



SEMANTIC MAPPING AND TASK-BASED TECHNIQUES IN THE COMPREHENSION OF THE ACADEMIC TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study determined the effectiveness of task-based and semantic mapping techniques in the comprehension of academic texts of Grade 11 students for academic year 2017-2018. Matched-pairing of the English 10 students' average and sex were used to determine the participants in the study. A teacher-made comprehension test and lesson plans were used in the study. These instruments were content- and face-validated by a panel of four experts, were found reliable and were pilot tested to determine their administrability. Mean and standard deviation were employed for the descriptive analysis and inferential statistical tools employed were the t-test for dependent samples and t-test for independent samples. Results revealed that the students had average level of reading comprehension skills before and after the exposure to the task-based technique and semantic mapping technique. It was found out that there was a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of the students before and after the exposure to the semantic mapping and task-based techniques. Finally, task-based technique and semantic mapping technique were found to be effective techniques in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills of academic texts for it was revealed that participants in task-based technique group and semantic mapping technique group performed better after the conduct of the interventions. Furthermore, task-based technique and semantic mapping technique are both good teaching strategies in enhancing students' comprehension skills.

Keywords: *semantic mapping, task-based, comprehension, academic texts*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a language skill that is crucial for English language learners but increasingly seen as one of the most important skills. Reading is referred to as the gateway to all other knowledge (Al-Ghazo, 2015). Through reading, the learners can explore and build their knowledge from what they have read. Reading is a dialogue between the reader and the writer and comprehension is a procedure through which a reader builds meaning from the text using his/her knowledge, experience, and the information from the text. Reading comprehension is the ability to read and process a text and understand its meaning. It is the process of constructing meaning from a written or printed text (Chalak, 2015).

Reading is a compulsory skill to be taught in all primary and secondary schools here in the Philippines. The learners are expected to read difficult texts as they move to the higher levels. However, most students find the texts complex and difficult to comprehend. Most texts require learners' thought and individual construction of meaning. The learners have hard time understanding the text due to problems that exist. Lack of adequate vocabulary and cultural familiarity, decoding, fluency, reading strategy and orientation or purpose are some of the problems encountered by learners in reading comprehension. Some students just read the text in order to comply with the task but have not reached the target learning competencies as stipulated in the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum.

Some teachers tend to follow the teachers' guide book lavishly. Their teaching style is heavily teacher-centered and is not appropriate for teaching reading. In this sense, it is appropriate for the teachers to be well adequate with the teaching strategy and methodology. Students are also bored with reading classes because they see no maneuver of their own initiation (Okcu, 2015).

In light of the above information, the researcher used two techniques in enhancing the students' level of achievement in reading comprehension. One of the techniques is semantic mapping. Semantic mapping has emerged as a teaching technique to increase comprehension. This technique has become popular in the teaching of reading comprehension because of its multiple advantages. The major advantage of this technique is that it integrates new information with prior knowledge. Semantic mapping has been shown to be a beneficial learning-teaching technique for native speakers of English.

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) stated that semantic mapping strategies are valuable instructional tools. Unlike many tools that have just one purpose, semantic mapping is flexible and endless in application. One common trait found among semantic mapping strategy is that they show the order and completeness of a student's thought process where strengths and weaknesses of understanding become very evident.

Semantic mapping could be a helpful reference for students to use in clarifying confusing points as they are reading. Once students are familiar with the nature of

semantic maps, they can create their own during reading and post reading activity (Jones, 2006 cited by Supramaniam, 2011).

Moreover, the researcher used the task-based technique. This technique emphasizes on conveying meaning with a proposed product where learners can learn and practice forms of target language while paying attention to the meaning. Tasks are activities engaging the participants to be language users because tasks improve learners' ability to communicate in the real-world. Task-based instruction made strong claim for using tasks in planning teaching and also in classroom teaching. In task-based technique, students employ target language to do tasks which are meaningful and authentic (Chalak, 2015).

