A Study of the Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Multiple Intelligences and their Performance on Writing

By:

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Dedications

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the existence of any possible relationship between MI scores of Iranian English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners and their writing performance. Thirty three female subjects who were matched for the study through the Michigan Test, as a pretest at Ghotb Ravandi Educational Center (Elmi Karbordi branch), participated in this study. The instrument used was the Multiple Intelligence Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS) a commercially designed instrument which was designed by Shearer in 1996. Also, the participants' average scores on two writings were used as an index of writing products. The correlational analysis of the results indicated that a statistically significant relationship exists between participants' MI and their performance on writings. Furthermore, the results of regression analysis show that among all eight intelligences, linguistic intelligence is the best predictor of writing performance. So, the findings suggest English teachers to consider the role of MI in classes and modify class activities to help students improve learning.

Key words: Multiple Intelligence Theory (MIT), writing, Multiple Intelligence Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS), linguistic intelligence and English as Foreign Language (EFL)

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List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

IQ: Intelligence Quotient

MI: Multiple Intelligences

MIT: Multiple Intelligences Theory

MIDAS: Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales

MTELP: Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

BLS: Brief Learning Summary

Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the problem and highlight the grounds for launching the current project. