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EFFECT OF SEMANTIC MAPPING STRATEGY ON JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN NSUKKA EDUCATION ZONE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of semantic mapping strategy on junior secondary school students' motivation in English language vocabulary in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. The study was guided by three research questions and their corresponding null hypotheses. A quasi-experimental research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 4,769 Junior Secondary School Two (JSS II) students in all the 63 public junior secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone. The participants of the study were 165 (65 males and 100 females) students drawn from four co-educational secondary schools using multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was the Vocabulary Motivation Scale (VMS), which was validated by three experts. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach's Alpha Method and it yielded a reliability index of 0.76. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that students taught vocabulary using semantic mapping demonstrated significantly higher motivation levels and improved participation in vocabulary learning than those taught with the conventional direct explicit strategy. Although female students and urban students had higher mean motivation scores than their male and rural counterparts, the difference was not statistically significant in the test of hypothesis. It, therefore, indicated that gender and location were not significant factors in the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and the conventional direct explicit strategy. The study concluded that semantic mapping not only improved students' motivation but also enhanced their cognitive and affective domains of vocabulary learning hence, the recommendation that English language teachers should adopt semantic mapping as a learner-centered approach to promote motivation and effective vocabulary learning among student since this strategy is neither gender sensitive nor location bound.

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Keywords: English language, Vocabulary, Motivation, Direct Explicit Strategy and Semantic Mapping Strategy

Introduction

English language occupies a vital position in Nigeria's educational and socio-economic landscape. It serves as the official language, the language of instruction at all levels of education, and a major tool for academic achievement and social mobility. Proficiency in English is, therefore, indispensable for Nigerian students, as it facilitates comprehension across subjects. It enhances communication skills, and supports success in examinations. Among the major components of English, vocabulary stands out as the building block of language competence. Vocabulary refers to the collection of words known and used by a person or group of people to communicate meaning effectively (Nation, 2013). A rich vocabulary enables learners to understand texts, express ideas clearly, and participate effectively in communication.

Vocabulary learning is not merely about memorizing word meanings It involves the ability to use words accurately and meaningfully in various contexts. Despite its importance, vocabulary instruction in many Nigerian classrooms remains teacher-centre which is usually characterized by rote memorization. This approach often limits learners' active participation and reduces their intrinsic motivation to learn. Motivation is a critical affective variable in language learning, as it determines the effort, persistence, and enthusiasm that students display towards acquiring new vocabulary (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). When learners are not motivated, they tend to see vocabulary learning as a tedious task rather than an engaging process of discovering meaning. This problem is more pronounced in certain locations such as the Nsukka Education Zone, where socio-economic and environmental factors influence students' learning attitudes and access to instructional innovations. Okeke & Eze's (2023) study indicate that many junior secondary school students in the Nsukka Education Zone perform poorly in vocabulary-related tasks, often due to low motivation, ineffective teaching strategies, and contextual factors related to their learning location. This highlights the need for a learner-centered strategy such as semantic mapping, which can foster both understanding and motivation in vocabulary development.

Semantic mapping is an instructional strategy that involves the visual representation of words and their interrelationships. It allows learners to organize concepts and vocabulary items around central ideas, showing how meanings are connected through synonyms, antonyms, examples, and contexts (Novak & Cañas, 2008). By engaging students in creating word maps, teachers encourage deeper cognitive processing and active participation. This strategy transforms vocabulary learning from a mechanical memorization activity into a meaningful and interactive experience. Through semantic mapping, learners are able to connect new words to prior knowledge, making learning more personal and motivating. The strategy also accommodates different learning styles, allowing visual and kinesthetic learners to

participate effectively in vocabulary lessons across various locations and classroom settings.

The effectiveness of semantic mapping in enhancing students' vocabulary learning and motivation has been supported by several empirical studies. For instance, Aydin and Yildiz (2020) reported that Turkish EFL learners exposed to semantic mapping performed better in vocabulary retention and demonstrated higher motivation levels than those taught with traditional methods. Similarly, Hassanzadeh and Rahimy (2022) found that semantic mapping helped students to link new words with familiar concepts, which improved comprehension and long-term retention. In the Nigerian context, Okeke and Eze (2023) observed that secondary school students in Enugu State who were taught vocabulary using semantic mapping showed greater enthusiasm, collaboration, and active engagement compared to those in the control group. These studies indicate that semantic mapping not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also serves as a motivational tool that stimulates learners' motivation in English language learning.

