

Attitude and approach of medical students towards improving English proficiency and its impact on faculty exam results



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Introduction

Though academic activities are conducted exclusively in English, majority entering medical schools, study either in Sinhala or Tamil up to GCE advanced level. English language skills of students will influence their performance at the medical school, but only limited number of studies have addressed this issue.

Objectives

To assess, attitudes of medical students towards improving English language skills, the improvement achieved in language skills during faculty life, and effects of English language skills on academic performances of medical students

Method

Study design - A descriptive cross sectional study
Study setting - Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

Study period - 2019 December to 2020 January

Study population - Local medical students from original batch 25, currently studying in the final year

Sample size - An estimated targeted sample size of 125 students out of 155 local students

Sampling method - All inclusive sampling method, depending on consenting and voluntary participation

Study Instruments - A self administered questionnaire to obtain personal data and attitudes towards improving English language skills.

A question paper prepared by English department similar to the aptitude test held at faculty entry to assess improvement during faculty stay

Results sheets of post English course exam and unit 4 exam.

Data collection - Final year students filled the questionnaire and answered the English language paper within an allocated time. Their previous exam results were obtained from the faculty with permission from authorities. Answer scripts were marked with the help of English department.

Data analysis - SPSS version 21 was used for data analysis.

Results

Out of the original 25th batch, there were 152 local students studying in the final year. Out of this 62.8% completed the questionnaire, and 72.4% answered the English exam.

There was no association between the A/L attempt of entry and the A/L English grade (Fig.1 & 2)

