

IMPLEMENTING THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE FOR TEACHING/IMPROVING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Ankana Ghosh Dastidar,
Ria Roy Choudhury
Assistant Professors, English
University of Engineering and Management, Kolkata

Abstract:

Modern day education should not only encompass the advancements in science and technology but should also aim for an increasing sense of humanity by means of empathizing with our students and other fellow humans. This calls for a change or modification of approach towards teaching. According to Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, each human being is capable of seven different ways of information processing. This paper aims at emphasizing upon the various means by which teachers can cater towards the improvement of English Speaking skills among the Engineering Students, by making use of several techniques of Multiple Intelligence. The paper would go on to explore naturalist, bodily kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal and musical methods to teach Spoken English to Engineering Students.

Keywords: English Speaking skills, Engineering Students, Gardner's Theory, Multiple Intelligences.

Introduction:

In the modern world, the idea of education has changed to a great extent and with it has changed the teacher-student relationship. It is no longer the time when the student's role within the class is that of a silent listener and an obedient note taker of all that a teacher speaks. With the advancement of technology, the world is now on our finger tips; hence it is a challenge for the teachers to deliver knowledge to the students: knowledge that is both educative and interesting at the same time. Hence the equation of teaching and learning has also changed. Now the teacher's concern is not only engaging a class but to aim for effective teaching with concrete learning outcomes. In this context the theories of learning provide certain ideas as to how learning occurs and most importantly it states the teacher's role in the learning process. The cognitive theory of learning suggests that learning is an active, constructive and purposeful process which is majorly dependent on the cognitive faculties of an individual. To achieve the best of the learning outcome a teacher requires the understanding of the cognitive development of individuals to foster to the intellectual skills among the learners.

In this paper the domain under discussion is Language Learning. According to the American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, Noam Chomsky, the rudimentary form of language is stored in human brain. Language is a competency that is unique for man. We perceive language as the ability to comprehend and speak ideas. Chomsky emphatically argues that the mind possesses a distinguishable factor that could be termed as 'the language factor and it has well defined structure and system'. This paper aims to put forward the Theory of Multiple

Intelligence and how it can be utilised in teaching/improving English speaking skills among engineering students.

Howard Gardener first introduced his theory of Multiple Intelligence in the year 1983 in his famous book *Frames of Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Previous to this, human intelligence was limited to only mathematical and linguistic abilities that any human being can possess. But contrary to his Gardener introduced a group of seven intelligences which encompassed a wide diversity of ways in which people acquire and apply knowledge. Considering Human Intelligence as “the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting” (Gardner & Hatch, 1989), the theory of multiple intelligence talks about seven different types of intelligence that humans can have namely,

- Logical or Mathematical Intelligence which is the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively and think logically.
- Linguistic Intelligence is the ability to use language skilfully to express oneself rhetorically or poetically.
- Spatial Intelligence is the ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems.
- Musical Intelligence is the ability to read, understand, and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms.
- Bodily or Kinaesthetic Intelligence is the ability to use one’s mind to control one’s bodily movements.
- Interpersonal Intelligence is the ability to apprehend the feelings and intentions of others.
- Intrapersonal Intelligence is the ability to understand one's own feelings and motivations.
- Naturalist Intelligence is the ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals and other objects in nature.
- Existential Intelligence talks about the sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence.

Multiple Intelligence and classroom teaching :

Howard Gardener’s theory of Multiple Intelligence has been used in language learning classes since its introduction. Moreover in recent times the theory has been widely accepted as a successful way of teaching. The reason behind it is that it considers more than one way of approaching the cognitive power of the students and helps them acquire language skills. The traditional method of language learning (translation, reading and writing practice) was more rigorous, time consuming and many a times had adverse psychological effects on the learners. On the contrary, the concept of MI allows instructors to be aware of the cognitive needs of the students and helps them customise their teaching to cater to the students’ needs. Suitable curriculum design, lesson plans, instruction materials and assessment and evaluation methods can be decided using the concepts of MI. This, when regularly and successfully

implemented in the classroom, leads to the development of those dominant intelligences among the students and individual uniqueness of the students is highlighted. Students become aware of their learning pattern and can independently construct concepts, hence experiencing a variety of learning experiences. The teacher in such a class where MI is successfully implemented becomes a facilitator whose main role is the use various stimulations from time to time to stimulate the dominant intelligences among the students. This leads to the 4C approach of MI namely,

- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- Courage to experiment
- Considerate

Language Learning is a natural characteristic feature in any human being. A child acquires the mother tongue without any difficulty within the first few years of his/her life, without any formal training of the complex rules of syntax of the language. Hence Chomsky says that the basics of language learning are stored within the brain of an individual which makes it involuntary for a child to acquire the basic language skills i.e., speaking and comprehension during the initial growing age.

Language learning in Engineering colleges:

In India, engineering has been one of the first career choices of the majority of the students and their parents. With the establishment of more and more private engineering colleges, even those students get the easy opportunity to opt for engineering who could not achieve good ranks in state or all India Joint Entrance Examinations. One of their major lacunas becomes communicating in English. The challenge that any private Engineering college faces is to get such students placed into different companies. In order to make these students job-ready, teachers plan various soft skills and per-placement training classes. But it should not be forgotten that time is also a constraint. Four years seem to pass too fast; hence it is suitable that the preparation of such students should start from the second year onwards.

Based on their English speaking skills the students in any regular class (of an Engineering college) can be divided into three categories. The first, being the students who can write and speak English to the extent that they can survive in the competitive world. The second group should consist of students who can manage to construct grammatically correct English sentences in writing but cannot speak English. The third category of students is such that they can neither write nor speak English. For the Second and Third category of students, it has been noticed that these students have had their education mostly in vernacular medium schools, or from schools where though English is the medium of instruction, very little or no exposure to the language is given.

In some states in India the education system is such that there is no English in their curriculum. This is an alarming situation as the student products of such Educational system have to compete in the regular world where English is a common language of communication. Moreover these students are expected to do well in their respective fields. But due to the lacuna in language these students face a lot of difficulties in their future. They are looked down upon by their peers at various engineering colleges. They lose confidence and suffer from inferiority complex. In spite of doing good in the aptitude round, they stand no chance during the communication round in placement interviews conducted by Multinational companies. Hence they are left jobless.

Application of Multiple Intelligence in teaching English Speaking Skills:

In the very beginning, a piloting test is to be conducted in the class to find out the type of learners the students are. In this case we conduct the standard classroom tool of Learning Style Inventory (ILS). The idea of ILS is specifically designed in the form of a questionnaire to help the respondents to understand what particular learning style they have. The answers of the respondents give an idea of their learning styles. In this case the instructors will also have an opinion about the type of learners the test takers are.

The students will be divided into groups based on their learning styles and their dominant intelligence. Each target group should not exceed beyond 35-40 students. The role of the teacher is to plan the class in such a way that various stimulations relating to dominant intelligence can be frequently applied during the lesson. This will help the students to participate in the class activities as they can put into use their dominant intelligence and their favourable learning style. For example students who have kinesthetic intelligence as dominant intelligence can be shown videos after watching which they can perform role playing activities. This will also cater to the visual learners and auditory learners. Again, students who are musically intelligent are expected to be auditory learners, hence various audios can be played in the class. They can be asked to write down the lyrics of any English song being played. Later the meanings can be discussed. Nature intelligent people can be asked to prepare and explain the food chain of the animal/plant kingdom. Students who are logically or mathematically intelligent can be asked to explain a certain mathematical theorem or the life history or research work of some famous mathematician. Students with Interpersonal Intelligence can be engaged into situational role plays or dialogue writing. Again students who have Intra personal intelligence can be asked to do a SWOT analysis and present it in front of the class. Each of the aforementioned activities will lead to the improvement of speaking skills in the students.

If successfully conducted, the students will be benefitted; they will be more confident to face the challenges in the career front. The colleges can use MI to help the weaker students to catch up with their peers. Companies will get better quality of potential employees, and our education system will produce engineers who are both talented and presentable. In short, through research with people who had been brain damaged, Gardener came to the conclusion that just because someone isn't able to perform one task (as a sign of being 'smart'), that didn't exclude them from still performing other tasks, or making their way in the world. And, even if we all have all types of intelligence, some of us seem to excel in one area over another. Probably in the future we will have such educational systems where classrooms will have teachers and students both having similar dominant intelligence. This will undoubtedly lead to a better teaching-learning process, but will require intense planning and structure before being executed.

Conclusion and Further Study :

For further study and for wider application of the proposed method, two structured survey can be conducted differently among the students and the teachers: one before the application of MI and one after. This will clearly show the level of improvement that has occurred in reality. With positive results, this idea can be proposed for different levels of students for different study areas. This is already being used in teaching students with special needs and has relevance in the field of Adult Literacy programmes.

If applied from a very young age, learners will surely be benefited and the education system will pave toward a learner friendly system.

The Brain and its working has a lot of importance in language learning, hence more detailed research can be conducted as to how each intelligence can be connected with the brain and its activities and how the way the brain's functioning can be correlated and used to develop language learning among students.

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