Hokmi (2005) as cited by Chalak (2015) pointed out that teachers can adapt teaching materials in such a way as to create situation which helps meaningful engagement of the learners, and, as a result, successful completion of the tasks.

Research Questions

This study aimed to investigate the effect of task-based technique and semantic mapping technique in teaching reading comprehension of academic texts among Grade 11 students.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the students' level of reading comprehension skills before and after exposure to the task-based technique?
2. What is the students' level of reading comprehension skills before and after exposure to the semantic mapping technique?
3. What is the mean gain scores of the task-based technique group and semantic mapping technique group?
4. Is there a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of the task-based and semantic mapping groups before the intervention?
5. Is there a significant difference between the students' reading comprehension skills before and after the exposure to the task-based technique?
6. Is there a significant difference between the students' reading comprehension skills before and after exposure to the semantic mapping technique?
7. Is there a significant difference in the mean gain scores of task-based technique group and semantic mapping technique group?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used the quasi-experimental method of research. This study involved six (6) weeks of reading academic texts based on the learning competencies stipulated in Curriculum Guide of English for Academic and Professional Purposes Subject (Grade 11) of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum. Two groups were exposed to an intervention – one with the use of task-based technique and the other class was exposed to the use of semantic mapping technique. Comprehension tests validated by a panel of experts were given to the two groups as pretest and posttest. Reliability testing was also done by the researcher.

For implementing this research, the researcher has designed a procedure as a guide for this study. The procedure for this research follows: (1) Conducting Pretest; (2) Treatment/Intervention (Semantic Mapping/ Task-based Techniques); (3) Conducting Posttest; (4) Calculating and Analyzing Test Scores and (5) Concluding the Results of the Study.

Participants.

The participants of this study were the 72 selected Grade 11 students of Calinog National Comprehensive High School (Senior High School), Calinog, Iloilo under the General Academic Strand enrolled during the first semester of the school year 2017-2018 and taking English for Academic and Professional Purposes as a subject. English 10 and sex. Thirty-six (36) students composed each group and were exposed to the task-based technique and semantic mapping technique. The complete list of Grade 11 students taking General Academic Strand was obtained from the records at the Senior High School Office of Calinog National Comprehensive High School.

The participants were given pretest and posttest to measure the level of reading comprehension skills. The participants were taught how to comprehend academic texts by assigning them the task-based technique or semantic mapping technique. The choice to ascertain whether a group was subjected to task-based technique or semantic mapping technique was done through toss-coin method grouping. A teacher-made reading comprehension test was used before and after the intervention. Each group took the same comprehension test for pretest and posttest.

Data-gathering Instruments

Data for this study were gathered using a researcher-made reading comprehension test. The instrument has been content and face validated by a panel of English teachers and reliability testing was done by the researcher. The comprehension test was pilot-tested to a comparable non-sample group of Grade 11 students of a public high school in the province of Iloilo to determine its administrability.

The researcher also prepared lesson plans validated by three English teachers. The lesson plans were based on the learning competencies of English for Academic and Professional Purposes subject of K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum.

After the pilot testing of the instrument, some items were then slightly modified to simplify the task of the students and to lessen time to be consumed in answering the test. Face modification of the instrument was also made to aid in the checking of the responses/answers.

This test was based on various academic texts. Students were given two hours to finish the test, including all the instructions. It was marked and scored by the researcher according to the scoring criteria.

The following scale was used to interpret the means obtained:

Scale	Descriptive Rating
32.00-40	Very High
24.00-31.99	High
16.00-23.99	Average
8.00-15.99	Low
0-7.99	Very Low

Data-gathering Procedure

The participants in the study were the selected Grade 11 students under General Academic Strand enrolled in school year 2017-2018 and taking English for Academic and Professional Purposes as a subject at Calinog National Comprehensive High School. The participants were chosen using match-paired sampling. Toss-coin was used to determine which section would be assigned for each technique: semantic mapping and task-based.