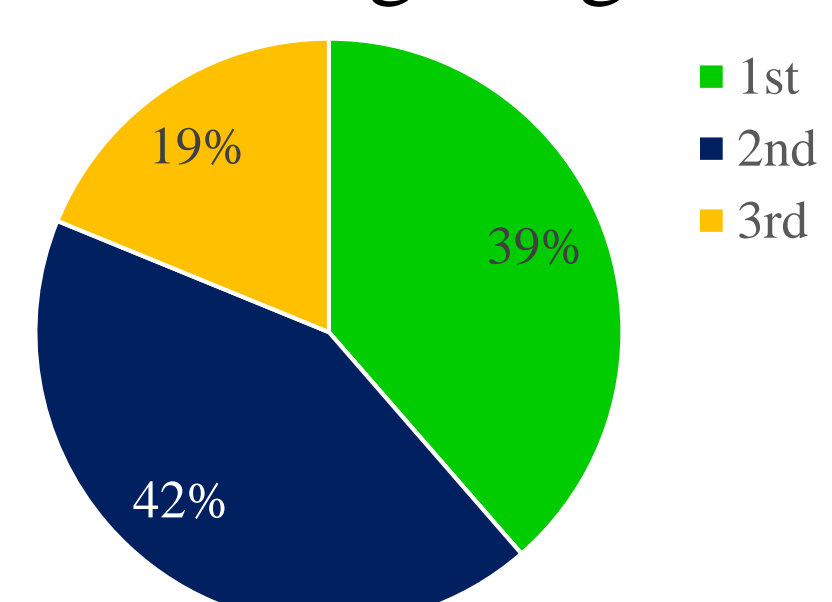


Figure 1: Distribution of sample according to the entering attempt at A/L

Results

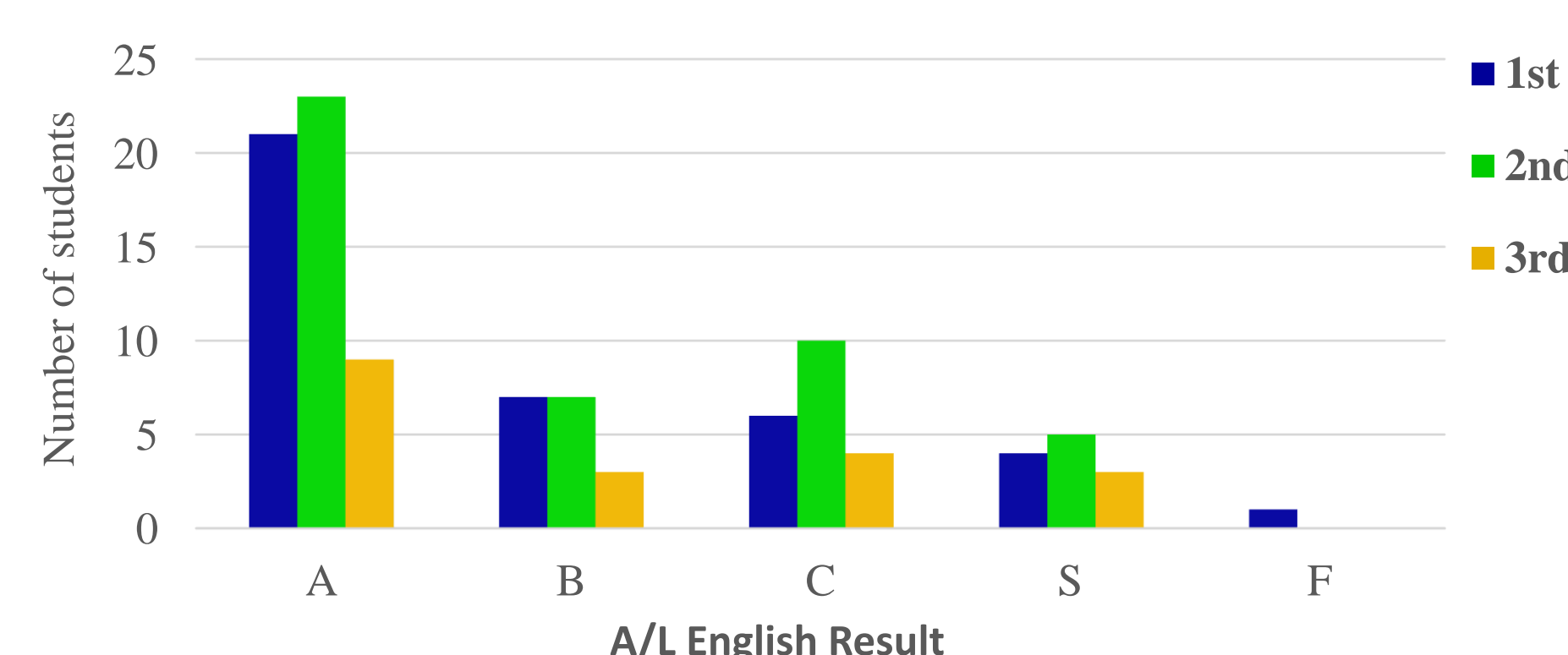


Figure 2: Comparison of A/L English result and the attempt at A/L for faculty entry

A significant drop in "A" grades were noted from O/L to A/L. Only 58% of students who had an 'A' grade at O/L had "A" grade at A/L. (Figure 3)

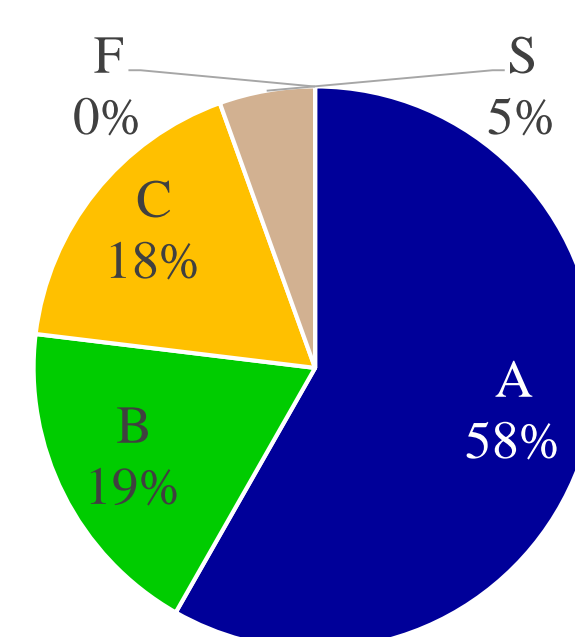


Figure 3: A/L English grade of students who had "A" grade at O/L (n=91)

With regard to improving English language skills, only 39% had made formal attempts before entering faculty and only 30% after entering. Formal attempts were through attending a course or tuition class.(Figure 4)

