



The Effect of Teaching Communication through Semantic Mapping Technique on the IELTS test takers concerning the IELTS Cue Card round in the Speaking Module.

**1Kovvali Srilakshmi, 2 Prof. K. Ratna Shiela Mani, Research Scholar, Research Supervisor,
Department of English, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, AP, India.**

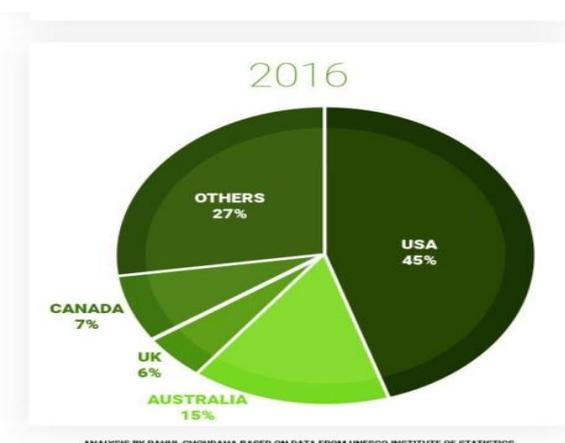
Abstract : This study aims to investigate the effect of using the Semantic Mapping Technique in teaching communication skills to IELTS test aspirants and to know their beliefs towards the technique. IELTS is an international standardized test of language proficiency for non-native speakers conducted in the four language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Speaking test, one of the modules of the test, consists of three rounds. The second round is called the Cue Card round in which the test taker is given a topic to speak for at least a minute. The present study is conducted by applying the semantic mapping strategy during the time given for the preparation of the topic. Specifically, the present study focuses on a) whether the semantic mapping might bring any change in the way of communication among the aspirants, b) whether there is a significant change in the mean scores of the mock tests conducted and c) know the beliefs of the students towards the technique. These questions are examined through the experimental study conducted with 10 IELTS aspirants. Speaking mock tests are conducted twice to observe the significant change in the communication of the aspirants in the cue card round and to assess the efficiency of the semantic mapping technique.

Key words: IELTS, investigate, communication, semantic.

Introduction: Over the years English has attained the status of a global language. It is spoken by millions of people across the world as a second language, foreign language and native language. It is used for international communication and as a source language. It has made the world a ‘Global Village’ by giving a global language for communication. It is being used in the five continents of the world. It is estimated that a quarter of the world’s population knows English. No other language in the world has spread so extensively within this short period.

As India is a multi-lingual country, it has always had the problem of a common language. English serves as a ‘Link Language’ in India which is helpful not only for inter-communication but also for intra-communication. It had been enjoying the status of ‘official, associate, additional language’ in India. Students aspiring to study and professionals seeking to work abroad have to score well in English proficiency; tests like TOEFL, IELTS and PTE are designed exclusively to test proficiency in English. Hence, the demand for learning English is growing day by day.

India has become one of the largest source countries for international migrations globally. According to the latest estimates by the United Nations, there is an upsurge of migrants globally reaching an estimated 272 million. India is in the leading position with 17.5 million migrants in 2019. There is a constant rise in the number of students enrolling for higher education in universities abroad. One of the main reasons is the fact that there is a great demand for candidates with a degree from an international university. Other reasons are high quality of life, cosmopolitan environment, free education in some public universities, scholarships for international students, extensive focus on research, opportunity to work during and after study etc. Due to the above-said reasons, India has experienced an expansion of aspirants towards global education from high to middle-income families.



International English Language Testing System: IELTS is the most popular proficiency test designed to measure English language skills for educational, immigration and professional purposes. It is recognised in over 140 countries by 10,000 organisations. Nearly 2 million people take the test every year. The IELTS test is used to measure English language proficiency for educational, immigration and professional purposes. The exam is recognized by over 10,000 organizations worldwide and can be taken within over 900 test centres across 140 countries. About 2 million people take this test each year. It is to test the ability in the four language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Any non-native speaker of English has to submit a proof of the English language skills as an aspirant to pursue higher education or research and to work abroad.

