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MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY IN GENERAL ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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Abstract:

This article deals with the application of Multiple Intelligences Theory (MI theory) in teaching General English to the learners. A General English Classroom at the tertiary level consists of learners from different disciplines, such as Science, Arts, Commerce, Visual Communication etc. In order to reach learners from different subjects, and give them a holistic growth, MI theory would be of great help to them to understand themselves and use their potentials in multiple ways. Multiple Intelligences theory was propounded by Howard Gardner in 1983, where he says each individual has at least seven to nine intelligences, and each one is intelligent in complex ways. This study attempts to say how the application of MI theory in a General English Classroom can make difference in learners' life.

Keywords: Multiple Intelligences Theory, Language teaching, language learning, Effective Communication, holistic growth.

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Introduction:

Multiple Intelligences Theory is being used in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT)across the world. Many schools around the world welcome MI theory as it caters to the needs of the learners. In the United States of America, MI theory is applied in the elementary level and an intermediate level. Parents, teachers, students, and others who are part of that particular society welcome this theory as it provides a holistic growth for the students. There is seven to nine intelligence propounded by Howard Gardner (1983), the proponent of MI theory. The intelligences are: Linguistic Intelligence (Word Smart), Logical-Mathematical Intelligence (Number Smart), Musical Intelligence (Music Smart), Spatial Intelligence (Picture Smart), Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence (Body Smart), Interpersonal Intelligence (People Smart), Intrapersonal Intelligence (Self Smart), and Naturalist Intelligence (Nature Smart). Together with this intelligence, there is Existential and Pedagogical Intelligence, which are added to the list of intelligence by Gardner.

There are many misunderstandings spread about MI theory by many people around the world. Most of the people have wrongly understood that MI theory is a method to use in an educational atmosphere and to incorporate into the system in order to get an immediate result. MI theory is not a fixed method for the learners to learn the language, rather, it caters to the needs of the learners and helps them learn language holistically. MI theory is not a learning style because it cannot be fit into any learning styles. Learning styles fix a person but MI theory tells us that each person can learn a language in seven to eight different ways.

Role of a Teacher: English language Teaching has many approaches and methods to teach language to learners. Most of the methods are developed during the last two centuries. MI theory is also one of the approaches in the development of language teaching. The most important part of language teaching is the role of teachers than all the methods and approaches. It is the teacher, who makes learners learn the language. For example in the Grammar Translation Method, the role of the teacher is like a manager in the classroom. The teacher dominates and controls the students fully. Whereas communicative theories and MI theory bring learner-centeredness teaching in the classroom and the teacher becomes a facilitator or a moderator in classrooms.

Ahmed (2012) firmly states in his article that the role of the teacher is considered important in imparting language to the students. The role of the teacher is reflected important because not all learners are equal in abilities and capacities to be dealt with in a uniform manner. Learners come from a different background with different abilities and different capacities. A uniform method may not confirm a justice to the learners in the teaching of a language. Therefore, the teacher has a very pivotal role and responsibility in training the learners according to the needs that arise at that particular point of learning. Needs differ from each other and it depends on learners' strength, capacity, the methodology of teaching, classroom atmosphere, etc. Thus, Ahmed (2012) in his article writes that language teacher must be

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aware that students have different strengths, learning styles, potentials and therefore through MI theory one can teach the students effectively.