The use of semantic mapping in the classroom aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaboration. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs when learners engage in meaningful dialogue, share ideas, and receive guidance from more knowledgeable peers or teachers. Semantic mapping provides such an environment by encouraging group discussions, peer collaboration, and shared meaning-making. As students construct word maps together, they negotiate meanings, connect concepts, and internalize vocabulary more effectively. The interactive and cooperative nature of this strategy helps sustain motivation, as learners feel ownership of their learning process and experience a sense of achievement through group participation.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that proficiency in English remains a major determinant of academic success hence, applying semantic mapping to vocabulary instruction could help address the persistent problem of students' low motivation in learning vocabulary. Also, the unique socio-educational context of this zone makes it imperative to adopt strategies that stimulate learners' motivation and promote active participation. By creating a learner-centered and socially interactive classroom environment using semantic mapping, teachers can make vocabulary learning more engaging, meaningful, and contextually relevant. It has the potential to contribute to improving language teaching practices and enhancing learners' communicative competence within the Nigerian educational system. Therefore, exploring the effect of semantic mapping on junior secondary school students' motivation in English vocabulary within the Nsukka Education Zone is both timely and significant regardless of gender and location-specific limitations.

Motivation is the internal process that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-directed behaviours. From Jenkins & Demaray's (2015) perspective, motivation is the force that causes individuals to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions. It is related to a person's will to embrace or get involved in a task or action. Cherry (2023)

describes motivation as the process that initiates, guides, and maintain goal-oriented behaviours thereby helping individuals to act in ways that bring them closer to their goals. For example, motivation tells why people begin an activity, why they continue the activity, why they choose the activity over others why they stop the activity and why they repeat such activity thus, the question of what causes behaviour may appear to be somewhat simplistic but is in fact highly complex. It include elements necessary to understand the role of nurturing, imparting and explaining ongoing behaviour. Motivation of students in learning the English language vocabulary can be influenced by gender.

Gender is a term used to exemplify the attributes that a society or culture constitutes as masculine or feminine. It is defined as the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed (WHO, 2020). The beliefs, values and attitude taken up and exhibited by women, men, girls and boys is as per the agreed upon norms of the society and the personal opinion of the person is not taken into the primary consideration of assignment and imposition of gender roles. The assignment of gender involves taking into account the physiological and biological attributes assigned by nature, followed by the imposition of the socially constructed conduct. Although a person's sex as male or female stands as a biological fact that is identical in any culture, what that specific sex means in reference to a person's gender role as a man or a woman in society varies cross-culturally according to what things are considered to be masculine or feminine. These roles are learned from various intersecting sources such as parental influences, the socialization a child receives in school, and what is portrayed in the local media. Research-based evidences have revealed divergent findings on learners' achievement in English vocabulary using semantic mapping. For example, while Onuoha (2013) found that male and female students perform equally using concept mapping instructional strategy, Asante et al (2022) revealed that boys were superior to girls in school achievement. Refuting this, Nordlander and Stensöta (2022), reported that girls perform significantly better than boys. On the contrary, Connell (2023) was of the opinion that gender was not a relevant factor that should be reckoned with in predicting school achievement. Apart from gender, the location of students can also determine to a reasonable extent, the achievement and motivation of students in vocabulary learning.

The term location in educational research refers to the geographical, socio-economic, and environmental setting in which learning takes place. Titus et al (2016) state that school location implies urban-rural setting. Adeyemi & Ige (2022) further explains that it encompasses factors such as the quality of school facilities, accessibility of learning resources, teacher availability, and community attitudes towards education. These contextual differences often influence students' exposure to the English language vocabulary and their motivation to learn. Disparities in school resources, teacher quality, and students' socio-cultural background have contributed to variations in language learning outcomes. Owoeye and Yara (2011) note that many parents are of the opinion

that students whose schools are cited in towns perform better than their colleagues in village schools. Akissani et al (2019) add that parents look at such factors as the location of schools (urban or rural), distance of school from home, noisy environment and other variables before enrolling their children because these factors are capable of hampering effective teaching and learning. Understanding how location interacts with instructional strategy like semantic mapping is essential for improving vocabulary instruction and learner motivation. This underscored the need to investigate the influence of location on students' motivation in English language vocabulary using semantic mapping strategy. The findings of the study will contribute to empirical evidences in literature and also corroborate or refute the findings of already existing studies. To conduct the study, the following research questions were posed:

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping strategy and direct explicit strategy?
2. What is the influence of gender on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy?
3. What is the influence of location on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05level of significance:

H_{O1}: There is no significant difference in the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping strategy and those taught using direct explicit strategy?