Table 1*Implementation of Intervention (Semantic Mapping and Task-based Techniques)*

Date	Period	Activity	
July 24, 2017	2 hours	Pilot	Testing
July 28, 201	2 hours	Pretest	
July 31-August 3, 2017 Techniques	1 hour per session	Implementation	of
August 7-10, 2017 Techniques	1 hour per session	Implementation	of
August 14-17, 2017 Techniques	1 hour per session	Implementation	of
August 21-24, 2017 Techniques	1 hour per session	Implementation	of
August 29, 2017 –			
September 1, 2017 Techniques	1 hour per session	Implementation	of
September 4-5, 2017 Techniques	1 hour per session	Implementation	of
September 6, 2017	2 hours	Posttest	

Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered were subjected to appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 17 and qualitative data analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

The following descriptive statistics were employed:

Mean. This was used to describe the students' level of reading comprehension skills from the pretest and posttest scores.

Standard Deviation. This was used to determine the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the students' pretest scores from the means obtained for the two groups in the study.

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics employed in this research was set at alpha 0.05 level of significance for two-tailed test.

t-test for independent samples. This was used to determine the differences in the mean gain scores of the semantic mapping technique and task-based technique groups. This was also used to determine the differences between the pretest and posttest of each group.

t-test for dependent samples. This was used to determine the differences between the pretest and posttest from each intervention or treatment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Data Analysis

The mean was used to determine the level of comprehension of the Task-based Technique Group and the Semantic Mapping Technique Group. Standard deviation was used to determine the participants' homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Table 2

Students' Level of Reading Comprehension Skills before and after the Exposure to the Task-based Technique

<i>Category</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Description</i>
Before Exposure to the				
Task-Based Technique	36	4.18	18.22	Average
After Exposure to the				
Task-Based Technique	36	3.89	18.78	Average

Note: The description was based on the following scale: Very Low (0-7.99), Low (8.00-15.99), Average (16.00-23.99), High (24.00-31.99), Very High (32.00-40)

Table 2 presents the participants' pretest and posttest levels of comprehension skills of the Task-Based Technique Group. The mean indicates that the participants' pretest and posttest levels of comprehension skill were average. The standard deviation suggests that the participants were homogeneous in terms of their level of comprehension skills. This means that the participants have almost the same level of comprehension skills. Furthermore, it can be observed from the table that the participants had a higher mean after the exposure ($M=18.78$, $SD=3.89$) to the task-based technique than the mean before the exposure ($M=18.22$, $SD=4.18$) to this technique. This indicates that the participants performed better after the use of task-based technique. This might be because activities are effective if they are constructed around a task. In addition, this might be because participants were guided on how to do the tasks because they were provided by worksheets on which instructions were written.

These findings are supported by the study of Anderson and Pearson (1984), as cited by Supramaniam (2011) where they found out that the reader comprehends a text actively by constructing meaning internally from interacting with the materials that are read. Moreover, the result is also strengthened by the study conducted by Willis (1996) and Iranmehr (2011) who confirmed that in task-based approach, learners concentrate more on meaning rather than form. Students carry out a group of communicative tasks instead of doing form-based discrete exercises.

The study conducted by Cekiso (2012) revealed that learners who received reading strategy instruction scored both statistically and practically significantly higher marks on the reading comprehension pretest than those in the control group and explicit instruction in the use of reading strategies was essential to bring about the increased use of reading strategies of learners in the experimental group. In addition, this finding was supported by the study of Shabani and Ghasemi (2014) which stated that the implementation of task-based technique is a helpful strategy in which teachers try to activate the learners' background knowledge and related schemata by engaging the learners in completing tasks similar to those which should be worked out during the other tasks.

Task-based learning can intrinsically motivate students since it provides them with a number of opportunities to use language without worrying failures in accuracy (Willis & Willis, 2007; Lap et. al., 2017). The study of Okcu (2015) confirmed that task-based activities have positive effect on vocabulary as well. It is inferred from the classroom atmosphere that students develop positive attitude towards reading lessons. The motivation comes from the purpose that they have to finish the task. Furthermore, this is parallel with the study conducted by Castaño (2016) who confirmed that the nature of tasks increased students' production and accuracy as they were always given a familiar model to follow. Besides, it motivated the students to link the information they were decoding with their real lives, as they were focusing more on topics and activities, the language was not perceived as a struggle.