Teachers' role in creating an atmosphere which will indeed make students involve fully is highly appreciable. Ng (2010) states the role of the teacher in the classroom. He says that a teacher is the director of the lessons that are to be dealt with in the classroom. The teacher has to determine the participation of the learner in the given opportunity in the classroom. This will surely shape the behavior of the students in the classrooms. As a result, a teacher can create a symmetrical social relationship with his/her students within the classroom that results in full involvement and active participation.
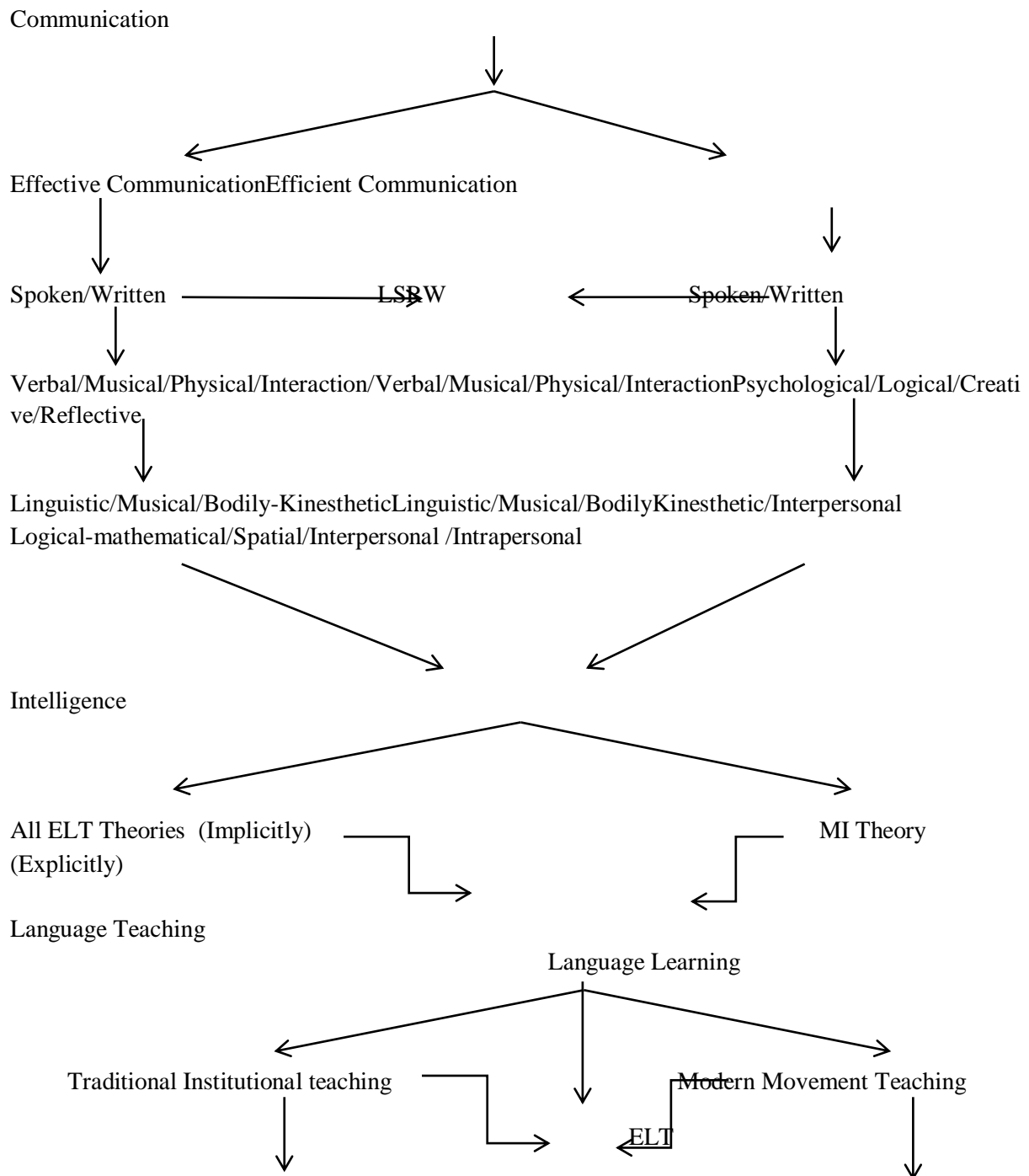
Ng (2010)also says that there are at least three types of teacher-interaction strategies such as Teacher-fronted Strategy, where teachers use a controlled and structured manner to interact with the learners. The second is a Facilitator- oriented Strategy. Here the teacher facilitates the interaction in the classroom which includes personalizing topic, use of