

**ACHIEVEMENT TESTS INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPING RECEPTIVE SKILLS:  
(CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT SCIENCE AND  
HUMANITIES COLLEGE - SHAQRA UNIVERSITY - KSA)**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aims at investigating the achievement tests impact on receptive skills of undergraduate Saudi students at the Faculty of Science and Humanities- Sharqa University. To obtain valuable information the researchers use a questionnaire and achievement tests. Afterwards, they use the SPSS programme and the descriptive analytical method to analyse the data. Moreover, they divide the sample into a controlled and experimental group. The latter group is examined by three achievement tests whereas the controlled group is not. Then, the two groups are exposed again to a post-placement test that shows significant and positive effect on the experimental group. Some of the findings are as follows: students of the experimental group are highly motivated and encouraged to gain knowledge, have self-confidence, neglect mistakes and errors and focus on fluency as a means of enhancing learning process. Ultimately, the study problem reasons are discussed and remedies are recommended as well.*

**KEYWORDS:** Achievement Tests, Receptive Skills, experimental group, controlled group, the SPSS programme.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The field of foreign language (FL) teaching and learning faces some challenges. Testing in this field is not an exception. It is perhaps one of the most misunderstood areas in language teaching and learning. So, teaching and testing are interdependent and interrelated processes. This is noted repeatedly by testing experts such as Heaton (1990), Ebel, R.L. and Frisbie, D.A. (1991) and Bachman (1990).

Poor teaching techniques that require the memorization of hard facts can have a negative effect on the test such as the teacher prepares test items that require only the recalling of hard facts, however. On the other side, teaching which is based on interactive and communicative approach mainly focuses on the application of high amount of mental effort. Afterwards, this attempt would lead to good test items' preparation which requires high level of mental effort.

In teaching-learning process, language testing is a necessity in most teaching situations, as it provides educators with feedback which reflects to what extent learners' achievement has approached the ultimate stated objective. Language testing is also one of the instruments of assessing the validity of teaching methods and techniques being used. In fact, the relationship effect between teaching and testing can be positive or negative on learners and it is called backwash effect. Hughes, A. (2002) defined backwash as: "The effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash, and can be harmful or beneficial" (p.1) Whereas Geoffrey et al, (1980) declared that "the second meaning of test refers to what is usually a short, quick teacher- devised activity carried out in the classroom, and used by the teacher as the basis of an on-going assessment." (p.146)

Unfortunately, tests are considered fearful to the majority of students, as they take tests seriously. Teachers benefit from backwash effect. Yet, Dina T., (2009) argued that "there might be other factors at work, in addition to the design of a test that could influence the presence or absence of washback. For example, there might be many consequences which can be caused by misuses of a test or by a teacher's linguistic ability, training, motivation or course hours, class size, and extra lessons and so on which are beyond the control of the test." (p.6) Therefore, setting a test deserves to be given a due care and attention.

Normally, achievement tests are used to evaluate instruction via knowledge gained. They are ability tests designed to measure what learners have learned in a planning or training programme. Thus, the researchers consider the achievement test as a very useful tool to arrive at an accurate feedback. It is useful in taking decisions about who will be accepted or rejected in a particular programme at an institution, in placing or transferring a student from one programme to another in which he/she is likely to be most successful, and in depicting points of strength and weakness in order to improve the students' record of achievement. Cherry K, ( 2020) declared that "achievement testing remains a key element in measuring educational success...an achievement test can be important for determining your current level of ability and possible need for further training." (n. p.).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Tests are effective educational means that serve informational functions. First, tests help teachers evaluate students then assess whether the objectives of learning process are fulfilled or not. Second, smart tests serve to motivate and help students construct and plan for their academic future. Third, tests can help teachers understand how to present their

material successfully. Finally, tests reinforce learning by providing learners with hints of skills that they should master.

The researchers already know the inspired idea that a test has a huge impact on classroom behavior. Then, the above idea encouraged them to investigate achievement tests influence on developing receptive skills and to examine them as tools of reinforcing and enhancing learning process rather than frustrating and fearing learners. The above problem is a predictive one as it is possible for the researchers to collect data and conduct an empirical research that answer the question: “Are the achievement tests used wisely to encourage undergraduate students, at Science and Humanities College at Shaqra University, engage in activities that will reinforce their learning of English language receptive skills?”

