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Nurturing students' intellectual diversity through Multiple Intelligences Theory-based activities

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the diversification of foreign language teaching activities through the lens of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT), emphasizing its implications for language instruction. The study aims to clarify the key principles of MIT, its educational applications, and practical methods for implementing it in English language teaching. These approaches include instructional strategies and classroom activities designed to align with learners' distinct cognitive profiles. To enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning specialized English, educators should adapt their pedagogical methods and activity structures to nurture students' intellectual diversity.

Keywords: *Multiple Intelligences Theory, Intelligence, Howard Gardner, Legal English*

1. Introduction

Student achievement can be improved when learners are provided with opportunities to learn according to their individual preferences and strengths (Deligiannidi & Howard-Jones, 2015). According to Pawlak (2019), students process and respond to language differently depending on their backgrounds and intellectual capacities.

Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) provides a deeper understanding of this learner diversity. Unlike the traditional notion that intelligence is a single, measurable entity, divided simply into "high" or "low" (Strauss, 2013)—Gardner proposed that human intelligence is multifaceted. His perspective prompted educators to recognize that intelligence manifests in various forms and that no one form is inherently superior. This shift has encouraged diversification in classroom organization, teaching methods, and assessment strategies, leading to positive outcomes in education.

Akbari and Hosseini (2008) assert that integrating MI theory into language teaching has proven both necessary and beneficial (Dolati & Tahiri, 2017). Similarly, Wallace (2010) observed that using MIT-based approaches facilitates language learning when teachers acknowledge the unique abilities of each learner. Educators are encouraged to respect students' diverse backgrounds and employ multiple teaching techniques to develop their language skills while providing ample practice opportunities (Dörnyei, 2006; Mongkolchai & Sitthitikul, 2024). Despite certain challenges, Kevin (2006), Dillon (2005), and Xie and Lin (2009) emphasize that the application of MIT remains essential in advancing diversity within higher education.

To enhance the quality and effectiveness of university-level teaching, and to respond to the diverse needs and capabilities of learners, the application of Multiple Intelligences Theory is crucial. This paper aims to elucidate the core concepts of MIT, its educational applications, and specific strategies for applying it in English language teaching through MIT-based activities.

2. Literature Review

Theory of Multiple Intelligences

The concept of "intelligence" has been defined and approached in numerous ways. Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as the ability to solve problems or create products that hold value within one or more cultural contexts. He argued that individuals adapt successfully to their environments through cognitive and creative abilities. Gardner's perspective challenged traditional education and assessment

models that rely on narrow, standardized measures of intelligence, offering instead a broader and more inclusive view of human capability.

Traditional intelligence tests, according to Gardner, fail to capture the full range of human potential, as they measure only a limited set of abilities. In contrast, intelligence should be viewed as dynamic, capable of growth through experience, training, and context (Christison & Bassano, 2005). Mongkolchai and Sitthitikul (2024) further emphasize that all individuals possess multiple intelligences that can be nurtured and developed through appropriate encouragement and guidance.

Willingham (2004) expanded Gardner's notion of intelligence by highlighting the importance of both mental and physical skills in problem-solving and product creation. Initially, Gardner (1983) identified seven types of intelligences, later adding an eighth:

Adapted and modified from Chapman (2006), these include:

- Linguistic intelligence: the capacity to learn, use, and manipulate language effectively.
- Logical-mathematical intelligence: the ability to reason logically and solve numerical or scientific problems.
- Musical intelligence: sensitivity to rhythm, tone, and sound.
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: control over physical movements and the use of the body to accomplish tasks.
- Spatial intelligence: the ability to visualize and manipulate spatial relations.
- Interpersonal intelligence: the capacity to interact effectively with others.
- Intrapersonal intelligence: self-awareness and the ability to work independently.
- Naturalist intelligence: the ability to classify, organize, and appreciate the natural world.

Armstrong (2009) expanded this list to nine, adding existential (philosophical) intelligence. He emphasized that individuals possess multiple intelligences that function in unique combinations. With the right environment, motivation, and effort, each form of intelligence can be cultivated. Campbell et al. (2003) grouped these intelligences into three main categories:

- Spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, and naturalistic
- Linguistic and musical
- Intrapersonal and interpersonal

This classification simplifies implementation by clustering related intelligences for practical teaching applications.

