Multiple Intelligences –
Addressing Diverse Learners in an ESL Classroom

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Abstract

Language learners show diverse learning capabilities making it imperative for instructors to incorporate strategies that help bring out student potential. Each one of them perceives content based on their unique learning style. This paper explores approaches for maximizing multiple intelligences to ensure improved learning in classrooms. Multiple Intelligences theory by Harvard Professor Howard Gardner in 1983 contradicted the standard approach of measuring intelligence with a single perspective. He explained that learners possess different forms of intelligences and apply them in more than one way to interpret information, solve problems and create things (Gardner, 1993). This paper emphasizes on the implementation of multiple intelligences theory in the context of teaching English as a second language. It focuses on the need to consider learners as having individual differences and learning styles. It further emphasizes on the use of methods and approaches that pay attention to learning with varied intelligences and learning preferences. It also lays stress on the importance of student-centered approach, in teaching strategies, the most to ensure student guided learning environment in classrooms. With multiple intelligences theory-based approach, educators need to create activities that encompass all types of intelligences and to suit all learners. Moreover, activities appropriate for learners will be suggested with varied intelligences and preferred styles of learning. Finally, the paper will also highlight potential issues faced by educators, recommendations and conclusions about the implementation of the multiple intelligences approach.

Keywords: *Multiple intelligences, second language, learning styles, language learning;*

1. Literature Review

Language learners are unique and different in their learning styles and intelligences and bring their own experiences to the classroom. Educators have to harness that potential and organize their teaching strategies based on those differences. They should not only focus on the differences in their styles but also on the differences in their intelligences (Dunn, 2000). It is also crucial that the approaches are student-centered to promote learning independence in them and make them self-reliant learners (Bas, 2008).

Howard Gardner first introduced the new concept of multiple intelligences in the year 1983. He established that there's no one or general intelligence rather, each person is endowed with multiple or eight different types of intelligence some of which or all of which develop throughout his lifetime (Gardner, 1983, 1993). Initially, Gardner propounded that there are seven types of intelligence. He described these intelligences as logical or mathematical thinking, verbal or linguistic intelligence, visual-spatial, musical and kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner also emphasized that all these types of intelligences are not present in any one individual in the same strength but vary in levels. He further added that individuals make use of these bits of intelligence in a combination of all or some of these to access information and complete various tasks (Currie, 2003) (Gardner, The Unschooled Mind, 1991). Later in the year 1997, Gardner added two more types of intelligences namely 'Naturalistic' and 'Existential.' We will discuss each of these intelligence in brief to be able to get an insight into the theory:

1.1 Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence

Linguistic intelligence denotes a person's ability to use language effectively, both oral and written. Learners with strong linguistic intelligence can easily take on tasks like writing an essay or a paragraph, comprehend reading text or using synonyms in spoken word (Christison, 1995, 1996).

1.2 Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

Logical intelligence implies that a person is good at using numbers, solving problems and enjoys facing new challenges in life (Kim, 2009). Second language learners having logical knowledge are capable of sequencing events in a chronological order and classifying language items successfully.

1.3 Visual-Spatial Intelligence

Gardner described spatial intelligence as the ability to imagine and form pictures and transform those forms into visual ideas and expressions (Gardner, 1983, 1993). Visual-spatial intelligence helps language learners in describing images, pictures or in tasks like concept mapping, representing graphic analyzers and flowcharts.

1.4 Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence
According to Gardner, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence involves using a body part or the entire body in solving a problem or performing a task (Gardner, 1983, 1993). Second language learners possessing this intelligence to perform well at role plays, drama and enjoy miming and games.

1.5 Musical Intelligence
Musical intelligence involves singing a song or chanting to a melodious tune. It shows how sensitive we are to music, rhythm, and tone. Educators can make use of songs, music or rhymes to address learners with musical intelligence in their classes

1.6 Interpersonal Intelligence
Interpersonal intelligence means empathizing with others and feeling their emotions and mental state (Gardner, 1983, 1993). Second language teachers or foreign language teachers use interpersonal intelligence the most in their classes when they try to understand and care for their learners.

1.7 Intrapersonal Intelligence
Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to self-introspect about our abilities, emotions, and feelings, and appreciate ourselves (Lazaer, 1999). Language learners with this type of advanced knowledge are good at journal keeping and self-analytical skills and tasks.

1.8 Naturalistic Intelligence and Existential Intelligence
Naturalistic intelligence represents explicitly our abilities and skills to observe, recognize, and analyze the natural world that includes, flora and fauna along with rocks and minerals that exist around us (Bas, 2008)[1]. Existential intelligence relates to our sensitivity to our existence in asking questions about our life as to who we are, where have we originated from and where do we go?

2. Multiple Intelligences Theory and Second Language Learning
We can use a wide range of activities to suit our learners' needs and their multiple intelligences' profiles. Some of them have been suggested as follows:

2.1. Linguistic Intelligence – Storytelling, writing a short poem, debates, Group discussions, gap fills, conducting interviews, word games.