### **Questions of the Study**

To response to the above presented question which, the study intends to answer, the questions below are put forward. They are analytical questions since the researchers use quantitative methods- a questionnaire and achievement tests - to explore them:

1. Which of the receptive skills is positively more influenced by achievement tests rather than the other?
2. How can achievement tests reinforce learning of English language receptive skills?
3. How do achievement tests affect learners' receptive language skills?

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The researchers think the problem over, review the literature for clues, and then set the following hypotheses:

1. When achievement tests are administered to learners, then more positive effect will be observed in their reading skill rather than listening.
2. Since learners perform achievement tests, then they can succeed in learning receptive skills of English language.
3. If learners are exposed to intensive achievement tests, then their receptive language skills level can be measured.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it will contribute in making English learning more facilitated in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it will help and encourage learners to consider a test as a developer of language skills rather than a fearful tool that hinders the progress of their learning process. Furthermore, it contributes in foreign language (FL) skills development research, focusing primarily on reading and listening as receptive language skills. It, also, stimulates EFL students to develop their language skills especially reading and listening. Then, it anticipates that there will be open new horizons to EFL teachers to consider using achievement activities inside their classrooms. It stresses the influence of achievement tests on developing language skills especially the receptive ones; reading and listening skills. Finally, it highlights the relationship between administering achievement tests and the promotion of young learners' learning process.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

In the year 2019, the study population was chosen as EFL undergraduate students of grade one (Preparatory-year students) from Quwaiyiyah Science and Humanities College at Shaqra University, in KSA. As one of the data collecting tools, three achievement tests were set to assess the receptive skills only. The tests were taken from a syllabus called "Direct English 1 ". The achievement test was the only type of test which would be focused on. The other data collecting tool was a questionnaire being distributed to lecturers and teachers of schools. Using a questionnaire, in this study, is not going to be hundred percent perfect, meanwhile, the questionnaire's validity and reliability are questionable because of the following points:

- Some respondents do not answer all questions and some give incomplete or indefinite responses.
- Some respondents answer superficially, then the questionnaire takes a long time to complete, though an immediate response is generally best.
- Since respondents are so busy in KSA, some of them answer the questionnaire carelessly.

Due to the detailed nature of the treatment of tests and the time needed to study each case individually, it was not easy to control a large number of subjects to be on time for their tests: therefore, the results seems more suggestive rather than conclusive. Moreover, the study focused on a group of Saudi male students which limits its results and interpretations to that group only. Finally, female subjects were excluded due to cultural and social values. So results and findings might be different if female subjects participated.

### **Literature Review**

This section will cover all important points of the previous researches on the study topic. It will survey scholarly journal articles, books, government reports, web sites and other sources on the subject of this research, that is to say it will describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify the researches that existing in the field before this study. The researchers will identify the relationship of some works in the area of the study to the topic of this research paper and to other works, and then they will make a case for why further studies are needed.

### **What are Achievement Tests?**

It is known that, achievement tests are assessments of developed knowledge or skill which are conducted to measure students' level of skill, accomplishment, or knowledge in a specific area, usually through planned instruction, such as training or classroom activities. In other words, they are examinations that attempt to determine and measure a person's ability to acquire, through future training, some specific set of skills (intellectual, motor, and so on), that is to say they measure how well students can demonstrate their knowledge of a particular academic subject or skill.

