	1	1	1	1	2.5
S	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.3
M	1	1	1	1	1	2.5
M	1.5	1	1	1	1	2.5
A	1	1	1	1	1	2.5

4.1 Discussion

This study found that aptitude test is the best predictor for success in the tertiary level specifically at Arab Open University (AOU). This result differs from Bushiat,(2015), (Magno 2009), (Alnahdi, 2015), (Koljatic & Cofre2015) Mcmanus, et,al (2005) findings; the authors either found that the combination of HSGPA and SAT scores or validate Aptitude tests was consistently the best predictor of university success across many studies. Converesly, the present study used aptitude test for freshman to ensure writing abilities. This study found that, freshman learners have shown very low score which is the strongest predictor of success in the tertiary level compare to GPA. This result can be explained that secondary schools used similar instructional methods and provide experiences similar to those students experience in high schools. The other explanation is that aptitude test is a standardized test showed the real level of freshman

in writing means that is failed to capture and measure abilities that could help students succeed in a university without a standardized test. Therefore, the similarities between high school education and university education are greater than the differences. It is reasonable that high school GPA is the most accurate predictor of university success. This finding supports that aptitude test measures different abilities that might be ignored in high school tests or colleges. Therefore, the learning and assessment methods utilized in universities must be different and more thoughtful than school level. In the second scenario, the GAT failed to capture and measure students' aptitude and potential to succeed in a university setting. If this finding is accurate, the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education needs to develop and make necessary modifications to the GAT to increase its predictive validity. This study found that the GAT is the strongest predictor of success when the criterion is to predict graduation, with slightly better predictive ability than HSGPA. The result of current study is partially consistent with (Alnahdi, 2015), (Koljatic & Cofre2015), Bushiat, (2015). To recap, aptitude tests appear to be more able to predict university success in writing as one of the problematic area of EFL learners.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the present study aptitude test is designed to measure abilities of freshman learners' writing at Arab Open University (AOU), which is not often offered either in high school or college tests as a requirement of admission. Colleges should use aptitude tests to improve the predictive validity of the learners to reach or exceed the predictive writing ability specifically freshman learners. Future studies need to examine and conduct intensive studies on different English skills by using aptitude tests. In addition, the need for university officials in Saudi Arabia to review and evaluate students continually in order to categorize students into different levels of knowledge and skills. Moreover, the intensive English program at Arab Open University in Saudi Arabia needs to develop remedial classes to practice writing as one of the problematic area of our students in Saudi Arabia.

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