2.2 Logical-Mathematical Intelligence – Concept mapping, flow charts, sequencing events in chronological order, word-order activities, pattern games, and jigsaw puzzles.

2.3 Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence – Planning and attending a field trip, role plays, miming, dancing, building models and grammar games.

2.4. Visual-Spatial Intelligence – Describing pictures, using visual images for teaching vocabulary, video exercises, multimedia projects, using charts, maps, graphics analyzers and concept maps.

2.5 Musical Intelligence – Playing songs, musical cloze activities, singing a song or rap to explain something, making presentations using sound or music and tongue twisters.

2.6 Interpersonal Intelligence – Conducting a meeting to address a subject, group work, practice giving and receiving feedback from teachers and peers, surveys and polls and group brainstorming.

2.7 Intrapersonal Intelligence – Writing journal entries, activities involving self-reflection, and sharing personal experiences, assessing one's work and setting and pursuing a goal.

2.8 Naturalistic Intelligence – Taking field trips and service projects, caring for pets and wildlife and gardens, drawing or painting a natural object,

3. Integration of Multiple Intelligence in ESL Classes – Learning Styles
The concept of multiple intelligences implies that though a person may have all the intelligences mentioned above, they may not be all developed at the same level. Therefore, a teacher would have to plan her lesson in such a way that utilizes the different types of intelligence to their full potential but also to attend to the diverse needs and nature of the learners in her class. Kagan & Kagan stated that, if we provide our learners with different styles of learning, it will not only expose them to varied forms of education but also prepare them for a diverse world that awaits them out there and is ever changing (Kagan, 1998). Some of such diverse learning styles have been suggested in detail here –

3.1 Language in Action – Young learners love to sing and dance. We could also give them helpful words and let them create their rhymes with those words. With adult learners, rhymes could be replaced by songs to suit their age and needs.

3.2 Drawing and Coloring Alternatives to Music – As an alternative to music, students could be asked to draw characters from stories. They could also be asked to make interesting, picturesque folders, bookmarks, and posters for their classes.

3.3 Drama in Action – Young learners love action in classrooms. Drama can motivate them, as it involves enacting the characters they are studying. Drama involves all four skills of language namely listening, speaking, reading and writing as students create their characters after reading the story, write their lines and speak them while enacting the play.

3.4 Games for Fun – Students can make their games on stories or characters they have studied in their classes. They can create card games and play in pairs or groups. Digital games like 'Kahoot' can be effectively used for teaching skills, language, vocabulary, and grammar.

3.5 Handicrafts for creativity and learning – Students both young and old can be asked to follow instructions both oral or written to create interesting artwork or craftwork based on characters in their plays. Young learners can create small objects like hats, masks, and bookmarks, etc.

3.6 Storybooks for inspiration – Stories can be the best way to introduce a foreign language to young learners. Students can also be asked to enact, draw or sing to these fairytales as discussed earlier.

3.7 Jokes for fun and laughter – Young learners specifically love to laugh. Jokes can be adapted to language learning by asking learners to enact them, compose songs or create puppets or characters that narrate the jokes to class.

3.8 Vocabulary building exercises – Learners can be asked to build picture dictionaries or 'Pictionary.' They could also be asked to write entire poems or stories in their notebooks in a colorful manner, highlighting new words in the story or the poem they learned.

4. Issues and Recommendations

There are some limitations to applying the MI theory full-fledged in ESL classrooms despite its positive results. Firstly, there are few tests available to test the learners' intelligences based on different intelligence levels. Also, it has been observed that some cultures believe in relying more on a certain kind of intelligence than other. Moreover, planning and adding more activities to already existing lesson plans can be quite overwhelming for some teachers. Besides, teachers would need some training workshops to be able to apply these approaches in classes. Also, they may need some prior experience with these approaches. Furthermore, teachers need to evaluate students on a wide variety of criteria corresponding and appropriate to their diverse profiles.

Despite its limitations, MI theory has shown great achievements when it comes to raising performance levels in ESL classes. Careful planning and analyzing the classroom profile of their students can help teachers prepare well in advance and structure their lesson plans to suit their students' requirements. Training and workshops that focus on teaching how to adapt lessons to specific tasks which stem from MI theory would guide teachers in effectively implementing the approach in their classes. Teachers would also need to use various forms of assessments to do justice to the distinct profiles in their classes. They could include debates, role plays, projects and presentations to provide incentive to such learners.

5. Conclusion

Multiple Intelligences theory has more benefits than limitations. It has the potential to reform not only students' learning process, but it also provides educators with an opportunity to introspect and analyze on their capabilities as teachers to deliver content in diverse forms which further enhances their efficacy as educators. They discover a paradigm shift in their experiences as teachers and they can create more learner-centered classes rather than teacher-led courses. Through MI approach, educators can raise the level of linguistic skills of their learners. It makes them better learners and develops their communicative skills. In other words, they contribute to all-round development of their learners by applying the principles of multiple intelligences theory (Christison & Kennedy, 1999). It can be therefore concluded, that multiple intelligences theory has great potential to bring out the best in both the educators as well as learners when it comes to language learning in ESL classes.

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