

THE ENHANCEMENT OF LEARNER AUTONOMY AND ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY FOR YOUNG LEARNERS THROUGH MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE THEORY.

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Abstract:-

Learning English is vital for young learners today given both the increasing globalization of academic, governmental, economic affairs and associated rise in the global profile of English as a lingua franca as well as potential for personal enrichment that comes with learning any foreign languages. As the need for learning English among young learners increases, so does the need for appropriate measures for informing relevant stakeholders (e.g. learners, parents and educators) of the learners English Proficiency Level. Inevitably, the appropriate measurement of English proficiency will be critical if assessment is to play an effective role in young learners' English development and academic success.

In order to equip learners properly, English teachers working in the school system must have the necessary knowledge of English as a school subject and the skills to teach it in a way that learners find motivating and meaningful. In addition, teachers should be able to support their students as they become more autonomous in their language learning.

In devising English Language Proficiency assessments for young learners, an array of issues needs to be carefully thought out in terms of young learner's characteristics and their language development. For that, Theories of learning and intelligence can be used to identify and clarify the claims that are made in English Language Proficiency tests and validity of test interpretations. According to the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) every single child and person in general, can excel in a different area depending on their intelligence (linguistic, logico mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist). The implications for language teaching are that classroom activities should be organised in a way which stimulates our students' various intelligences. As a result, they get more actively involved in the learning process.

Key words:-*Learner's autonomy, Assessment, Language proficiency, multiple intelligence*

INTRODUCTION:

“I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions. An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do... Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves. The performance of understanding that try matters are the ones we carry out as human beings in an imperfect world which we can affect for good or for ill”. – Howard Gardner

Howard Gardner’s work around multiple intelligences has had a profound impact on thinking and practice in education, as a theoretical construct the theory of multiples intelligences suggests an explanation for intelligence which embraces human diversity and emphasizes the importance of the cultural context within which intelligence operates. As features teaches is very important to us learn and understand this theory because it is becoming an important influence in education and also it is beginning to have an impact on second language learning; something really interesting to us about the multiple intelligences theory is that it doesn’t generalize the learning of the students, every student has different skills and he/she can use it to learn successfully a second language, even if some student has a highly developed linguistic intelligence, as a measured by IQ test, is not necessary a successful second language learner.

Multiple Intelligence Theory – a brief introduction

At the end of the 20th century, Howard Gardner gave teachers a new way to look at the learning process by claiming that intelligence and learning are multidimensional. Thanks to him, teachers confirmed something they have always felt: intelligence is not what you are born with and there is little you can do to change it. Gardner argued that human beings have evolved to have several distinct intelligences to solve any potential problem in their daily lives. In this way, Gardner identified the following intelligences: linguistic intelligence or the ability to communicate to each other; logical-mathematical intelligence or the ability to manipulate numbers or quantities; visual-spatial intelligence or the ability to present the spatial world visually in your mind; musical intelligence or the ability to hear music in our head; kinaesthetic intelligence or the ability to use the whole or parts of the body to solve a problem; naturalist intelligence or the ability to observe and notice changes in the environment; intrapersonal intelligence or the ability to know and understand ourselves; and interpersonal intelligence or the ability to understand other people (*fig.1*). Although each intelligence is relatively interdependent or semi-autonomous of the others, any significant achievement involves a blend of intelligences.

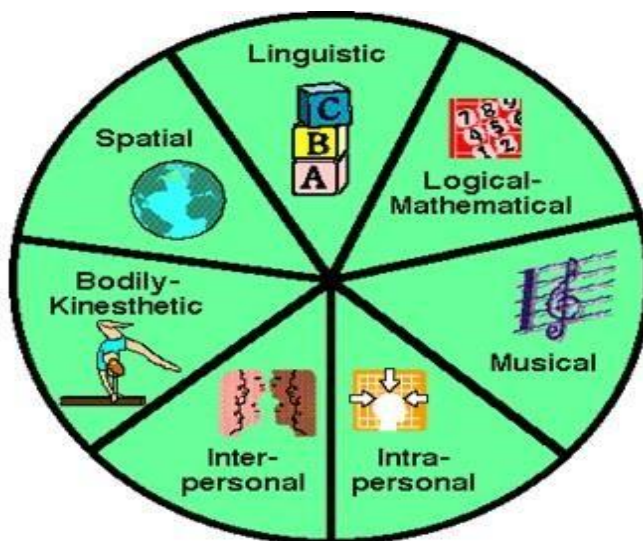


Fig. 1

MI Theory and Teaching English as Foreign Language:

As language teachers we traditionally focus most of our attention on the linguistic ability of our students. Students whose strong areas are elsewhere might be seen by us as inactive, stupid and demotivated and, as a result, neglected in the teaching process. If we cater for the various student intelligence profiles that exist in our learning environment we will activate more students and will increase their motivation to study English.

Outline of the teaching situation

MI theory was implemented in the English language classroom during a 28-lesson language course which took place in a school in Bharuch town situated in Gujarat state of India. 42 eleven-year-old learners took part in the project. During two months they had an oral course in English (3/4 lessons per week); get acquainted with the Latin alphabet; learned to associate letters with English words but they did not read or write anything. During other two months they began to learn how to read and write in English. They had 4 lessons per week with two different teachers: one of them taught those 2 lessons per week following a course book (*The Jungle book*); the other – 2 lessons per week for which there was no prescriptive syllabus.

After the Christmas holiday the children were asked to fill in a questionnaire about the school activities they like most (table 1).

Activities	I Like	I Don't know	I Don't like
Reading			
Writing			
Maths			
Drawing			
Music			
English			
History and Geography			
Doing things with my hands			
Physical Education			
Learning about other people			

Table 1

Although I was aware of learners' preferences, this questionnaire helped me to get a more detailed picture of their likes and dislikes (chart 1). All children appointed the activities associated with physical education as their favourite which confirmed my expectations and made necessary the design of as many teaching activities catering for kinaesthetic learners as possible. Since the least appealing activity was writing the challenge when designing the course was how to 'disguise' writing tasks as more attractive activities catering simultaneously for the linguistic and some of the other intelligences (table 3).

After the analysis of the children's preferences a course was devised, based on "The Jungle Book", providing a variety of activities addressing learners' multiple intelligences.

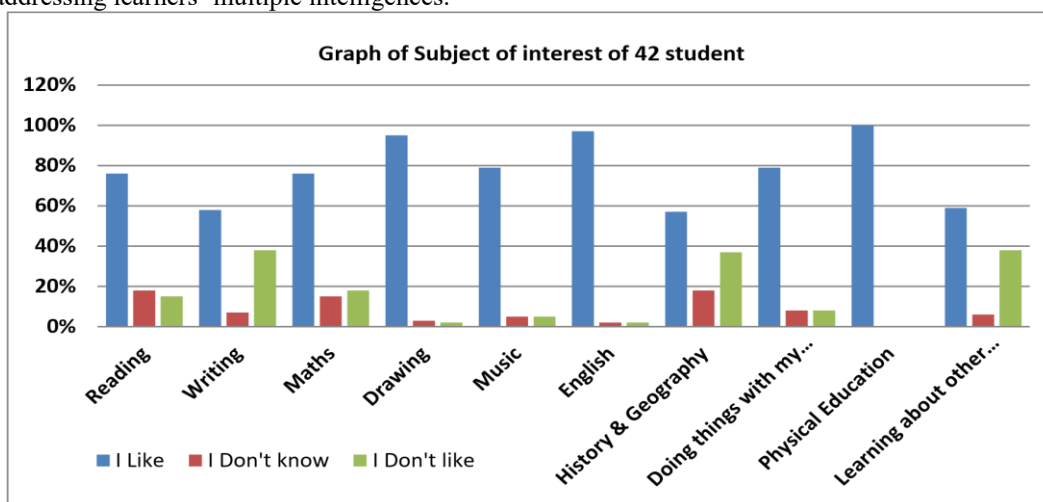


Chart 1

By the end of the course pupils will have:

- Talked about food, presents, birthday parties, nature;
- Used "There is / are", "Have / haven't got", "I can see; hear; smell; feel...";
- Asked for permission "Can I give it too?";
- commented on suggestions "This is / isn't a very good idea";
- made difference between nouns, verbs and adjectives;
- used opposite adjectives: good / bad, happy / sad, empty / full, hungry / full;
- read sentences from the story;
- recognized familiar words in unfamiliar texts;
- rearranged mixed letters in familiar words;
- rearranged mixed words in familiar sentences;
- Acted out conversations and situated them in corresponding places.