U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (2000), proposed that, “achievement tests, also known as proficiency tests, are frequently used to measure an individual’s current knowledge or skills that are important to a particular job. These tests generally fall into one of the following formats:

- Knowledge tests typically involve specific questions to determine how much the individual knows about particular job tasks and responsibilities. Traditionally they have been administered in a paper-and-pencil format, but computer administration is becoming more common. Licensing exams for accountants and psychologists are examples of knowledge tests. Knowledge tests tend to have relatively high validity.
- Work-sample or performance tests require the individual to actually demonstrate or perform one or more job tasks. These tests, by their makeup, generally show a high degree of job-relatedness. For example, an applicant for an office-machine repairman position may be asked to diagnose the problem with a malfunctioning machine. Test takers generally view these tests as fairer than other types of tests. Use of these tests often results in less adverse impact than mental ability tests and job knowledge tests. However, they can be expensive to develop and administer.” (Ch. 4, P. 2)

### **What are Receptive Skills?**

Receptive skills are the skills of listening and reading. They are called receptive because learners need not to produce language in order to conduct them; he/she only receives and understands them. Being this the case, they are passive skills. They are contrasted with speaking and writing which are productive and active as well. Hossain, M. I. (2015) declared that “reading and listening are called receptive skills because when we listen and read something we receive the language, understand it and decode the meaning.” (p.8).

Students should master receptive skills as they are important for learning new languages. Receptive skills are also important in helping the students to understand and interpret spoken and written materials. According to researchers' view these necessary skills are developed in active learning classrooms where students achieve higher learning outcomes; however this type of learning needs active teachers and students who are ready to perform particular activities. The above view is strengthened by Sirous Tabrizi’s opinion (2018) that “a typical passive learning classroom could involve a lecture where students write down what they hear and then have to repeat it back at some point later. In contrast, an active learning classroom could involve a lecture but then students need to discuss with each other the topics given in the lecture, and use that discussion to give a presentation to their classmates. As can be seen from this simple example, active learning techniques achieve higher learning outcomes but require more effort from both the teachers and students.” (p.100).

### **How to develop Receptive Skills?**

It has been agreed upon that, meaning is understood and imagination is increased, easily, through listening and reading. Sreena S. and Ilankumaran M. (2018) declared that “a large

amount of reading and listening takes place because it helps the students achieve the clear aim. For example, if someone reads a roads sign so that they know where to go. Students listen to lectures, seminars and talks for extending their knowledge and skills. Listening is a hub of all learning. A student who cannot understand what the teacher says in a class is seriously slowdown in the learning.” (P.670)

The above two scholars go further to say that “the receptive skills are to be improved through the improvement of listening and reading. A student is a good listener and careful reader as well. Through the interest and search of knowledge, the learner may earn maximum receptive skills. The ability to make out something remains questionable until it reaches perfection. A student may understand a well written essay but he cannot produce it perfectly without practice. For a good output, an input is necessary. Absorption and concentration is important for listening. The reading needs an extensive study to improve it. The best selection of materials for reading, different ideas on the same subject also help to improve these skills.” (P.670)

If the students develop their listening and reading skills through certain practice, they are sure to get confidence to speak in any situation. The teachers guide the students and motivate them to improve their speaking skills by giving topics and ask the students to give talks. Reading makes students to improve their knowledge. The efficient reading increases and improves the concentration as well as the level of comprehension. The cognitive process makes the learners more confident about their learning process. Yet, Juni B. S. and Wargianto, S. (2015) stated that, a large number of language learners throughout the world study English for the sake of proficiency in speaking skills. And this is only because speaking is the first in importance than the other English language skills and should be learnt by people if they need to communicate with each other around the world and gain benefit out of that communication. (p. 1).

Bryan H. (2019), claimed that “developing receptive skills can be particularly challenging especially when communicating with a fluent or native speaker. Although starting a conversation may be done with relative ease, maintaining one poses greater challenges. Most likely learners may not recognize features of connected speech or idiomatic language which may lead to an unsuccessful interaction. Similarly with reading, if the language or grammar is too complicated it makes the text unintelligible. The key difference between listening and reading is that when learners listen to information, they have much less support than when they are working with the written word on the page. Listening requires ‘real-time’ processing of language, and once the message has finished, there is no easy way to go back and check for meaning, as there is during reading.” (n. p.)

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present part of this paper is about the field research, that is to say it deals with data collection by recording methods. In fact, the collecting and using the data (factual exploration) has an important role in this study.