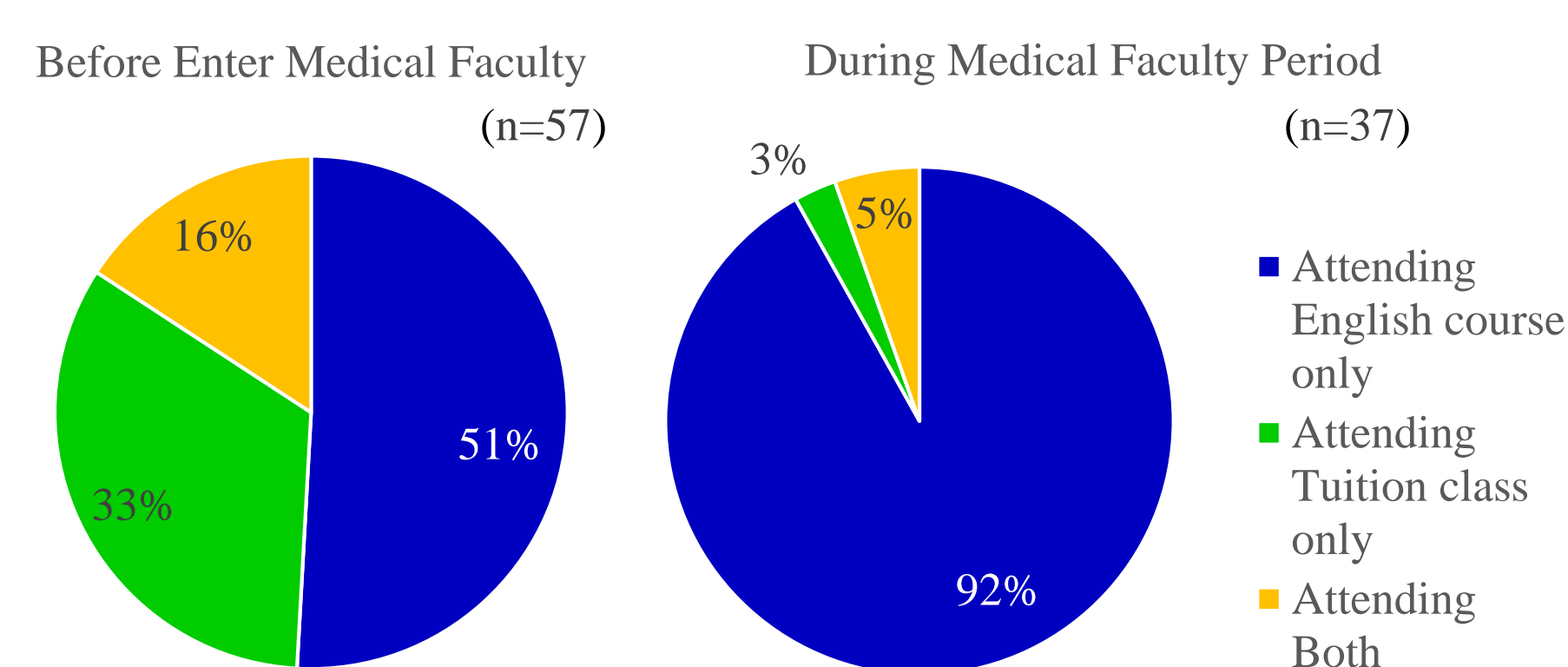


Figure 4: Distribution of Formal attempts

Writing, reading and listening skills of students have improved during the faculty stay. improvement was most significant in writing (figure 5). For reading there were 69.1% "A"s at entry Vs 75.5% at final year. In listening, only a minor increase in "A" grades was noted, due to high percentage of "A" grades, even at the time of entry (91.4% Vs 92.7%) .