As the purposes are varied, there are two versions available for the IELTS test. One is IELTS Academic which tests the suitability of language proficiency of the test taker for the educational environment. Another one is IELTS General Training which tests for the skills of English language appropriate for the work environment. It depends on the needs of the aspirants to choose the variety of tests.

Test format: The IELTS test evaluates the ability of the students in listening, reading, writing and speaking. The test is available in two types academic and general training. The format of these two types is almost the same with a few dissimilarities in the reading and the writing modules. Listening, reading and writing modules are conducted at a stretch and speaking is conducted separately either on the same day or before/after the LRW. The format and the duration of the test are: explained in the below given diagram below.



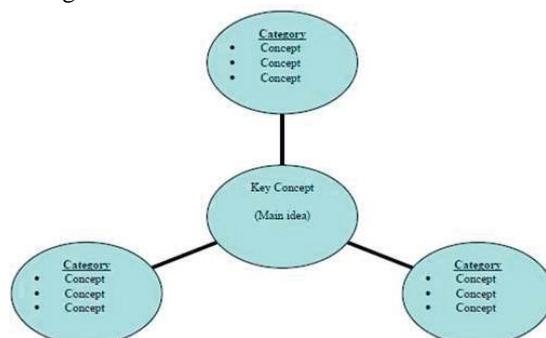
Source: <https://mayuriedu.com/ielts-coaching/>

Speaking Module: The speaking test is an informal face-to-face interaction session that lasts for 11 to 14 minutes. It consists of three rounds – Interview round, Cue card round and Discussion Round. Among the three rounds most of the students feel difficulty with the cue card round. The first and third rounds are question-and-answer sessions whereas in the cue card round, a topic is given with three prompts. The test taker is supposed to speak for more than a minute to two minutes with one minute is given for preparation. The time allotted for preparation is the most crucial part of the speaking round for a test taker to get success. The present paper deals with the time allotted for preparation and the strategies to apply for a successful preparation.

Semantic Mapping Technique: Semantic mapping is the process of the graphical representation of information by making a meaning-based connection between words, phrases and concepts. It is the graphical display of constructing the information related to its categories and their relationships. Information can be well organised with the help of the semantic mapping technique. Rubin, (1993, p.79, cited in Omer, 2017) states that Semantic mapping is a technique through which information is well organised and it helps to give a systemic order to the information gathered in the form of a picture. It is very useful to show the relationship between every bit of information. This technique is very useful to relate the previous knowledge and real-life experience with the new learning. Buis (2004) said that semantic mapping creates an interest in learning vocabulary, develops

reading comprehension and enhances writing skills as it connects the background knowledge to the words they read from the text. This technique facilitates the students to expand their vocabulary by strengthening their ability to read and comprehend by establishing a relation between the lexical items. It further helps the students to excel in written and spoken communication skills (Sokmen, 1992).

Semantic mapping can be considered as a successful technique in the classroom as it displays the graphical information of a concept by forming a meaningful relationship to the learner's background knowledge or schemata. It requires the cooperation of both the teacher and the student to optimize the learning process by allowing them to relate the new learning to already existing schemata (Dilek, 2012). Jonassen (1993:98), indicates that semantic maps "are a type of graphic organizers that visually represents relationships among categories of concepts". The figure given below shows the structure of a semantic map and the association between the key concepts with different categories related to the central idea.



(Dilek, 2012)

Semantic mapping provokes student's prior knowledge and creates a student-centred environment by allowing the students to brainstorm and work independently. Apart from teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension, this technique can be used to teach the four basic skills of language. Especially this technique is very useful in developing the speaking skills of the students. It helps students to connect ideas logically and speak fluently.