### **Instruments**

For this empirical study, the researchers will use different transactions to secure data. Then, they will cleave or follow steadily the descriptive analytical method to report, arrange, investigate and sum up the data by making use of the following tools:

1. A questionnaire
2. Achievement tests

The researchers use the above instruments to combines quantitative methods and qualitative ones in three manners: using one to display the findings of the other, using one as a base for the other, and using them in a collective way to locate different attributes of the same research question. These mixed methods are more dependable and provide a more complete explanation than either method alone.

### **Population and Sample**

The study population is Saudi university students who studied at Shaqra University. The sample is selected form the population which is taken from Science and Humanities College. Students of the whole population are middle class society. Their ages are between 19 and 20 years. They study English for seven years.

### **Actions of Conducting the Questionnaire and Achievement Tests**

The researchers use twenty-eight statements in this questionnaire. (Underneath is the questionnaire). The questionnaire consists of four domains that have direct relationship with the three hypotheses of the study. These four domains are as follows:

- Teachers' role with regard to achievement tests.
- Students' role in respect of achievement tests.
- The role of syllabus with reference to achievement tests.
- English department role in connection with achievement tests.

Regarding the actions of conducting the questionnaire and achievement tests: First, achievement tests are administered to students during the year 2019 to represent the experimental method. Second, one questionnaire is for investigating the attitudes of EFL teachers about the impact of achievement test on developing receptive skills. The responses of the questionnaire are tabulated and computed by applying arithmetic mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each statement to test the hypotheses round the mean by using the (T) test at (.05) level of significance. Then, the experiment scores are tabulated and computed as well.

***Questionnaire*****Name:** (Optional) .....**Years of experience:** .....**Place of work:** .....

Would you please, note that the purpose of this questionnaire is merely to help in writing a research paper, and that there are no right or wrong answers. You have five options, below, to respond to the questionnaire Statements. Please, respond to each of these statements, immediately, by making a (✓) in the appropriate box as an immediate response is generally best.

- **SA** = strongly agree
- **A** = agree
- **NS** = not sure
- **D** = disagree
- **SD** = strongly disagree

No.	Statement	SA	A	NS	D	SD
<b>Teachers' role with regard to achievement tests</b>						
1	Teachers focus on achievement test.					
2	It is difficult to set an achievement test.					
3	An achievement test is easily corrected.					
4	Teachers use an achievement test frequently in classrooms.					
5	Teachers usually prepare listening question based on the objective of the lesson.					
6	A student is encouraged to do an achievement test.					
7	A student obtains high marks in an achievement test.					
<b>Students' role in respect of achievement tests</b>						
8	Students prefer achievement test in listening skill.					
9	Students prefer achievement test in reading skill.					
10	Continuous reading practice enables a student to grasp the information they read easily.					
11	Achievement tests develop students' listening performance.					
12	An achievement test develops a student's reading performance.					
13	The more learners are exposed to reading, the better they master it.					
14	A student finds practicing reading is easier than listening					



<b>The role of syllabus with reference to achievement tests</b>						
15	EL syllabus encourages an achievement test in listening.					
16	English language syllabus encourages an achievement test in reading.					
17	Achievement tests are administered to a certain progress and to diagnose learning difficulties.					
18	There is discrepancy between what the students are exposed to and what the examiner assumes they are exposed to.					
19	An English syllabus gives chances of already-made achievement test.					
20	Audio- visual aids are necessary in teaching listening and reading.					
21	The majority of syllabus and test designers ignore the elements of achievement tests in their text books.					
<b>English department role in connection with achievement tests</b>						
22	The ministry of education in Saudi Arabia has standard achievement test administered monthly.					
23	The English department insists on having an achievement test.					
24	Education administrators insist on applying achievement test for students.					
25	English department focuses on testing listening and reading.					
26	English Department encourages students to do homework on listening.					
27	English department motivates students to go on reading during and after the lessons.					
28	Achievement test marks are added to the overall result of students.					