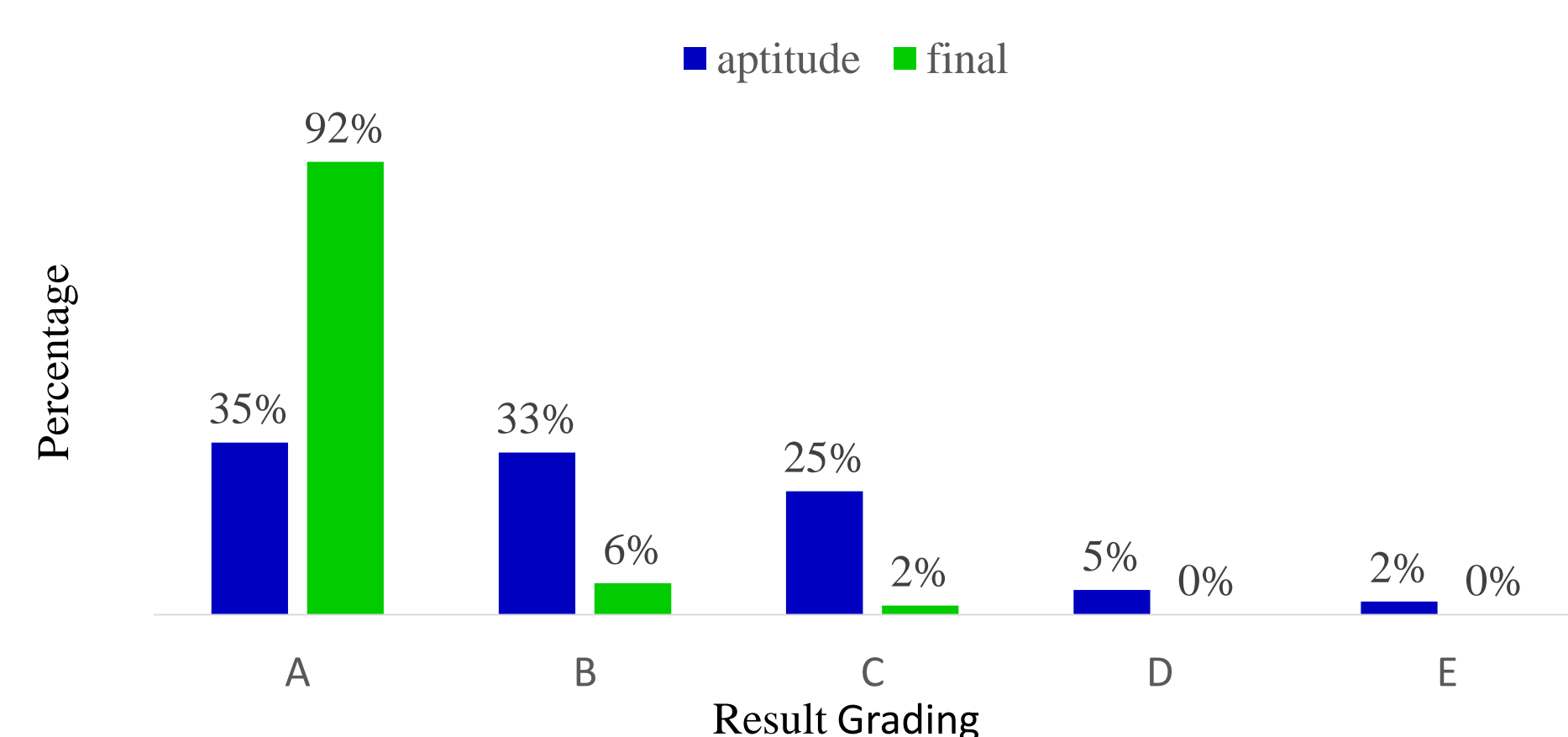


Figure 5: "A" grades for writing before and after

With regard to the influence of language skills at unit 4 exam, writing and reading showed a positive impact, but this was mainly in obtaining a higher grade, than passing the exam. Out of students who had "A" grades for reading at entry, 28% had "A" grades at unit 4 exam, while only 19% of students who lower grade for writing had "A" grades at unit 4. (Figure 6)