Others:

Pupils will have developed their:

- eye-hand co-ordination;
- singing skills;
- drawing skills;
- co-operation with mates

Description: Time: 7 weeks, 28 lessons

Step 1 (1 lesson)

The teacher tells the story of Mowgli: Main character of the jungle Book using toys, lots of gestures, mimes and animal sounds (translation may also help at certain points. Some of the pupils are familiar with the story, though). The teacher reinforces the learners' previous knowledge of vocabulary connected with animals and food. The pupils get the feel for the story and a general picture of what it is about. Then she teaches the names of the characters in the story: Mowgli, Tiger, Black Panther, fox, cubs, Bear, Python, Honey bees, Bison, Man, Woman and a child.

Step 2 (5 lessons)

The pupils are given papers with texts from the story. They underline the words they can recognize. Variations of this activity is repeated throughout the course: the pupils colour the familiar words with their favourite colours; or they associate the familiar words with the corresponding animal and colour them in the appropriate colour; or they colour the words they find easy orange and the ones they find difficult blue. At the end of the course the pupils colour the familiar words according to the following scheme: nouns – red; verbs – blue; adjectives – yellow.

Step 3

The whole story about Mowgli is divided into parts:

1. Mowgli meets Black Panther and understand about his life.
2. Mowgli meets Bear and tell them about his life. They discuss about Home.
3. Bear starts for Fox's place but gets hungry and eats the Honey from the hive on the way.
4. Bear meets fox and they prepare food for Mowgli.
5. Mowgli feels happy.
6. Mowgli receives his Friends.

Step 4 (6 lessons)

The teacher tells the first part of the story again, this time using flashcards with what the characters say. Helped by the teacher, the pupils read the sentences on the flashcards. They practise the dialogue chorally, then sing it as a chant and finally act it in pairs. This procedure is followed when introducing the other parts of the story (see step 3).

Step 5 (6 lessons)

The pupils practise reading by playing a board game in groups of 3-4. They throw a dice and move a counter along the track. When they step on a picture, they have to name it. When they step on a sentence, they have to read it. If they cannot do that, they are helped by their partners but they miss a turn. When the pupils finish the game, they write the words or sentences they stepped on. This activity with different contents is repeated throughout the course for practicing the latest part of the story.

Step 6 (5 lessons)

To practise the pupils' spelling the teacher provides them with activities in which they have to rearrange mixed letters and form familiar words or rearrange mixed words and form familiar sentences. In other activities the pupils have to decipher coded words and messages using a code given by the teacher. At a later stage they themselves cipher sentences from the story and their friends have to guess them.

To reinforce the familiar vocabulary the class, divided in 2 teams, play the game 'noughts and crosses'. The numbers of letters in the words are given together with their first and last letters. When a team guess the word and spell it correctly, they put their sign (a nought or cross) in the corresponding square (Since the pupils got over-excited during this game, they played it at the end of the lessons).

Step 7 (2 lessons)

Maps of the woods where the animals live are distributed among the pupils who have to find each animal's house (this map is taken from the original book containing 'The Houses of different animals'). When the pupils find all the houses, they colour them. They may colour the rest of the map as well. Then they write (the less advanced learners copy them from the board) different sentences from the story on different pieces of paper and put them on those places on the map where the corresponding conversations take place. More and more sentences are given until the pupils construct the complete dialogues and situate them in their appropriate places.

Step 8 (2 lessons)

The pupils make figures of the animals from the story using plasticine. They decorate the maps with different natural materials. This decoration is preceded by a discussion of what you can see in a wood; what you can smell, hear, feel. Some new useful vocabulary is presented.

Step 9 (1 lesson)

Using their plasticine figures as toy animals and the map as woods, the pupils act out the dialogues from the story. Most of them have learned the dialogues by heart so far. Those who have not find support reading the sentences they have written on the pieces of paper.

Below is a table of the teaching activities used throughout the course and the intelligences they cater for.

Activity	Intelligences addressed
Scan the text and find(colour) familiar words	Linguistic
Read the dialogue and sing it as a chant	linguistic, musical
Classify the words/sentences in 2 groups: Easy / Difficult	linguistic, intrapersonal
Play a board game and read sentences / pronounce words	linguistic, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal
Decipher / cipher coded messages	logical, linguistic
Noughts and crosses	linguistic, logical, spatial
Find and colour each animal's house on the map	spatial, linguistic
Write sentences and situate them on the map	linguistic, spatial
Decorate the maps	natural, bodily-kinaesthetic, linguistic
Make plasticine figures	bodily-kinaesthetic
Act out the dialogues	linguistic, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal

Table 3

Notes

Throughout the course the pupils were asked to consider what words or sentences they find easy and what – difficult; what activities they find entertaining; boring; easy or difficult. They were not made to take part in activities they felt anxious about. However, when they saw that the others were having a good time and were advancing, they joined in. All the pupils were thrilled when the maps were presented to them. They enjoyed colouring and decorating the maps and making animals of plasticine. The pupils particularly liked the board games. In fact, one of the classes wanted to play each lesson, which, of course, was impossible.