Similarly, McKenzie (2005) proposed a framework of nine intelligences categorized into three broader domains, analytical, intrapersonal, and interpersonal, which interact in complex ways. Understanding these interconnections allows educators to design effective learning experiences that leverage students' strengths and improve overall performance.

Razmajoo (2008) emphasized that individuals exhibit varying degrees of multiple intelligences, often excelling in two or three. Recognizing and utilizing these dominant intelligences can enhance both personal development and learning outcomes.

Multiple Intelligences Theory in Teaching

Kevin (2006) asserted that no single teaching method can successfully reach all learners. One of the goals of MIT in teaching is to diversify teaching methods to meet the characteristics of multiple intelligences of learners. If in the past, teachers only provided a specific teaching method to match the course objectives and program content, with MIT, in the same lesson, many teaching methods and techniques are used. These methods will promote the learners' abilities and positivity, learners will be more proactive in activities (Lana, 2000). According to Armstrong (2004), teachers must understand the characteristics of learners and their prominent

intelligences to build teaching techniques suitable for each type of intelligence. Willingham (2004) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the impact of differences in learners' intelligence on their learning outcomes in order to design more feasible educational programs and methods in the corresponding educational environment. He believes that there are many ways to introduce a topic to stimulate creativity and different abilities from each learner, while creating great motivation for the learning process. According to Ramos (2007), teachers apply MIT to build motivational methods with the aim of helping learners confidently express themselves through actively designing and implementing their favorite activities while still ensuring the content requirements of the lesson. Through the activities and performances of learners, the strengths and abilities of learners are discovered and promoted. He emphasizes the importance of working in groups and teams so that learners have the opportunity to share different skills and knowledge and complement each other, and at the same time they have a sense of responsibility for their own work and the collective. It is the group activities that will motivate the intelligences to be expressed and developed in a team that is both competitive and constructive.

The results show a positive relationship between learners' vocabulary memorization ability and the use of MI strategies in ESL classrooms (Ghamrawi, 2014). Wallace (2010) asserts that current foreign language teaching methods will change when Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences is applied. The speed of language acquisition is also affected when this theory is used in second language learning.

3. Methodology

Research design

Qualitative method was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the applying this theory in teaching. The interviews included both direct questions and experience-based inquiries, where teachers were asked to about classroom practice they had observed or were involved in. To ensure the reliability of the data, the interviews were conducted after the course was completed. Ethical issues were

addressed by obtaining consent from participants through a participation agreement sheet.

Participants

The study was conducted with 5 teachers and 34 students at a university in Vietnam. The 5 teachers who participated in the study had more than 3 years of English teaching experience. All of them had previous experience with applying MIT in teaching methods.

Research Instruments

In-depth interviews were conducted with students and instructors to gather more detailed information, which were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Observations was also used to collect data related to engagement in the classroom, while interviews were conducted with students and instructors to collect data on activities and methods prefered in classroom through MIT.

Data collection

The interviewer also conducted the interviews with the interviewees in two ways: direct communication (face to face) or indirect communication (via social networks or mobile phones). The direct conversation was recorded, taken notes and rewritten in writing. The indirect conversation was saved in writing data analysis

Data analysis

For the qualitative data, the coding technique was employed, which selects a specified amount of text and codes it with a previously selected code. The information from the in-depth questions, interviews, and reflection notes was sorted based on repetition indigenous categories or specialized vocabulary, key words in context, compare and contrast, metaphors, and analogies, to be grouped into codes and common themes.

1. Findings and dicussions

Corresponding to each type of intelligence, there are the most suitable teaching methods and techniques, activities specifically designed for the lesson content, and

effective forms of testing and evaluation for the learner's results. MIT is applied to teaching English as follows:

Linguistic Intelligence

Teaching methods and techniques: Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Natural Approach, Active Teaching Method, Communicative Approach.

Preferred activities:

- Word games and quizzes using English vocabulary: Word Association, Taboo, Scrabble, Bananagrams, Word Chains, and 20 Questions (players guess a word through yes/no questions).
- Story-Building: Each student contributes a sentence to a collaborative narrative to develop creativity and fluency.
- Word Bingo: Students mark vocabulary items they hear instead of numbers.
- Portfolio or learning diary: Learners record new vocabulary, summarize key points, reflect on challenges, and track progress.
- Presentations: Students present on assigned topics, applying speaking and presentation skills.
- Debates: Learners discuss lesson-related topics from multiple perspectives.
- Essay writing: Writing samples such as essays, letters, and creative texts.
- Journalistic writing: Students act as reporters to write short academic articles for a class website.
- Reading comprehension: Reading and analyzing foreign legal articles, followed by oral summaries or lecture-style presentations.