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This is the most necessary part of the paper since it expresses and interprets the findings value in a way improving what is already recognized about the research problem under investigation. The researchers discover that the proper way is to report the study results and frame them around the research hypotheses which they have formulated already, that is to say, they restate the first hypothesis and present the findings concerning it, and then they repeat the same procedure for each hypothesis in turn. To do this job, they start by interpreting and analysing the data using analytical and descriptive means to restate the hypotheses and then state clearly and concisely whether or not they have been supported by the experiment. In other words, the researchers will check whether these results support and verify the hypotheses, or they contradict them. They will list weaknesses that they have

identified in their experimental design if any. Then, they will tell the reader how these imperfections may have affected their results.

### Restating of the First Hypothesis

The researchers administer a listening placement test for the two groups- control and experimental- so as to check the equality in their performance. With regard to listening skill pre-test, the academic performance of the two groups is almost similar. The control group means score is (18) whereas the experimental group is (17.83). See table (1) below. The two groups mean scores difference is  $(18 - 17.83 = .17 < 0.5)$ . It is insignificant which declares that the two groups are almost the same in their academic performance.

Groups	Mean
Control group	18
Experimental group	17.83

Table (1). Listening placement test mean scores

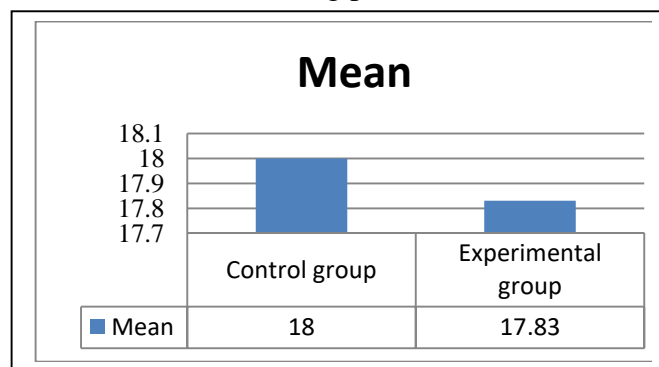


Figure (1). Listening placement test mean scores

Then, the researchers set a reading placement test for the two groups- control and experimental- in order to examine their performance. With respect to this test, the two groups' academic performance is nearly similar. The control group means score is (25.26) whereas the experimental is (25.13). See Table (2) and figure (2) underneath. The two groups mean scores difference is  $(25.27 - 25.13 = .14 < 0.5)$ . This difference is insignificant as it shows that the two groups are almost the same in their academic performance.

.Groups	Mean
Control group	25.27
Experimental group	25.13

Table (2). Reading placement test mean scores

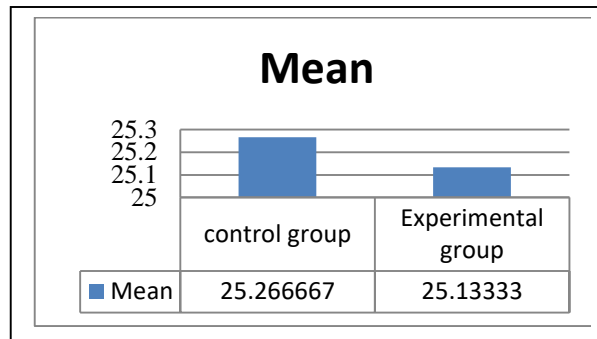


Figure (2). Reading placement test mean scores

The researchers deliver a listening post-test to both experimental and control groups. The subjects' marks are reported in table (3) below. This post-test is conducted to check the influence of the experiment on the experimental group. The experimental group mean in listening post-test is (27.7), whereas it is (17.9) in the control group. Therefore, the difference on mean scores is (9.8) which is more than (0.5).