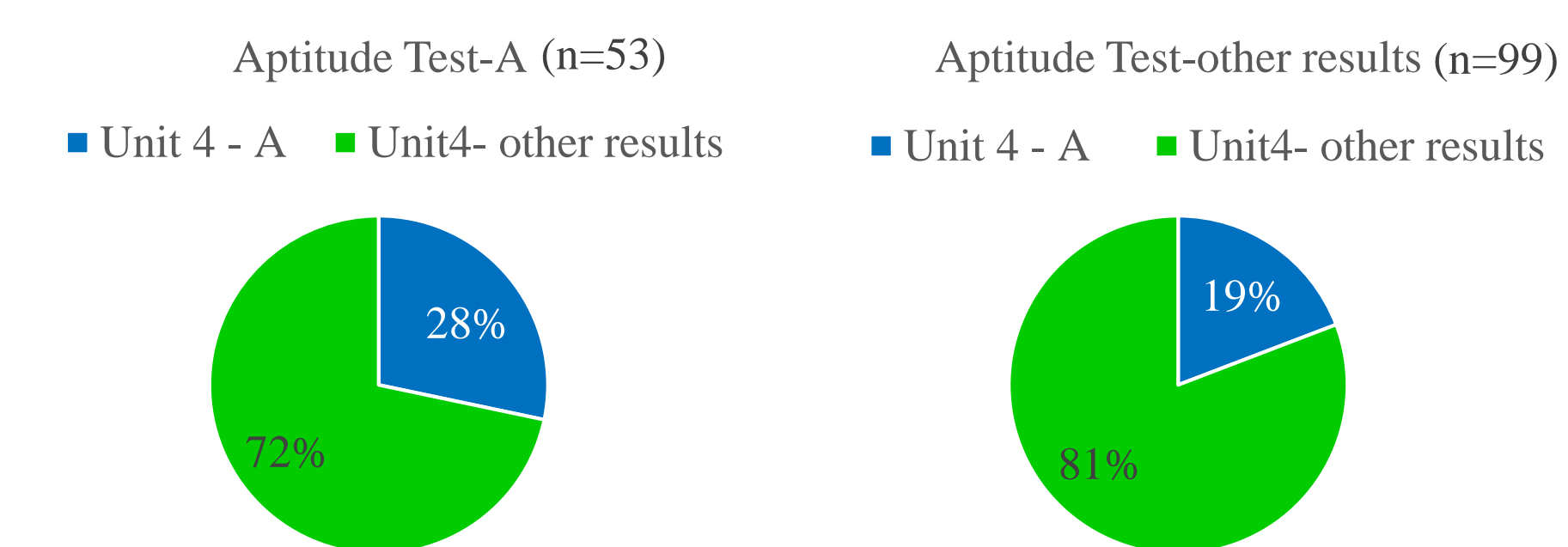


Figure 6: Comparison "A" grades obtained for writing at entry and "A" grades at Unit 4

Similar result was observed in reading as well with "A" grade percentages of 27% and 12% (Figure 7)

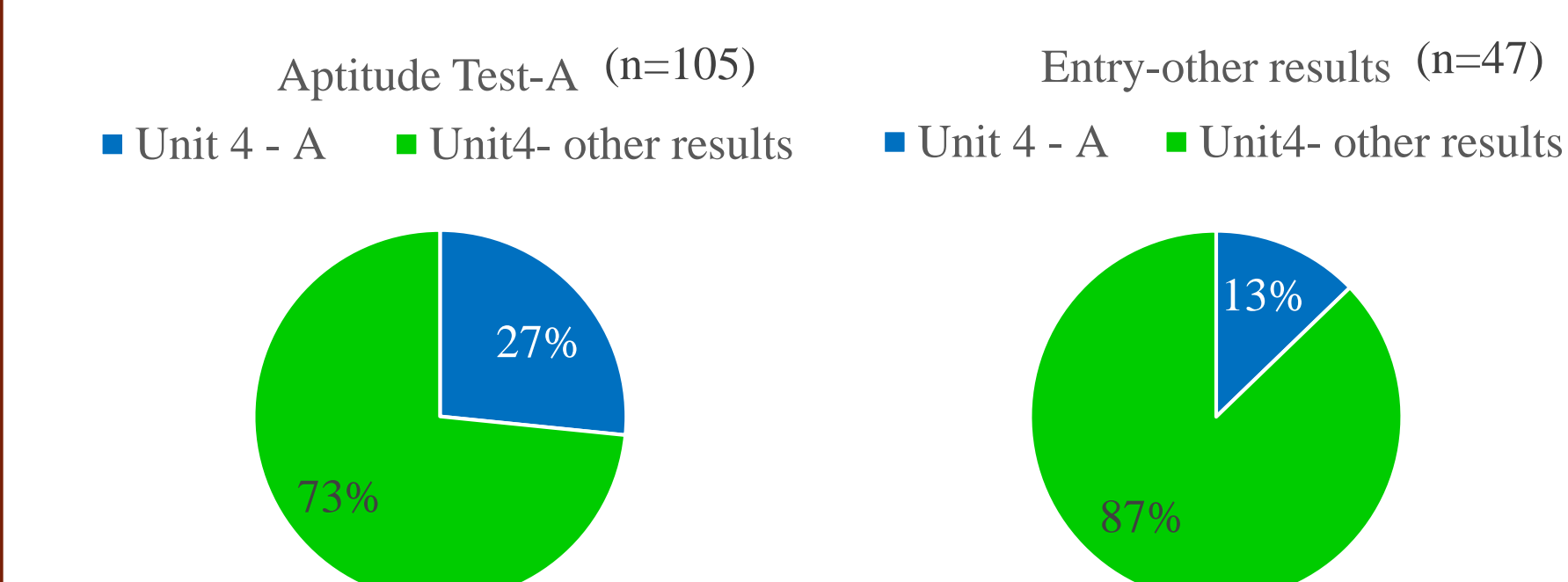


Figure 7: Comparison "A" grades obtained for reading at entry and "A" grades at Unit 4

