

Implications of Multiple Intelligences Theory in ELT Field

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating implications the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory in English Language Teaching (ELT) field.

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the main features of the multi-intelligence theory?*
- 2- What are the implications of the multi-intelligence theory in English Language Teaching (ELT) field?*

Results of the study showed that in EFL class, it is possible to motivate learners by making use of the nine different types of intelligence described by Gardner (1983, 1999) as well as by activating multiple ways of meaning-making through the use of tasks relating to the different intelligences.

Key words: Multiple Intelligences Theory, ELT, TELF

Introduction

Intelligence is a psychological notion which is connected with learning and which educators base a lot of their professional decisions on (Khamis: 2004).

Since the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, various theories about intelligence have been discussed, and many attempts to define and to measure human intellectual capabilities have been made.

The traditional view of intelligence was also challenged, Gardner (1983) suggested an alternative definition, noting that intelligence entails the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular setting or community.

Howard Gardner's MI theory (1983, 1999) is an important contribution to cognitive science and constitutes a learner-based philosophy which is "an increasingly popular approach to characterizing the ways in which learners are unique and to developing instruction to respond to this uniqueness" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 123).

Gardner said that there are many, not just one, different autonomous intelligence capacities that result in many different ways of knowing, understanding, and learning about our world. Gardner defined seven intelligences including verbal-linguistic, mathematical-logical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. In 1997, Gardner added an eighth intelligence, the naturalist intelligence, and two years later a ninth intelligence, existentialist intelligence (Gardner: 1999).

Problem of the study

Based on the researchers' experience in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) field, they noticed that most students face difficulties in learning EFL in particular situations, while the same students were good in other activities in the class. Thus, this study comes to investigate implications the MI theory in English language teaching area.

Questions of the study

The study attempts to answer the following two questions:

- 3- What are the main features of the multi-intelligence theory?
- 4- What are the implications of the multi-intelligence theory in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) field?

Aims of the study

- This study aims at exploring features of the multi-intelligence theory.
- This study aims at exploring implications of the multi-intelligence theory in English Language Teaching field.

Significance of the study

The study is expected to contribute to:

- Helping the Ministry of Education improve outcomes of the educational process.
- Helping curriculum planners take the multi-intelligence theory into accounts while designing English language curricula.
- Familiarizing EFL teachers with implications of the multi-intelligence theory in the class.

Limitations of the study

- The study is limited to exploring implications of the multi-intelligence theory in ELT field.
- The study is limited to exploring the multi-intelligence theory implications in teaching the four language skills; namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Theoretical Background

Gardner defines intelligence as "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting" (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Using biological as well as cultural research, he formulated a list of nine intelligences. This new outlook on intelligence differs greatly from the traditional view which usually recognizes only two intelligences, verbal and computational. The nine intelligences Gardner defines are:

- Logical-Mathematical Intelligence: consists of the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically. This intelligence is most often associated with scientific and mathematical thinking.
- Linguistic Intelligence: involves having a mastery of language. This intelligence includes the ability to effectively manipulate language to express oneself rhetorically or poetically. It also allows one to use language as a means to remember information.
- Spatial Intelligence: gives one the ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems. This intelligence is not limited to visual domains-- Gardner notes that spatial intelligence is also formed in blind children.
- Musical Intelligence: encompasses the capability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms. (Auditory functions are required for a person to develop this intelligence in relation to pitch and tone, but it is not needed for the knowledge of rhythm.)
- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence: is the ability to use one's mental abilities to coordinate one's own bodily movements. This intelligence challenges the popular belief that mental and physical activity are unrelated.
- Interpersonal intelligence: the ability to understand and discern the feelings and intentions of others.
- Intrapersonal intelligence: the ability to understand one's own feelings and motivations. These two intelligences are separate from each other. Nevertheless, because of their close association in most cultures, they are often linked together.
- Existential Intelligence: sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence, such as the meaning of life, why do we die, and how did we get here.
- Naturalist Intelligence: Designates the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations). This ability was clearly of value in our evolutionary past as hunters, gatherers, and farmers; it continues to be central in such roles as botanist or chef. It is also speculated that much of our consumer society exploits the naturalist intelligences, which can be mobilized in the discrimination among cars, sneakers, kinds of makeup, and the like. (Amy C. Brualdi: 1996).

Using Multiple- Intelligences in the Classroom:

Accepting Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences has several implications for teachers in terms of classroom instruction. The theory states that all nine intelligences are needed to productively function in society. Teachers, therefore, should think of all intelligences as equally important. This is in great contrast to traditional education systems which typically place a strong emphasis on the development and use of verbal and mathematical intelligences. Thus, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences implies that educators should recognize and teach to a broader range of talents and skills. (Amy C. Brualdi: 1996).