Groups	Mean
Control group	17.9
Experimental group	27.7

Table (3). Listening raw scores of post-test

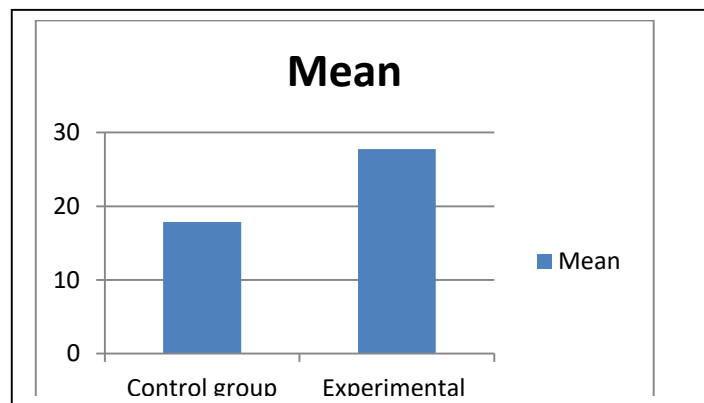


Figure (3). Listening raw scores of post-test

Referring to table (4) beneath, the experimental group mean in reading post-test is (28.8), whereas it is (25.4) in the control group. Therefore, the difference on mean scores is (9.8) which is more than (0.5). Then, the below table illustrates the difference on mean scores of the experimental group of reading skill is significant ( $28.8 - 25.4 = 3.4 > 0.5$ ) as it is more than 0.5.

Groups	Mean
Control group	25.4
Experimental group	28.8

Table (4). Reading raw scores of post-test

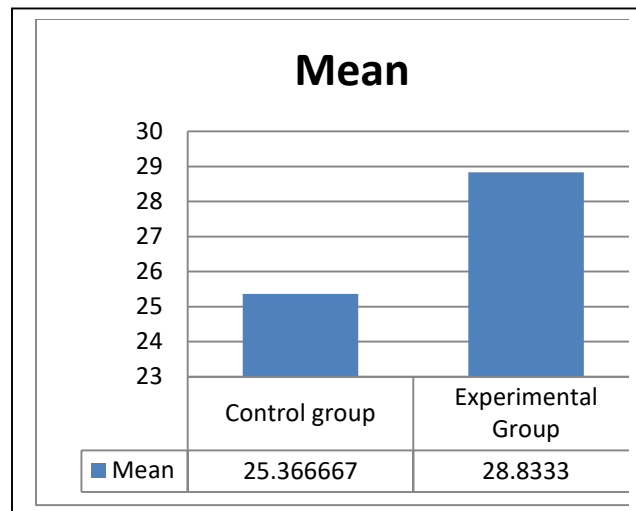


Figure (4). Reading raw scores of post-test

Referring to table (5) underneath, the difference in mean scores between listening post-test and pre-test, for the control group, is (0.1) and it is (9.9) for experimental group. Then the difference of mean scores in listening for both tests is  $(9.9 - 0.1 = 9.8)$ .

	Control group	Experimental group
Listening post-test	17.9	27.7
Listening pre-test	18	17.8
Difference of means	0.1	9.9

Table (5). The two groups difference of means in listening

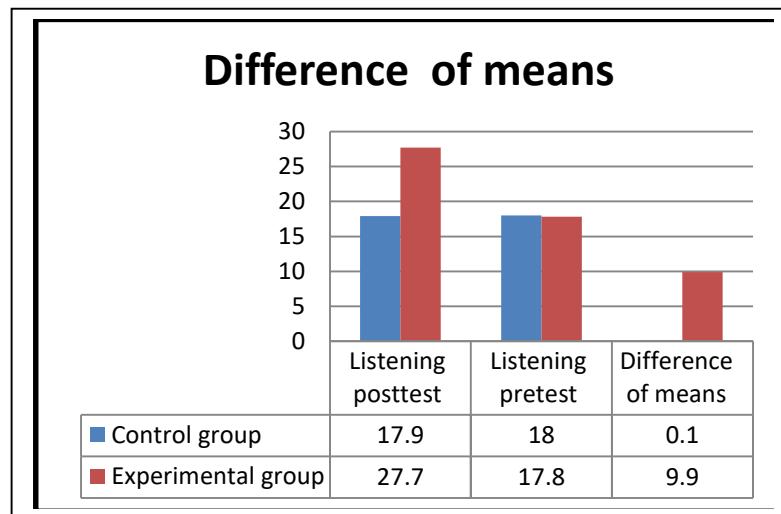


Figure (5). The two groups difference of means in listening

Here, in table (6) the difference in mean scores between reading post-test and pre-test, for the control group, is (0.1) and it is (3.7) for experimental group. Therefore, the difference of mean scores in reading for both tests is ( $3.7 - 0.1 = 3.6$ ).