referential questions, reformulation, elaboration, comment, content-focused feedback etc., in the interaction process. The third is Learner-oriented Strategy, where the teacher completely washes off his/her hands and let the learners approach among themselves. Out of all these three, Facilitator-oriented strategy is recommended and it enables both teachers and learners to collectively work for the goal and strike up a balance between instruction and content resulting in motivation and participation says Ng.
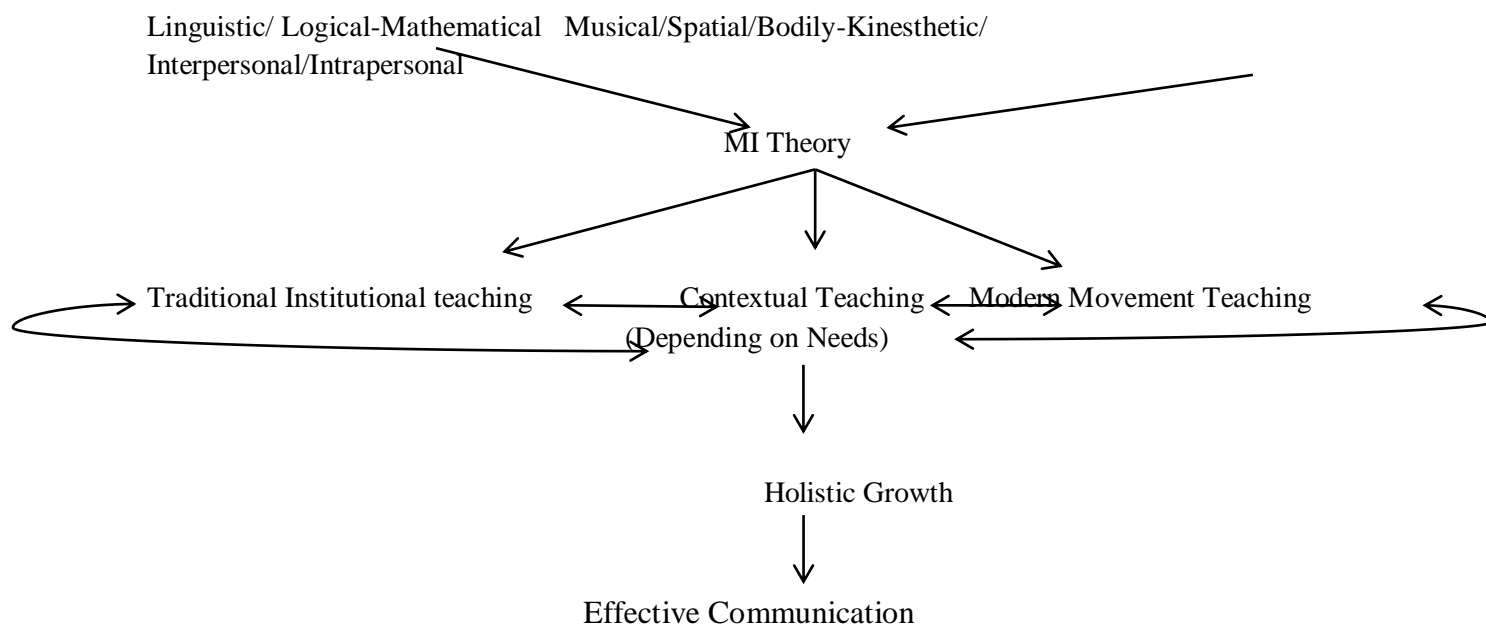
The role of the teacher should lead a learner to autonomous learning however, it does not mean that the teacher should leave the learner as he or she wants. It means that the teacher should take control of the learner and guide him or her to learn language naturally. Benson (2001) states that the role of the teacher in autonomous learning includes facilitation and coordination and that a teacher is expected to be a helper, knower and resource, and a counselor.