Rather than functioning as a prescribed teaching method, curriculum, or technique, MI theory provides a way of understanding intelligence, which teachers can use as a guide for developing classroom activities that address multiple ways of learning and knowing (Christison, 1999b). Teaching strategies informed by MI theory can transfer some control from teacher to learners by giving students choices in the ways they will learn and demonstrate their learning. By focusing on problem-solving activities that draw on multiple intelligences, these teaching strategies encourage learners to build on existing strengths and knowledge to learn new content and skills (Kallenbach, 1999). It may also mean the adult learners who have had little success in traditional classrooms where only linguistic and mathematics skills are valued may experience more success when other intelligences are tapped.

The MI theory and ELT:

Language educators have long used the concepts of four basic language skills:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

The four basic skills are related to each other by two parameters:

- the mode of communication: oral or written.
- the direction of communication: receiving or producing the message.

Specialists in the field of ELT conducted a number of studies to explore implications of various psychological theories in the educational field.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) describe MI theory as an approach that has been considered not only in general education but also in language teaching.

“Application of MI in language teaching have been more recent, so it is not surprising that MI theory lacks some of the basic elements that might link it more directly to language education” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)

Christison and Kennedy (1999) identified four ways in which the MI theory can be used in the classroom as follows:

- 1- As a tool to help students develop a better understanding and appreciation of their own strengths and their preferred ways of learning.
- 2- As a tool to develop a better understanding of learners' intelligences.
- 3- As a guide to provide a greater variety of ways for students to learn and to demonstrate their learning.
- 4- As a guide to develop lesson plans that address the full range of learners needs.

With regard to the procedures of implementing MI theory in ELT, Christison (1996) suggests the following steps:

- Identifying the activities frequently used in the class and categorize them to each particular type of intelligence.
- Making plans by selecting appropriate classroom activities/ tasks.
- Using ELT Multiple Intelligences weekly/ monthly checklist to keep track of different activities and tasks conducted in the class.
- Expanding classroom activities for the neglected intelligences by way of examining and analyzing the checklists for a period of time. (Khamis: 2004).

Furthermore, a number of studies conducted in ELT field recommend the following techniques to implement the MI theory in ELT field in the class:

Words Are Not Enough : Do not rely on the spoken word only. Most activities for the younger learners should include movement and involve the senses, colors and sounds (Bas 2008).

Play with the Language : Let the pupils talk to themselves. Make them play with the language by making up rhymes, singing songs, telling stories, etc. in the classroom (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990).

Cooperation not Competition : The ideology of the theory of Multiple Intelligences is based on "cooperation" not on competition. So because of this reason, avoid prizes and awards in the class. In this regard, according to Scott and Ytreberg (1990), make room for shared experiences.

Using Storybooks : The educational value of using storybooks and storytelling has always been undisputed throughout the world. EFL teachers of young learners are now more familiar with an acquisition-based methodology, and recognise the true value of using storybooks and storytelling as a way to create an acquisition rich environment and ideal learning conditions which provide "comprehensible input" or "language a little beyond child's current level of competence" (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003; Krashen, 1981).

Drawing and Colouring: Children can redraw the characters; create maps showing where the story takes place, think of other possible cover illustrations, and so on (Bas 2008).

Handicrafts : Craft activities are extremely useful as learners can develop their listening and reading skills while following the written or oral instructions. Teachers should always make the craft activity themselves before doing it with their class. The finished work should be shown to the learners to give them a general idea of what is expected from them. Teachers should have the necessary materials with them so that they can do the activity together with their students while also giving the instructions (Ersoz et al. 2006: 42).

Songs and Rhymes : Very often, the rhymes developed in stories are to be found in various songs and rhymes (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003). Pupils can also compose songs for the storybook(s) they have read and then sing the song they have composed in the classroom.

Vocabulary Activities: Pupils can create their own "picture dictionary", based on words from the stories they have read or heard. They can work individually or pool their efforts to illustrate the words, either by drawing pictures or by cutting pictures out of magazines or catalogues. They can choose whether to arrange the words alphabetically or thematically (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003).

Drama: Pupils can act out the story in the storybooks or song they have read or listened to. They can organise a place and write, if they want, a different end for the story and then perform the story in the classroom. The pupils can also compose a song for the story and sing it in some parts of the drama if they wish (Bas 2008).

Games: Students may wish to play games purely for fun. Teachers, however, need to make sure that whatever done in the classroom is for teaching and learning purposes (Ersoz et al. 2006).

Related Studies

This part deals with studies that addressed the effect of MI Strategies on English Language Arts.