Schema Theory: Schema is a term used in psychology and cognitive science, which describes a systematic pattern of thought and behaviour (Zhao, 2012). Schema theory is one of the cognitive learning theories, which was developed in the 1970s by Richard Anderson, an American Educational Psychologist. It describes how knowledge is acquired, processed and organized. It states that all knowledge is organised into units. Information is stored within those units of knowledge which Anderson named as Schemata. Schemata organizes knowledge stored in long-term memory and represents knowledge about concepts. Knowledge is represented and used with the help of the relationship of objects with other objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions (Rumelhart, 1980). It is a cognitive linguistic theory which states that learners draw meaning from mental representations formed from experiences. Schema theory affects the perception and memory of an individual and hence it is important for learning.

Types of Schemata

According to schema theory, it requires a minimal cognitive effort to understand and interpret as the existing schemata help to interact efficiently and the information thus fits in (Vinney, 2019). Basically, three types of schema are there – Content, Formal and Linguistic.

Content Schema: Content schema deals with the coherent whole of conceptual information about a specific topic. Hence it refers to the background knowledge or retrieves the already existing information and relates to the content of the particular text (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983).

Formal Schema: Formal Schema refers to the knowledge of the reader towards language, conventions and rhetorical structures of a text.

Linguistic Schema: Linguistic schema deals with the linguistic aspects of a text like grammar, vocabulary and syntax. It is a person's existing knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and jargon which are key factors in speaking skills. Already existing linguistic knowledge kindles the necessary skills required for better comprehension.

Implications of Schema Theory in Speaking Skills

A schema is a cognitive structure that serves as a framework for knowledge about people, places, objects, and events. Schemas help people organize their knowledge of the world and understand new information. These mental shortcuts help us make sense of the large amount of information we encounter daily. According to Vinney (2019), the term schema was first introduced in 1923 by developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget proposed a stage theory of cognitive development that utilized schemas as one of its key components. Piaget defined schemas as basic units of knowledge related to all aspects of the world. He suggested that different schemas are mentally applied in appropriate situations to help people comprehend and interpret information. To Piaget, cognitive development hinges on an individual acquiring more schemas and increasing the nuance and complexity of existing schemas. Vinney (2019) also stated that psychologist Frederic Bartlett later described the concept of schema in 1932. Bartlett conducted experiments that tested how schemas factored into people's memory of events. He said that people organize concepts into mental constructs; which he dubbed schemas. He suggested that schemas help people process and remember information. So when an individual is confronted with information that fits their existing schema, they will interpret it based on that cognitive framework. However, information that does not fit into an existing schema will be forgotten. Schemata are plans or generic concepts about things, events, and knowledge about the world that are stored in the mind. Every person has their own schemata that are obtained from past experience. The existing knowledge enables people to understand everything because they have a concept store in mind. Schemata are also known as background knowledge that helps people organize and interpret the world around them. This is a gradual experience building. The more background knowledge students have, the better their understanding of the lesson. It is in line with Widdowson (1983) as cited in Destriani, Yufrizal & Sudirman (2013) stated that

schema concerns how we organize information to long-term memory. On the other hand, schema represents the knowledge, information, and conceptual understanding to be interpreted and mastered. Kujawa and Huske (1995) as cited in Ahmad (2009) stated that it is a good starting point for the teacher to build students' prior knowledge in learning. Prior knowledge impacts how the teacher and students interact with the learning materials as both individuals and a group. Ahmad (2009) agreed that in the teaching and learning process, the approaches of the previous school and the social experience of the students, and ours also affect the course we are planning. Thus, it is essential to consider how these differences impact classroom dynamics and learning. Therefore, with Schemata, students will be more effective in learning the material which is familiar to them. The students will be more active in learning when they have the background knowledge of the lesson. Their curiosity and interest will appear when the teacher provokes the lesson with the knowledge they already know before.