Effective Communication: Communication can be divided into two parts. The first could be called efficient communication where a student speaks the language fluently and communicates it well. On the other side, effective communication makes a student to speak a language well but with a holistic growth. That is, speaking a language effectively means, using a language creatively, psychologically, logically, musically, interactively, reflectively, with the right aptitude and correct usage benefiting the society culturally, ethically and academically and must be able to solve problems that he or she faces either individually or

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socially. Therefore, in order to achieve success in learning and obtain a holistic growth, MI theory may be of a help to the learners. A mind map is given in order to get a clear picture of communication.

Figure1

Communication

Effective CommunicationEfficient Communication

Spoken/Written ——————— LSRW ←——— Spoken/Written

Verbal/Musical/Physical/Interaction/Verbal/Musical/Physical/InteractionPsychological/Logical/Creative/Reflective

Linguistic/Musical/Bodily-KinestheticLinguistic/Musical/BodilyKinesthetic/Interpersonal Logical-mathematical/Spatial/Interpersonal /Intrapersonal

Intelligence

All ELT Theories (Implicitly) (Explicitly)   MI Theory

Language Teaching

Language Learning

Traditional Institutional teaching   Modern Movement Teaching

ELT

Linguistic/ Logical-Mathematical   Musical/Spatial/Bodily-Kinesthetic/
Interpersonal/Intrapersonal

MI Theory

Traditional Institutional teaching   ←   Contextual Teaching   ←   Modern Movement Teaching
(Depending on Needs)

Holistic Growth

Effective Communication

Communication is essential in day-to-day lives for all of us. The educational system emphasizes on fluent reading and speaking, clear and critical thinking and accurate listening. The expression of ideas is considered very important in the art of communication. A person must be able to express his or her thoughts and ideas accurately without any biased ideas or incoherent ideas in his/her communication.

Here the researcher has divided communication into two. The first one is Effective communication and the second one is Efficient communication. Efficient communication is nothing but to communicate efficiently, that is, fluently without any interruptions. Effective communication is a little bit advanced when compared to efficient communication. Effective communication is needed for an individual to deal with any kind of problem in society. That is, it is a communication that gives importance to ideas, thoughts, critical thinking, accuracy, coherent and cohesive presentation, reflective, analytical and holistic in its approach. Therefore, it is advanced when compared to efficient communication.

Efficient communication and effective communication need all the four skills of the language- that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Both give importance to spoken and written form of communication. However, there are some differences between these two types of communication.

Goldenberg (2008) says that effective second language instruction is a combination of two factors. The first one is that explicit teaching that helps the learners to efficiently learn features of the second language such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and rules of social usages. The second one is to give ample opportunity to use the second

language in meaningful and motivating situations. He says that a balance between these two factors will give learners to communicate well.

When we take efficient communication, that is, communicating fluently without any errors, language learning is limited. That is, efficient communication makes the learners speak fluently and express fluently in writing also. Nevertheless, the question is how far the learners acquire logical reasoning, creativity, reflective speaking and solve most of the problems in personal and social life.

Efficient communication may have the following intelligence apparently. They are linguistic intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, and interpersonal intelligence. However, all these intelligence work implicitly and not explicitly. The learners may be unaware of their dormant and dominant intelligence, and may not be able to know how far they can use them. Hence, sometimes, communication may not be able to reach and meet all the situations they deal with.

Effective communication, on the other hand, needs logical, creative, reflective and problem-solving abilities. This may be possible if learners are trained through MI theory. Intelligence like logical-mathematical, spatial, intrapersonal together with other three such as linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic and music intelligence are needed for effective communication. Learners must be taught about the intelligence and make them know about their intelligence in which they are high. Later they must be explicitly be taught using MI theory. This will enhance their skills and make them communicate naturally and face all kinds of situations.

Having known about all the intelligence and that all intelligence is much needed to communicate a language well, we must understand what language learning and language teaching are all about. All ELT theories implicitly deal with intelligence but MI theory explicitly deals with all the intelligence. Therefore, for a language teaching and language learning both MI theory as well as a combination of all ELT theories are needed.