H_{O2}: There is no significant influence of gender on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy.

H_{O3}: There is no significant influence of location on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy

Methods

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design. Specifically, it adopted the 2x2 pretest-posttest non-equivalent control factorial design involving four intact classes. Three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The area of the study was Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. This zone is made up of three Local Government Areas (LGAs), which are Igbo-Etiti LGA, Nsukka LGA and Uzo-Uwani. Data from the Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB, 2026), Nsukka Zone revealed that there are 63 public secondary schools in the zone with Junior Secondary School Two (JSS II) students' population of 4,769 comprising 2,511 males and 2,258 females and 2,637 urban and 2,132 rural students. The participants of the study were 165 (65

males and 100 females and 90 urban and 75 rural) students drawn from four co-educational secondary schools using multi-stage sampling procedure. First, all the 63 public schools were stratified into the three LGAs that make up the zone. Nsukka LGA was purposively selected because it has the largest co-educational secondary schools and it is also the only LGA in the zone that has both urban and rural setting as categorized by PPSMB. Since gender and location were important variables in this study, four co-educational schools (two from the urban and two from the rural) were purposively selected.

By balloting, two schools (one urban and one rural) school were assigned to the experimental group (those taught using semantic mapping) and the other two (one urban and one rural school) were also assigned to the control group (those taught using the direct explicit strategy). And finally, by tossing of the coin, one intact class was randomly drawn from each of the four selected schools. The total number of all the students in these four classes was 165. This number constituted the sample for this study. The instrument for data collection was the Vocabulary Motivation Scale (VMS), which was validated by three experts from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument was trial-tested using 20 JSSII students from two co-educational schools outside the study area. The testees have the same characteristics as those in the population of this study. Cronbach's Alpha Method was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument which yielded a reliability index of 0.76. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What are the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping strategy and direct explicit strategy?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Mean Motivation Scores of Students Taught English Language Vocabulary with Semantic mapping Direct Explicit Strategy

Group		Pre-test		Post-test		
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Adjusted Scores
Semantic mapping	90	57.27	6.70	65.15	7.13	59.67
Direct explicit strategy	75	51.81	5.25	54.53	4.47	54.46

Table 1 shows that the students who were taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping had mean motivation score of 65.15 with a standard deviation of 7.13 at the post-test against their pre-test mean motivation score of 57.27 and standard deviation of 6.70 while those who were taught using the direct explicit strategy had mean motivation score of 54.46 and standard deviation of 4.47 at the post-test against their pre-test mean motivation score of 51.81 and standard deviation of 5.25. The adjusted scores of 59.67 for students who were taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and 54.46 for those taught using direct explicit strategy indicate that students taught using

semantic mapping had higher motivation score than their counterpart taught using direct explicit strategy.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of gender on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Mean Motivation Score of Male and Female Students Taught English Language Vocabulary with Semantic mapping and Direct Explicit Strategy

Gender		Pre-test		Post-test		
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Adjusted Score
Male	65	59.53	6.06	68.02	6.75	58.80
Female	100	51.06	5.70	59.59	5.73	56.32

Table 2 shows that the male students had mean motivation score of 68.02 with a standard deviation of 6.75 at the post-test against their pre-test mean motivation score of 59.53 and standard deviation of 6.06, while the female students had mean motivation score of 59.59 with a standard deviation of 5.73 at the post-test against their pre-test mean motivation score of 51.06 and standard deviation of 5.70. The adjusted scores of 58.80 and 56.32 for the male and female students respectively, show that male students had higher adjusted score than the female students implying that male students were more motivated than the female students when exposed to semantic mapping strategy.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of location on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Location Score of Urban and Rural Students Taught English Language Vocabulary with Semantic Mapping and Direct Explicit Strategy