However, for the listening component there was reversal of this association. (figure 8)

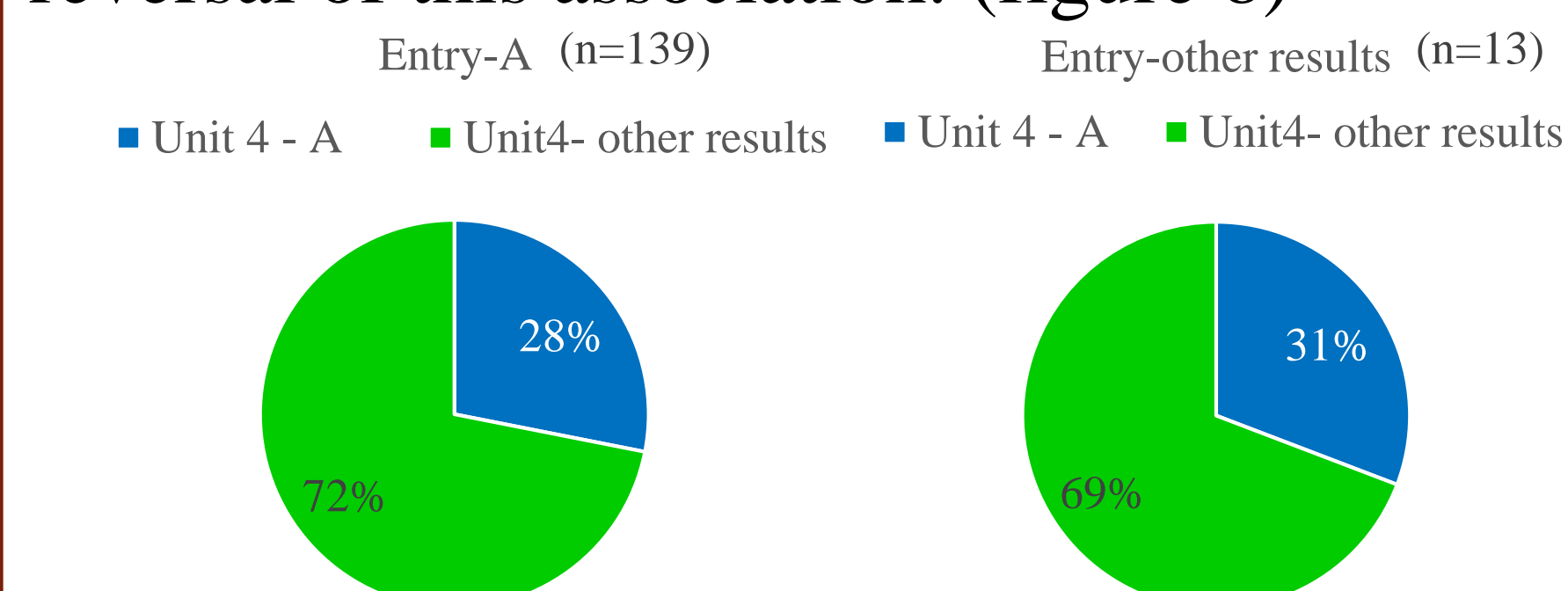


Figure 8: Comparison "A" grades obtained for listening at entry and "A" grades at Unit 4

Conclusion

There is deterioration in English knowledge from O/L to A/L. English dose not seem to influence the A/L attempt at which students enter medial faculty. Medical students attain significant improvement of English, though majority take no formal attempts to improve. Improvement was mainly in writing. Listening is good even at beginning. Whether this improvement is adequate for future challenges during their carrier as doctors is not certain. English language skills in writing and reading improve chances of students achieving higher grades at exams, but impact on passing or failing is less significant.

Recommendation

The final MBBS results need to be compared with English language skills of students to have a complete outlook. English Languages skills, tested with a tougher tool like IELTS, would assess student's ability to face challenges in their future carrier. Students should be encouraged and provided continuous teaching to improve their English skills.

References

Khan, I. A. (2011). An Analysis of Learning Barriers : The Saudi Arabian Context. 4(1).

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