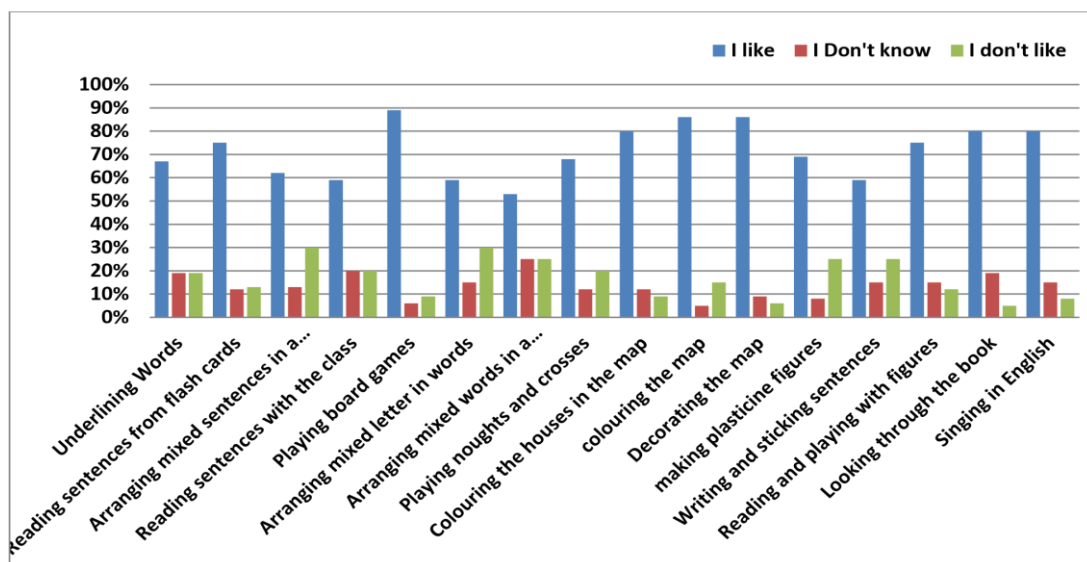
Although some of the pupils had already heard the story, all of them enjoyed listening to it in English and prompting the teacher what to say. They were fascinated by the book, wanted to hold it, turn its pages, and look at the illustrations. They felt extremely proud that they were able to recognize words and even read some sentences in a real English book. They were reading them at home, looking for mother tongue equivalents of the sentences they had already learned, and comparing the illustrations. I found this interest of theirs, together with the language they acquired, extremely stimulating and rewarding.

At the end of the first term the children were asked to fill in another questionnaire about the course activities they liked most (table 2).

Activities	I Like	I Don't know	I Don't Like
Underlining words			
Reading sentences from flashcards			
Arranging mixed sentences in a dialogue			
Reading sentences aloud with the class			
Playing board games			
Arranging mixed letters in words			
Arranging mixed words in sentences			
Playing noughts and crosses			
Colouring the houses in the map			
Colouring the map			
Decorating the map			
Making plasticine figures			
Writing and sticking sentences			
Reading and playing with figures			
Looking through the book			
Singing in English			

Table 2

Their preferences are shown in chart 2. As a whole, more than 50 % of the students enjoyed all the activities, with the board games and colouring and decorating the map their most favourite and arranging mixed words and letters and writing sentences on the maps their least favourite. Yet, the percentage of the pupils who did not like the writing activities from the course is lower than that of the pupils who stated they disliked writing in the first questionnaire, which proved my efforts worthwhile.



After course completion Graph chart 2

It was interesting to see whether the application of MI theory resulted in better language performance. Therefore, after the summer holiday the children were tested in: reading aloud sentences from the story; arranging mixed sentences in dialogues; finishing incomplete sentences; arranging mixed words in sentences and mixed letters in words; matching words to corresponding pictures. The results of their tests were compared to the results of the tests of a control group. The control group consisted of 22 children at the same age from the same school. They had the same number of lessons during the past two years and used the same course book. There was no special course for them, the teacher simply did more exercises on the language from the course book. Their test consisted of the same tasks with different vocabulary. The results of the tests are shown in chart 3. The children from the project group were definitely better at reading aloud. The results of the other tasks are not so categorical. Still, they show that the children who participated in the project were slightly better at the test as a whole. Was their performance more successful because of the MI-informed activities I used? There is not enough evidence to draw a definite conclusion but a further research into this field could be considered.