Location		**Pre-test**		**Post-test**		
	N	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Adjusted Score**
Urban	90	43.66	8.14	80.78	6.75	55.80
Rural	75	41.92	6.80	79.58	7.51	54.32

Table 3 shows that urban students had mean motivation score of 80.78 with a standard deviation of 6.75 at the post-test against their pre-test mean motivation score of 43.66 and standard deviation of 8.14 while the rural students had mean motivation score of 79.58 with a standard deviation of 7.51 at the post-test against their pre-test mean motivation score of 41.92 and standard deviation of 6.80. The adjusted scores of 55.80 and 54.32 for the urban and rural students respectively is an indication that urban students had higher adjusted score than the rural students. By implication,

therefore, urban students were more highly motivated than their rural counterparts when exposed to semantic mapping strategy.

H_{O1}: There is no significant difference in the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and those taught using direct explicit strategy

Table 4: Analysis of Covariance of the Mean Motivation Scores of Students Taught English Language Vocabulary Using Semantic Mapping and Those taught Using Direct Explicit Strategy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1531.302a	4	382.825	28.599	.000
Intercept	4851.294	1	4851.294	362.421	.000
Pre-test	116.574	1	116.574	8.709	.004
Experimental	79.910	1	79.910	5.970	.016
Strategy	.044	1	.044	.003	.954
Experimental *Strategy	16.115	1	16.115	1.204	.274
Error	1940.938	160	13.386		
Total	164062.000	165			
Corrected Total	3472 240	164			

a.R Squared=.441(Adjusted R Squared=.426)

Table 4 showed that F (1,145) =5.970, P<0.05. Findings revealed that students who were taught vocabulary using the semantic mapping strategy exhibited significantly higher motivation levels than those taught the direct explicit strategy. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary with semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy is rejected. The mean post-test motivation scores of those taught with semantic mapping were notably higher showing increased enthusiasm, participation, and positive attitudes towards vocabulary learning. This implies that there is a significant difference between the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping strategy and. direct explicit strategy.

H_{O2}: There is no significant influence of gender on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy.

Table 5: Analysis of Covariance of Students' Mean Motivation Scores in English Language Vocabulary by Strategy and Gender

Source	Type 111 Sum of Squared	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Corrected Model	1270.841[a]	4	317.710	9.154	.000
Intercept	5664.227	1	5664.227	163.200	.000
Pre-test	8.836	1	8.836	.255	.615
Experimental	852.922	1	852.922	24.575	.000
Gender	67.718	1	67.718	1.951	.165
Experimental* Gender	7.594	1	7.594	.219	.641
Error	5032.552	160	34.707		
Total	496965.000	165			
Corrected Total	6303.393	164			

a. R Squared = .202 (Adjusted R Squared = .180)

Table 5 shows that the probability associated with the calculated value of F (1.951) for the influence of gender on the mean motivation scores of students in English language Vocabulary is 0.165. Since the probability value of 0.165 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance (p>0.05), the null hypothesis was not rejected meaning that there is no significant difference in the mean motivation scores of male and female students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy.

H_{O3}: There is no significant influence of location on students' mean motivation scores in English language vocabulary when exposed to semantic mapping strategy.

Table 6: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of the mean motivation scores of students in English Language Vocabulary by Strategy and Location

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	168.747[a]	3	56.249	1.067	.365
Intercept	1045557.489	1	1045557.489	19833.125	.000
Experimental	79.699	1	79.699	1.512	.221
Location	68.429	1	68.429	1.298	.256
Experimental * Location	21.837	1	21.837	.414	.521
Error	8487.556	161	52.718		
Total	1071066.000	165			
Corrected Total	8656.303	164			

a. R Squared = .019 (Adjusted R Squared = .001)

Table 6 shows that F (1.512) for the influence of strategy on the mean location score of students in English language vocabulary had an associated probability level of .221. Since the probability value of .221 is greater than 0.05 level of significance

($p<0.05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that there is no significant influence of location in the mean motivation scores of students' taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy.