Schema theory and its innate intuitive appeal had a great impact on teaching practice. It had far reaching positive effects on reading instruction as it led to the development of a more learner-centred approach which focused on individual needs and celebrated the diversity of background experiences. Activating the learner's background knowledge can make them understand the reading materials better and gain more information that can be used as background information for future reading activities.

Teachers can help learners in enlarging their vocabulary by imparting learning strategies like associative strategy and context strategy to learn and consolidate new words and language items that can improve language level through an application of the language schema. They can also help the learners in establishing specific content schema by providing background knowledge for learners to predict correctly. Schema theory can be used to improve speaking skills by activating the schema of known information and input information before speaking, comprehending and absorbing the information, making a response and developing oral activities, and updating the spoken language to establish a new schema for the next listening.

Schema Theory and Semantic Mapping

According to schema theorists, the study of abstract concepts should occur only after a prior foundation of concrete, relevant information related to the major concepts to be studied has already been created. To achieve successful comprehension of the material to be read, the learners should bring with them enough background knowledge and experience along with linguistic knowledge. The application of semantic mapping strategy is found useful for the same. In semantic mapping strategy, teachers put to use learners' collective prior knowledge of a particular concept so as to arrange it into related conceptual sub-categories by utilizing the schemata present in their minds. Semantic mapping gives a graphic structure to this schematic knowledge of the learners that is to be used as the basis for organizing new ideas that are to be read. Oxford's (1990) study implies that "semantic mapping in classroom instruction requires a variety of basic memory and comprehension techniques (making associations, grouping, and using visual memory of the semantic map)".

Briggs (1970) as cited in Destriani, Yufriзал& Sudirman (2013) stated that skills of schemata include in reading, listening, writing, and talking. Based on the theory and explanation above, the schemata are also related to speaking skills. People may not speak without having an idea, content, or tool because speaking relates to the real thing. As we know, speaking is one of the most needed skills in English. It is used by someone to communicate with each other. Shumin (2002) as cited in Syarifudin (2017) stated that speaking English is difficult, especially for English foreign language learners, because effective oral communication requires the ability to use language appropriately in social interactions. To be fluent in speaking, students should often practice it with the people around them. Besides, more clearly and fluently someone speaks more effectively the communication he will get. Students face some problems in delivering their ideas in speaking class; one of their problems is caused by their language proficiency and background knowledge. To have a good ability in speaking English, the students should have the schemata convey what they talk about. Their various backgrounds positively affect their abilities and performance in the classroom, including Speaking Class. If students practice speaking through activities such as conversation practice and memorizing vocabularies every morning aim at making students fluent in speaking English at a standard level. Therefore, most students speak improper English with a lot of ungrammatical structures.

Application of the Semantic Mapping Technique in the Cue Card: Semantic Mapping is a useful teaching technique to help students to identify, understand, and recollect words and ideas. Cue Card is one of the rounds in the Speaking test of IELTS which demands the test takers to speak for more than a minute logically, coherently, grammatically correct structures. I have seen many students struggling to construct a sentence and speak fluently. The reasons for this are a lack of proper vocabulary in the first place; problems in grammar and above all coherence are some of the other major problems.

The ideation process itself is a hindrance for the IELTS aspirants as they have to speak extemporaneously. Though one minute of time is given to prepare on the given topic most of the students failed to utilize that time wisely. So the researcher felt that the semantic mapping technique would help students to use the time given wisely and hence to speak coherently and fluently.

Study conducted: As the researcher is an IELTS trainer, she has taken 10 students for the present Study. These are the students who are taking coaching with her and her colleagues. All these 10 students have faced problems in speaking coherently and fluently though their vocabulary was good enough. This is observed from their writing scripts, they all have exhibited a good vocabulary size and scored well in the writing module.

A pre-test and a post-test were conducted for these 10 students. Students were given 2 different Cue Card topics for pre and post-tests. A Semantic mapping technique was introduced for these 10 students after the pre-test was conducted. Then again after allowing them to work individually on the semantic mapping technique a post-test was conducted.