Logical–Mathematical Intelligence

Teaching methods and techniques: Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Active Learning.

Preferred activities:

- Exploring correlations between theoretical concepts and their real-world applications.
- Analyzing, comparing, and contrasting related topics from multiple sources.
- Identifying and proposing solutions to given problems.
- Encouraging inquiry and critical questioning.
- Selecting topics for evaluation or commentary.
- Using educational games to test vocabulary and conceptual understanding.
- Creating mind maps to systematize knowledge.

Musical Intelligence

***Teaching methods and techniques*:** Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Approach.

Preferred activities:

- Organizing language games involving music, sound, or rhythm.
- Learning vocabulary and thematic knowledge through audiovisual materials.
- Allowing students to create original audio or video projects based on lesson content.

Bodily–Kinesthetic Intelligence

***Teaching methods and techniques*:** Communicative Approach, Project-Based Learning (PBL), Cooperative Language Learning (CLL).

Preferred activities:

- Using gestures or physical demonstrations to explain vocabulary or concepts.
- Role-playing or recording dramatized scenarios.
- Organizing dramatization competitions.

- Conducting experiential and extracurricular activities related to course topics, such as observing court procedures in different countries.
- Reconstructing lesson content through student-made videos and explanations.
- Participating in English-language contests.
- Engaging in physical games related to lesson themes.

Spatial Intelligence

***Teaching methods and techniques*:** Active Learning, Project-Based Learning, Technology-Enhanced Learning, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

***Preferred activities*:**

- Presenting vocabulary and concepts through diagrams or illustrations.
- Designing charts and tables to demonstrate structures and topic features.
- Using digital tools to present content visually.
- Creating visual simulations of cases, situations, or trials through diagrams and infographics.

Interpersonal Intelligence

***Teaching methods and techniques*:** Communicative Approach, Project-Based Learning, Cooperative Language Learning (CLL), Experiential Learning.

***Preferred activities*:**

- Discussing lesson-related topics in groups or pairs.
- Playing interactive language games emphasizing teamwork and understanding.
- Role-playing or dramatizing lesson content.
- Participating in expert-led talks or seminars.
- Forming academic or peer-learning communities.

- Engaging in extracurricular or outdoor group activities.
- Competing in academic contests.
- Initiating projects to promote and disseminate legal knowledge.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

***Teaching methods and techniques*:** Flipped Learning, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Problem-Based Learning (PBL).

Preferred activities:

- Independent study and lesson planning, including self-generated questions.
- Researching topics and organizational structures from various international sources.
- Maintaining learning diaries and portfolios to document progress.
- Writing essays, reports, or presentations on selected issues.
- Participating in structured debates.
- Solving real-world problems through case-based tasks.

It can be seen that with the learning content of the same subject, there will be many different approaches. Therefore, teachers need to adjust teaching methods and ways of organizing different activities to promote the intellectual diversity of learners. Teachers can flexibly combine many activities for a lecture from many different sources of documents, many ways of assessing a subject so as not to bias the assessment of ability and ignore some talents of learners. It is necessary to develop both language and thinking, orientation and intuition, combine theory and practice, movement and inner self, or interaction between individuals and internal strength in the proposed methods. At the same time, teachers also encourage and motivate learners to find for themselves learning methods and strategies that are suitable for their abilities to achieve the subject's goals in the most favorable way. Finding their

strengths will also help learners have long-term goals for the learning process and career orientation.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The article has clarified the contents of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (MIT), including: views on the theory, classification of intelligence, and the application of the theory of multiple intelligences in education. The study has also proposed ways to apply this theory in teaching English to develop diverse talents of learners, including: teaching methods; lecture activities designed to correspond to the intellectual characteristics of each learner; appropriate forms of assessment to improve the quality of English teaching. Teachers need to know how to choose teaching methods suitable for the diversity of learners' intelligences, such as combining many activities for a task or organizing diverse forms of assessment so that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate their full potential.

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