Language Learning: Language Teaching and Language Learning: Language teaching and language learning can take place in two ways. That is, language teaching can be done in a traditional way as well as in modern movement way. According to the traditional way, teaching is done through chalk and talk method, and the teacher dominates the class and also uses the entire hour only in giving lectures. The learners are trained in linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence. Much importance is given to memory tasks and imitative tasks. Students repeat what is already said through lectures. There may not be any place for creativity or any extra tasks out of the box.

Modern movement teaching means, learner-centered teaching. The learners are treated well based on their needs and intelligence, and also made to study the language by themselves where the teacher becomes a facilitator or a moderator. The learners are given freedom to

choose their own materials and learn to the maximum. Lots of activity are involved in this type of teaching, and there is no stipulated framework for the class. This type of teaching meets other intelligence, such as musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Both the methods of teaching are in the ELT programme and the theories have clearly explained it. The difference in MI theory is that it purely deals with all the intelligence whereas traditional teaching deals with two bits of intelligence, such as linguistic and logical-mathematical. Movement teaching deals with intelligence, such as musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence.

MI theory brings out contextual teaching also. That is, teaching is done according to the needs of the learners. ELT theories, such as CLT, CLL, Suggestopedia, TPR also deal with learners' needs but the difference in MI theory is that it makes the learners know about their intelligence and capacities, and then tap the unused intelligence, and make them understand that they are capable of all the intelligence and that they can use all intelligence and become equally intelligent. Therefore, a combination of all the three kinds of teaching such as traditional, modern movement and MI theory discussed above will give the essence of MI theory. When teaching is made according to the combination of all the three kinds of teachings, learners get a holistic growth and communicate language effectively.

Therefore, teaching learners using the application of MI theory will help them develop effective communication. The methodology is considered the key to any language learning than designs says Nobuyoshi (1993). MI theory gives much importance to methodology than designs. There is also no single method to teach language through MI theory. Teaching methodology according to the needs of the learners will help them learn better. Scholars have written articles on the importance of methodology and have stressed peer learning and peer feedback which most of the ELT theories welcome.

Assinder (1991) conducted a peer-teaching, peer-learning model in the language class, where the materials are gathered and prepared by the students themselves, and then they teach each other. The role of the teacher here is to be a resource for language queries, a spot checker, a sounding board for ideas and opinions and interpretations of political scenarios. This made the students to get involved in the class activities and it was fully student-centered learning. As an observation to this application of this model, Assinder says that it has increased the motivation of the students, increased participation, and increased communication, in-depth understanding, responsibility for their own learning and communication to the course, increased confidence and respect for each other, increased number of skills, strategies and also accuracy. He gives six factors that he believed to be the key importance in the success of this practical experiment. The factors are as follows: subject matter, task, learner-centeredness, group work, (error correction, feedback, and counseling), presentations and peer teaching.

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Richards (2001) states that the Multiple Intelligences theory is a learner-based philosophy developed by Howard Gardner. It states that every human being is intelligent and everyone has at least seven to eight intelligence. MI theory is not a learning style but the application of this theory in language learning gives a holistic growth to the learners. They grow beyond language learning and become productive persons in society.

This theory rejects the traditional methods of language teaching and also goes beyond traditional books, pens, etc. Here the individuals are considered important and they are free to be intelligent in their own way without any force or domination. It rejects the widely accepted view of intelligence as 'g' factor, which is unique and one that is used to deal with cognitive complexities. Gardner points out a contrasting view that there is a cluster of mental abilities that are separate but equal to solve cognitive complexities.

Richard (2001) points out the fact that there is no syllabus so far framed regarding MI theory. However, there are a few basic attempts. MI theory does not suggest any prescribed texts or syllabus. The syllabus can be drawn according to the needs of the learners. The essential element is that learners learn in multiple ways without fixing any particular style. Many scholars apply MI theory in classrooms and have reached success. Christison (1999) says that the role of the teachers is not only to develop the second language but also to give holistic growth to the students. It should give a general growth and make students an all-rounder personality. The teacher has the freedom to design the classroom activities provided it should meet the needs of the learners and tap all the unused intelligence.

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