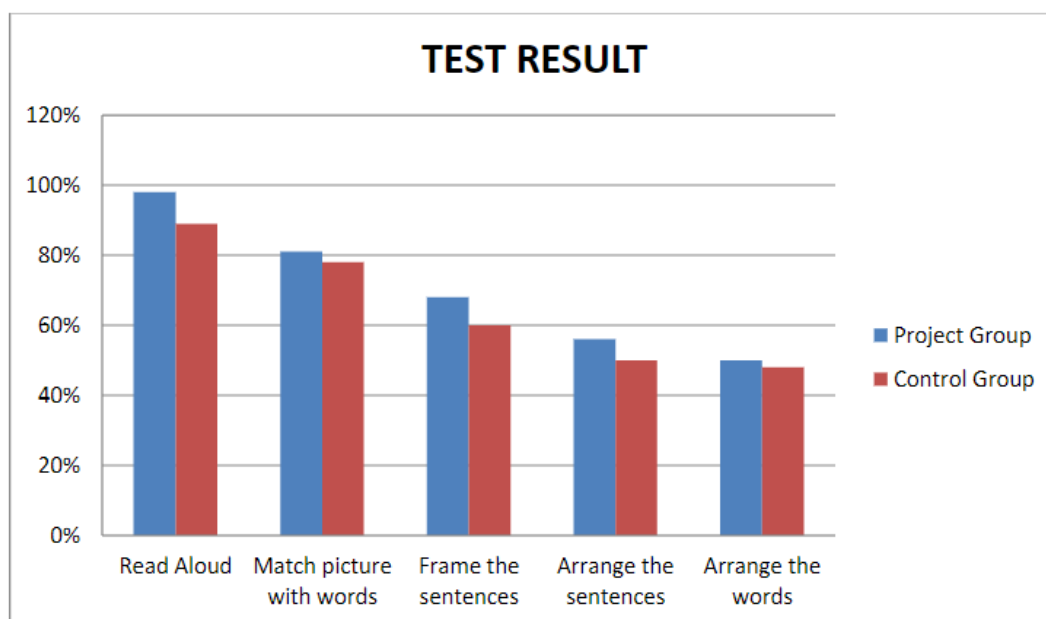


Chart 3

The Correlation between the enhancement of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency:
 As the acceptance of the definition of learner’s autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” provided by Holec in his report entitled “Autonomy of Foreign Language Learning” first published by the Council of Europe in 1979. According to this view, language learning should have an instrumental purpose and that language learning program should be capable of meeting the specific communicative needs of an individual learner. Since, 1990s, learner autonomy has been known as ‘independent learning’ and ‘critical thinking’, and now it seems to be a matter of learners doing things not necessarily on their own but for themselves. Access to the centre of Language Teaching theory and practice can be only based on an indispensable understanding of the essential relationship between the development of learner autonomy and the growth of target language proficiency.

Learner autonomy is said to be the product of an interactive process in which the teacher gradually promotes his or her learners' autonomy by gradually addressing them to more control of their learning. As a result of this, autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are considered the two sides of the same coin. According to Gardner language learning is a complex interaction of a number of a number of intelligences, and his theory offers cognitive explanation for the differences in adult second language communicative competence, which the traditional views of intelligence do not. Howard Gardner initially formulated a list of seven intelligences. The first two have been typically valued in schools; the next three are usually associated with the arts; and the final two are what Howard Gardner called 'personal intelligences'

Linguistic intelligence involves sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals. This intelligence includes the ability to effectively use language to express oneself rhetorically or poetically; and language as a means to remember information. Writers, poets, lawyers and speakers are among those that Howard Gardner sees as having high linguistic intelligence. We consider this intelligence one of the most important in adult second language acquisition because you can't learn a second language if you don't use it.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I would like to say that the implementation of MI theory in English classes might seem a little complicated. Nevertheless, I think it is worth a try. The positive feedback we will get from our students will make for it.

Finally, innovations in technology, especially those that conceptualize language assessment as an extension of gaming formats and practices, still need considerable research and development efforts in order to bring them to fruition with young language learners. However, I conclude strong note of optimism: Innovations with the most adaptable human minds – especially young children- as the target of new assessments of language stand to make the most gains if they are not only appealing but also relevant for scholastic and personal lives of young learners of English everywhere.

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