The Cue Card topics given for the pre-test: Describe an exercise you know, you should say: What is it, how it is done, when you first tried it, what kind of people it is suitable for and explain why you think is a good exercise.

Cue Card topic for the post-test: Describe a time you were embarrassed. You should say: When it was, who you were with, what happened and how you coped afterwards Semantic mapping done by students

The two topics which are mentioned above were given to the students and based on their performance respective band scores were given. In between these two tests, the semantic mapping technique was introduced and a few students were convinced to

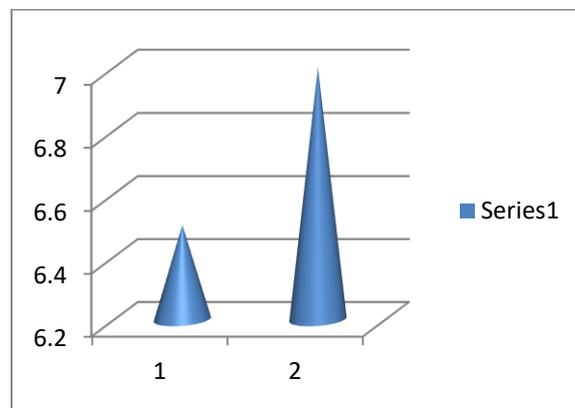
utilize it during the time given for preparation. After these two tests, a questionnaire was administered to know their willingness to follow the same technique for their future practice and to appear for the IELTS Speaking test.

Pre and post-test results:

Students are assessed based on the four band descriptors given by IELTS – Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy and Pronunciation. Most of the students score well in the first band descriptor fluency and coherence after taking the help of the semantic mapping technique. The results of the pre and post-tests are given below:

S. No.	Name of the Student	Pre-Test	Post-Test
1.	Sujith Supekar	7	8
2.	Nishant Agnihotri	7.5	7.5
3.	Dr. Varun Tripathi	6	7
4.	Supriya	5.5	6.5
5.	Suresh Kumar	7.5	8
6.	Rohan Reddy	7.5	8
7.	Ahmed Abdul	7	7.5
8.	Ronit Mondal	6	6
9.	Riya Mukherjee	6	6
10.	VijethaBitragunta	5	6

The comparison of the results of the pre-test and the post-test shows that a significant improvement in the performance of the students with a mean score of 65% in the pre-test and 70.5% in the post-test. The graphical representation of the average scores is given below:



Most of the students benefitted from the semantic mapping technique and they opined that it helps them to organize the flow of thought and framing sentences logically. Hence it helped them to score better in fluency and coherence. The questionnaire is given below:

S.No.	Question	Response	
		Yes	No
1.	Semantic Mapping technique helped me to overcome hesitation	8	2
2.	I can use this technique to remember vocabulary while speaking	7	3
3.	This is very useful to structure and organise my speaking	7	3
4.	It helps me to cover all the prompts given in the cue card topic	7	3

5.	This technique boosted my confidence	6	4
6.	More effort and time are needed in applying this technique while preparing for cue card	4	6
7.	This technique allows me to utilize the one minute of time catered for preparation wisely	7	3
8.	It helps me to connect the prompts given coherently	9	1
9.	I think it is a waste of time to use this technique	1	9
10.	I will recommend this technique to use in the cue card round for my friends	6	4

80% of the students said that this technique is very helpful in attempting the speaking task and 60% said that they will recommend this technique to their friends who would like to attempt the test; 70% said that it saves time and helps them organize their ideas logically and remember words while speaking.

Conclusion: Speaking is an active skill that demands a lot of practice, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary knowledge and connecting the ideas coherently. Practice and grammatical accuracy allow the students to speak accurately and fluently but not coherently. By kindling the background knowledge and connecting one idea to another idea with the help of vocabulary prompts students can be made to speak coherently and fluently.

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