Discussion

The findings of the study showed that students who were taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping had higher motivation score than their counterpart taught using direct explicit strategy. It was further found that there was a significant difference between the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary with semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy in favour of those taught using semantic mapping. These findings corroborate those of Aydin & Yildiz (2020) and Hassanzadeh & Rahimy (2022) who found that semantic mapping significantly improved English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' vocabulary retention and motivation and that learners taught through semantic mapping developed a more positive attitude towards English vocabulary learning due to the interactive and visual nature of the strategy. The results also align with that of Okeke and Eze (2023) who found that Nigerian students exposed to semantic mapping strategies demonstrated higher motivation and achievement in English vocabulary tasks.

The findings of the study also showed that male students had higher motivation score than the female students implying that male students were more motivated than the female students when exposed to semantic mapping strategy. This finding is at par with that of Yan (2009) whose study demonstrated a consistent advantage for female students in English proficiency and vocabulary. This result is also in disagreement with the findings of Catalán (2010), which highlighted that females often exhibit stronger lexical knowledge and more effective strategies in language acquisition. This result equally disagrees with Riandi (2018) whose finding indicated that female students were not only better motivated in vocabulary mastery tests but also used a wider variety of vocabulary strategies.

It was also found, in this study that urban students had higher adjusted score than the rural students. This means that urban students were more highly motivated than their rural counterparts when exposed to semantic mapping strategy. This finding is in agreement with Adepoju and Aremo (2019) whose findings indicated that urban students achieved higher proficiency levels than the rural students. This finding is also in tandem with the result of Eneh & Igiligi's (2023) study, which indicated that students in the urban areas were more highly motivated and as such they outperformed their rural counterparts when exposed to essay writing using project-based method.

The findings of this study further revealed that there was a significant difference between the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping strategy and. direct explicit strategy in the test of hypothesis hence, the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean motivation scores of students taught English language vocabulary with semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy. The findings is consistent with Hassanzadeh & Rahim's (2022) finding that semantic mapping significantly improved

EFL learners' vocabulary retention and motivation and that learners taught through semantic mapping developed a more positive attitude towards English vocabulary learning due to the interactive and visual nature of the strategy.

The findings of this study has also indicated that male students were more motivated than the female students when exposed to semantic mapping strategy. However, the difference in the mean motivation scores of male and female students was not statistically significant in the test of hypothesis hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean motivation scores of male and female students taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy was not rejected. This finding corroborates the findings of Lekawael et al. (2024) whose study found a very weak difference between male and female motivation in vocabulary mastery, suggesting a no significant difference between male and females in this context.

Finally, the result of this study showed that there is no significant influence of location in the mean motivation scores of urban and rural students' taught English language vocabulary using semantic mapping and direct explicit strategy. This finding is contrary to Adepoju and Aremo's (2019) and Odogwu and Zita (2025) whose findings revealed that location has significant influence on students' language learning outcomes.

The findings lend support to Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learning is most effective when students engage actively and socially in constructing meaning. In this study, learners taught using semantic mapping interacted freely, shared ideas and collaborated on word maps, all of which fostered a sense of ownership, autonomy, and motivation. The teacher's role as a facilitator further encouraged learners to take responsibility for their learning, reflecting the collaborative essence of social constructivism.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated that the use of semantic mapping strategy significantly enhanced junior secondary school students' motivation in English vocabulary learning. The findings that students taught with semantic mapping strategy had higher mean motivation scores than those taught with direct explicit strategy and that gender and location were not significant factors of students' motivation when exposed to semantic mapping strategy. These underscore the importance of adopting learner-centered and visually engaging strategies such as the semantic mapping strategy in English language vocabulary classrooms. Semantic mapping strategy provides both cognitive and motivational benefits. Cognitively, it helps learners build semantic networks that improve word retention and comprehension. Motivationally, it creates a supportive environment that stimulates interest and enjoyment in English vocabulary learning. Therefore, by allowing students to actively construct meaning and connect new vocabulary to prior knowledge, semantic mapping fosters both understanding and motivation. Future research could explore the long-term influence of semantic mapping

strategy on English language proficiency in order to contribute to literature and provide empirical evidences on language learning strategies.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are proffered based on the findings of the study:

1. English teachers should adopt and integrate semantic mapping strategy into vocabulary instruction to make lessons more interactive and motivating.
2. Teacher training programmes should also include workshops on how to effectively implement semantic mapping in classroom practice.
3. Future researchers could explore the long-term impact of semantic mapping strategy on students' acquisition and retention in English language vocabulary.

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