Chen (2004) examined the use of multiple Intelligences (MI) theory in large computer assisted EFI college classes in Taiwan to promote quality language teaching for large classes. Therefore, the researcher combined MI theory and computer assisted instruction in the intervention. The findings indicated that using the theory of MI in multimodal classroom proved to be effective to promote individualized and student-centered. It also helped students to achieve essential task of team work especially for large EFL classes. They were highly motivated and showed a great effective response.

Hall Haley (2004) investigated the effect of MI strategies in foreign and second language instruction through his action research project. Twenty three foreign language and English as second language teachers and 650 students from eight states and three countries participated in the study to determine the impact of implementing the theory of multiple Intelligences (MI) in daily classroom activities. Results showed that the students in the experimental group receiving MI-based instruction performed better than those in the control group.

The students in the experimental classes were more enthusiastic about learning and behavior problems were minimized. Teachers felt that their classroom management skills were enhanced. One surprising result of MI was the effective outcome. Most students expressed positive feelings about teachers using a variety of instructional strategies as well as assessment practices that address the multiple intelligences.

Hutchinson, McCavitt, Rude and Vallow (2002) conducted an action research project to implement language arts program using multiple intelligences to develop more positive attitudes towards grammar instruction and to help promote the transfer of grammar skills to daily writing and speaking tasks. The targeted population consisted of second, fourth and eighth grade students in four different school setting. During the intervention period, lessons and activities targeted the problem area of grammar education. Analysis of probable cause data revealed a great deal of controversy on the strategies of teaching grammar. Teachers are concerned over the lack of transfer of grammar skills into content areas. Students struggle to see the grammar instruction and its relationship to their daily communication skills. As a result, incorporating multiple intelligences strategies to meet the needs of different learning styles was the suggested solution. Post intervention data indicated the transfer of grammar skills into daily tasks. Student's attitudes towards grammar instruction improved. These results were consistent in all classroom studied.

Shore (2001) examined the use of multiple intelligences in George Washington University second language classroom. The findings indicated that utilizing multiple intelligences based lessons in English foreign language classroom has led to a higher self-efficacy and therefore a greater achievement in English language learning.

Geimer, Getz, Pochert and pullam (2000) carried out an action research project to determine the effect of incorporating multiple intelligences strategies into the language arts curriculum. The targeted students were in the second, third and fifth grades. It was discovered that reading was the lowest academic area tested on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, (IGAP). Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences appeared as a suggested solution. The selected intervention led to a comparison between traditional methods of teaching and multiple intelligences strategies. The intervention of multiple intelligences strategies showed an improvement in English grammar and reading comprehension. Spelling results showed a slight trend towards traditional instruction in three out of four targeted classrooms.

Snyder (1999) studied the relationship between learning styles/multiple intelligences and academic achievements. The sample consisted of high school students (128) American high school taking a United States history (required) class at a large public high school whose racial diversity was representative of that of the United States population. Data collection techniques included observations, interviews with students and teachers and assessments. She found that the females tended to be stronger than the males in the intrapersonal, linguistic and musical intelligences while the male students were more gifted than the females in the bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical and visual-spatial intelligences.

Female students were often more eager work alone on a project while male students preferred to work as groups.

Conclusion

In the second language classroom it is possible to motivate learners by activating multiple ways of meaning-making through the use of tasks relating to the different intelligences. Providing a variety of language activities that stimulate the different tools or intelligences proposed by Gardner (1999) makes it possible to engage multiple memory pathways necessary to produce sustained deep learning (Schumann 1997).

Christison (1999) indicates that teachers who use MI theory to inform their curriculum development find that they gain a deeper understanding of students' learning preferences and a greater appreciation of their strengths. Students are likely to become more engaged in learning as they use learning modes that match their intelligence strengths. In addition, students' regular reflection on their learning broadens their definitions of effective and acceptable teaching and learning practices. Students' increased engagement and success in learning stimulates teachers to raise their expectations, initiating a powerful expectation-response cycle that can lead to greater achievement levels for all.

Based on what has been mentioned, the researchers concluded that the MI theory could have a vital role in creating an attractive, encouraging and motivating atmosphere in ELT class.

ELT teachers and specialists need to make use of the nine different types of intelligence described by Gardner (1983, 1999) and design activities that take into account the students' attitudes, interests and levels in order to keep them engaged and involved and motivate them to put more effort into learning.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on findings of the study, the researchers recommend:

- Spreading awareness among EFL teachers on the MI theory and its implications in education in general and in ELT field in particular.
- Enriching the current English Language Curricula with extra activities based on the MI theory.
- Holding training sessions for teachers on the MI theory and its educational implications.

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