Comparing the differences between the mean scores of post-tests in listening and reading, it appears that the mean score in listening is (9.9) while in reading is (3.7), that is to say the mean score in listening is greater than in reading. Another piece of information is that the experimental group is positively more influenced by the treatment in listening than in reading. The above findings strengthen the first hypothesis that: “When achievement tests are administered to learners, then more positive effect will be observed in their reading skill rather than listening.” It is clearly shown that reading and listening, as main skills, are positively influenced by the treatment. However, this result contradicts the preceding hypothesis since researchers expect reading to be more influenced by achievement tests than listening. Fortunately, the result is corresponding to the former opinion of Juni B. S and Wargianto, S. (2015) who declared that, “speaking is the first in importance than the other English language skills...” (p. 1).

	Control group	Experimental group
Reading posttest	25.4	28.8
Reading pretest	25.3	25.1
Difference of means	0.1	3.7

Table (6). The two groups difference of means in reading

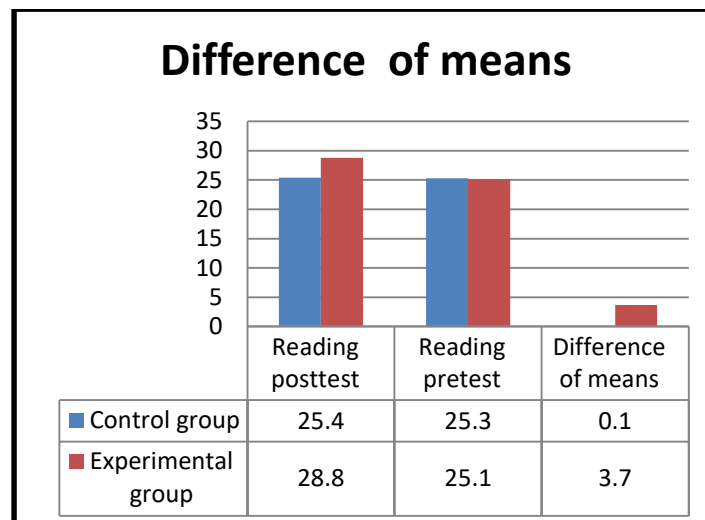


Figure (6). The two groups difference of means in reading

### Restating of the Second and Third Hypotheses

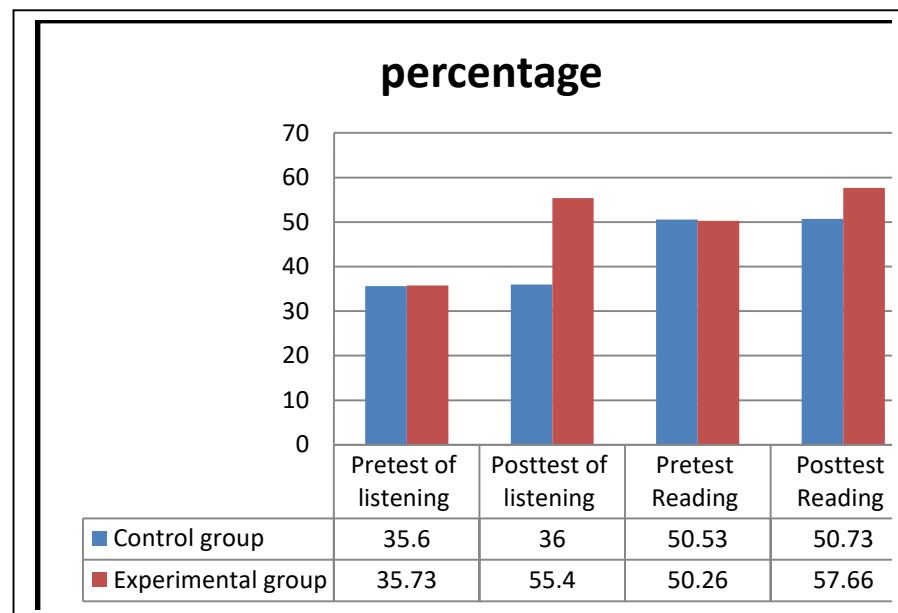
In table (7) below, the mean of listening pre-test for the experimental group is (35.73) while for the control group is (35.6). The difference between these two means is (.13) which is insignificant because it is less than (0.5). Yet, the mean score of listening post test of the experimental group is (55.4) while of the control group is (36). The difference between these two means is (19.4) which is significant because it is more than (0.5). The present results show that the experimental group is vividly affected by the treatment in listening. They are, also, justified that achievement tests enhance learners' English language receptive skills. In such a case, the researchers claim that these results support and verify the second and third hypotheses:

- Since learners perform achievement tests, then they can succeed in learning receptive skills of English language.
- If learners are exposed to intensive achievement tests, then their receptive language skills level can be measured.

In addition to the preceding information about the second and third hypotheses, these results, also, agreed with Cherry K. (2020) opinion- in the introduction- that "achievement testing remains a key element in measuring educational success...an achievement test can be important for determining your current level of ability and possible need for further training." (n. p.).

	Control group	Experimental group	Result
<b>Pre-test listening of</b>	35.6 %	35.73 %	Similar
<b>Post-test listening of</b>	36 %	55.4 %	Significant difference
<b>Pre-test Reading</b>	50.53 %	50.26 %	Similar
<b>Post-test Reading</b>	50.73 %	57.66 %	Significant difference

Table (7). A three-dimensional identification



## CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### Conclusion

The main problem of this study is based upon the classical idea that a test has a huge impact on classroom behaviour. Bearing this idea in their minds the researchers set off to investigate the area of the achievement tests as tools of reinforcing and enhancing learning process rather than frustrating and fearing learners. They, also, set out to collect data that answer the question: ‘Are the achievement tests used wisely to encourage undergraduate students at Science and Humanities College- Shaqra University- KSA, engage in activities that will help them acquire more knowledge?’

The researchers administer listening and reading placement test for two groups- control and experimental- so as to check the equality in their performance. Afterwards, they deliver listening and reading post-test to both groups. Yet, the experimental group is influenced by the treatment in both reading and listening skills, as it is clearly shown that learners do not need to produce language when conducting these two skills which are considered as receptive ones. Hence, researchers regard them as the easiest skills that can be used for learning a language.

So many studies reflect that achievement tests are developed to measure skills and knowledge learned in a given grade level, usually through planned instruction, such as training or classroom instruction. The researchers emphasize that the utilization of achievement tests have good effect on developing and reinforcing teaching and learning processes, since the majority of the respondents stand for the idea that the application of these achievement tests is useful in having decisions about who will be taken or refused in a specific programme in an educational institute, in putting or transferring a student from one programme to another in which he is likely to be most successful, and in determining points of strength and weakness in order to improve the students' record of achievement.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Here are some recommendations that are related directly to the above-mentioned problem of the study. Based upon the results of the study researchers suggest these recommendations which they want scholars to follow when performing future studies:

1. To encourage students to study, teachers have to consider achievement tests as tools of reinforcement and motivation.
2. Regular tests have great role in developing all language skills especially the receptive ones, that is to say listening and reading.
3. To provide teachers and school administrators with the programmes that enable students to practise listening and reading skills in and outside their classrooms.
4. EFL teachers should be trained to construct subjective and objective tests in order to give learners a wider scope of practising the integrity of language skills.
5. Curriculum planners, syllabus designers, and administrators should prepare workshops and training programmes in how to set achievement tests.
6. Attention should be paid to listening skill as it is regarded as a key to learning process.
7. To improve EFL teachers' ability to construct valid and reliable achievement tests.
8. Teachers should not use tests as a frustrating instrument against students.
9. Regular tests encourage learners to learn more.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

Based on the findings of the study, the following topics are suggested for further research:

1. Further studies could be done to measure the impact of effective teachers on developing receptive skills.
2. Reasons and factors behind learners' fear of tests needed to be investigated.



3. Further studies should be carried out to investigate obstacles that hinder the development of listening and reading.
4. The same study to be conducted with another different data gathering.
5. The impact of reliable and valid achievement tests on washback effect.

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