Table 3

Students' Level of Reading Comprehension Skills before and after the Exposure to the Semantic Mapping Technique

Category	N	SD	M	Description
Before Exposure to the				
Semantic Mapping Technique	36	4.96	19.94	Average
After Exposure to the				
Semantic Mapping Technique	36	5.17	21.78	Average

Note: The description was based on the following scale: Very Low (0-7.99), Low (8.00-15.99), Average (16.00-23.99), High (24.00-31.99), Very High (32.00-40)

Table 3 presents the participants' pretest and posttest levels of comprehension skills of the Semantic Mapping Technique Group. The mean indicates that the participants' pretest and posttest levels of comprehension skill were average. The standard deviation suggests that the participants were homogeneous in terms of their level of comprehension skills. This means that the participants have almost the same level of comprehension skills. Furthermore, it can be observed from the table that the participants had a higher mean after the exposure ($M=21.78$, $SD=5.17$) to the semantic mapping technique than the mean before the exposure ($M=19.94$, $SD=4.96$) to the semantic mapping technique. This indicates that the participants performed better after the use of semantic mapping technique. This might be because participants were allowed by the researcher to draw maps on their own in order to organize the ideas and contents of academic texts. In addition, this might be because semantic map itself let them categorize the major ideas and relationships on texts. These findings were supported by the study of Denton, et. al. (2007) which stated that a semantic map allows students to conceptually explore their knowledge of a new word by mapping it with other related words or phrases similar in meaning to the new word. The study of Hadley (2003) as cited by Mozayan et. al. (2012) stated that semantic mapping technique consists of "creating graphic arrangement of associated clusters" around a key word, idea, or concept. Moreover, the result of this study is also strengthened by the study of Zaid (1995) as cited by Taghavi et. al. (2008) which confirmed that in teaching reading, semantic mapping helps teachers to get students to focus not just on individual details but also on the structure of the paragraph and short essay.

Al Ghazo (2015) concluded that semantic mapping and SQ3R strategies made considerably higher gains on the reading comprehension than those of the traditional strategies taught with traditional instruction. In addition, the EFL learners were able to remember a greater percentage of the steps associated with the semantic mapping and SQ3R strategies. Furthermore, the result was supported by the study of Supramaniam (2011) who found out that students enjoyed and learnt better using semantic mapping

technique. It confirmed that semantic mapping strategy can be used in reading comprehension. This strategy enhances and encourages students' comprehension skills.

Table 4

Mean Gain Scores of Task-based Technique Group and Semantic Mapping Technique Group

<i>Category</i> <i>Gain</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Posttest</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Task-based Technique	36	18.22	18.78	.56
Semantic Mapping Technique	36	19.94	21.78	1.83

Table 4 shows the mean gain scores of Task-based Technique Group and Semantic Mapping Technique Group. The mean of each group indicates that the participants in the task-based technique and semantic mapping technique have performed better in their posttests than their pretest. It can be observed that the participants in task-based technique group performed better after the intervention. Though they have performed better, the result of this study confirmed that their scores in pretest are almost similar to their scores in posttest. The result shows that the task-based technique group has a mean gain of 0.56, indicating that the task-based strategy has somehow developed the comprehension skills of the participants. This is parallel to the study of Mesbah (2016) who found that task-based instruction could positively affect EFL learners' reading comprehension skills and vocabulary retention. This is also strengthened by the study of Fani et. al. (2011) as cited by Mesbah (2016) who also found that using tasks is effective in improving the learners' reading comprehension skills.

Furthermore, Table 4 also reveals that in the semantic mapping technique group, the participants have improved scores in the posttest higher than in the pretest. It has a mean gain of 1.83 which implies that semantic mapping has helped them comprehend academic texts. Participants in this group have found semantic mapping as a good teaching technique in understanding texts. This is parallel to the study of Supramaniam (2011) who found that semantic mapping itself is an opportunity for teachers to consider the importance of individual concept and the organization of the ideas.

The interventions in the two groups are both helpful in enhancing the comprehension skills of learners, but semantic mapping seems to be a better teaching technique. Thus, students in the semantic mapping technique group performed better than in the task-based technique group, based on the result.

Inferential Data Analysis

To determine whether there were significant differences in the level of comprehension skills of the participants, the researcher employed the t-test for dependent samples and t-test for independent samples.

Table 5

Difference in the Reading Comprehension Skills of the Task-Based and Semantic Mapping Groups before the Intervention

Category	t-value	df	p-value.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Task-Based Technique	1.593	70	0.116	(-0.433, 3.878)	
Semantic Mapping Technique					

Note: p-value > 0.05, Not Significant

With 95% confidence, the difference in the reading comprehension skills of the task-based technique and semantic mapping technique groups before the intervention is between -0.433 and 3.878.

The data reveal that there was no significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of Task-based Technique Group and Semantic Mapping Technique Group with $t(70)=1.593, p=.116$. This means that the two groups were comparable and had almost the same level of comprehension skills prior to the conduct of the interventions.

The learners are motivated to learn because of their willingness, need, desire, and compulsion to participate in and be successful in the learning process. This result seems to support the view of Richardson (2010) as cited by Avriante (2015) who confirmed that good readers are both purposeful (they have a reason to read) and active (they think to make sense of what they read).

Table 6

Difference in the Students' Reading Comprehension Skills before and after the Exposure to the Task-Based Technique

Category	t-value	df	p-value	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Before Exposure to the Task- Based Technique	0.712 35	35	0.481	(2.139, 1.028)	
After Exposure to the Task- Based Technique					

Table 6 shows that with the 95% confidence, the difference in the students' reading comprehension skills before and after the exposure to the task-based technique is between -2.139 and 1.028.

Hence, there is no significant difference in the pretest and posttest levels of comprehension skills of the Task-based Technique Group [$t(35)=0.712, p=0.481$].

Though the intervention itself has somehow increased the level of comprehension skills of the participants, the teaching-learning strategy should be enhanced more and the activities should be contextualized. This is parallel to the study of Ozdemir (2009) who stressed that reading comprehensively affects learners' education and his life as a whole. Learning any lesson depends on understanding of the learning instrument of that lesson; thus, a learner who cannot read comprehensively finds it difficult for him/her to be successful in his or her lessons. In addition, the researcher can prepare meaningful tasks with contextualized learning competencies if he has enough time in the implementation of the intervention. Moreover, the learning competencies in the curriculum guide are flexible since the said subject is only offered during the first semester of the school year. The result of this study is similar to the study of Mesbah (2016) who claimed that applying task-based language teaching is difficult or even impossible due to time limitations.

Table 7

Difference in the Students' Reading Comprehension Skill before and after the Exposure to the Semantic Mapping Technique

Category	<i>t-value</i> <i>Cohen's d</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>	95% Confidence Interval Lower Upper	
Before Exposure to the Semantic Mapping Technique	2.277*	35	0.029	(0.199,	3.468).
0.3813					
After Exposure to the Semantic Mapping Technique					

Note: * $p < .05$

Table 7 shows that with 95% confidence, the difference in the students' reading comprehension skill before and after exposure to the semantic mapping technique is between 0.199 and 3.468.

Hence, there is a significant difference existed in the pretest and posttest levels of comprehension skills of the Semantic Mapping Technique Group $t(35)=2.277, p=0.029$ which indicates that the participants performed better after the intervention. This means that semantic mapping is a useful graphic strategy for improving reading comprehension. This result is parallel with the findings of Asadollahfam, et. al (2012) who concluded that

EFL instructors should integrate semantic mapping strategy instruction to their EFL/ESL classes in order to improve and enhance reading comprehension. Instruction on different types of semantic maps should be operationalized and implemented by second language instructors. Moreover, the study of Zaid (1995) as cited by Taghavi, et. al. (2008) confirmed that semantic mapping is student-centered because it makes use of students' prior knowledge and because students control the input at each stage of the map building. This result is also strengthened by the study of Kumala Sari (2013) who proved that the use of semantic mapping strategy is effective to improve reading achievement. Likewise, in the study of MohdJunaid (2005), it was found out that semantic mapping strategy training affected the reading comprehension performance.

However, this result is in contrast with the findings of Taghavi, et. al. (2008) who stated that semantic mapping is interactive because in drafting the map, students work with each other before and after the targeted language. In the conduct of the current study, the researcher gave the tasks as individual activities and the participants were not able to interact with other participants. Finally, the findings in the study of MohdJunaid (2005) implied that ESL teachers should encourage their students to use semantic mapping in their reading instruction as it facilitated instruction.

Table 8

Difference in the Mean Gain Scores of the Task-Based Technique Group and Semantic Mapping Technique Group

Category	Mean Gain	t-value	df	p-value	95%Confidence Interval Lower Upper
Task-Based Technique	10.56	1.140	70	0.258	(-1.777,4.333)
Semantic Mapping Technique	1.83				

Table 8 reveals that with 95% confidence, the difference in the mean gain scores of the task-based technique group and semantic mapping technique group is between - 1.777 and 4.333.

Thus, there was no significant difference in the mean gain scores of the participants [(t=(70)=1.140,p=.258]. Though both groups performed better after the conduct of interventions, it shows that both groups had comparable mean gain scores.

This implies that the intervention employed in the Task-based Technique Group is as effective as with the intervention employed in the Semantic Technique Group because the participants had developed almost similar levels of comprehension skills. This might be because the participants were matched-paired and they were under the same strand (General Academic Strand) in Senior High School. This might also be because they were given the same set of lessons and the same set of academic texts and only differs with strategies employed in accomplishing the given activities. This result is similar to that of McKnight (2010) as cited by Al-Ghazo (2015) who stated that through the use of specific learning strategies, students can be more successful learners. The learners should do

their roles as active readers in order to develop their comprehension skills. It was indicated that the participants were from a public school and were residing in the same municipality. This view seems to be similar with the study of Nutall (1996) as cited by Mozayan, et. al. (2012, p. 2422) which posited that “more intangible things like attitude, beliefs, values, and all the unspoken assumptions shared by the people brought in the same society” also need to be considered vital in any reading activity.

Each participant needed to accomplish reading the academic texts because there were activities given after each text. The researcher was able to guide the participants in answering the activity sheets for it was researcher-made and are parallel with the learning competencies stipulated in the Curriculum Guide of the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum for Grade 11 learners. This was supported by the study of Baier (2005), Cekiso (2012), Tizon (2013), Ness (2009), Imam, et. al. (2014), and Clarke (1979) as cited by Supramaniam (2011) who all confirmed that if learners are given assistance and proper guidance, they are able to become better and more independent readers. On the contrary, those participants who did not focus on the reading of academic texts were not able to accomplish the given activities using the different techniques employed by the researcher. This was confirmed by the study of Loghamani, et. al. (2016) who claimed that reading for academic purposes is a multifaceted skill, whenever students read, it is purpose-specific.

The result also implies that Task-based Technique and Semantic Mapping Technique are effective teaching techniques that reading teachers can use in their classes to improve the level of comprehension skills. These techniques had developed the comprehension skills of the participants in both groups. This was supported by the studies of Long (2015), Iranmehr, et. al. (2011), Hasan (2014), Basturkmen (2005) as cited by Chalak (2015), and Okcu (2015) who all found out that utilizing task-based learning strategies will help students improve their writing and reading competence and will support the effectiveness of learning English as a foreign language. Moreover, from the studies of Asadollahfam et. al. (2012), Al-Ghazo (2015), Zaid (1995) as cited by Taghavi (2008) and Avriante (2015), results confirmed that the use of semantic mapping can help the students comprehend the reading text well and it is easy for them to answer questions. Finally it is also considered as a good and effective technique to be applied by the teacher.

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“Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts.”

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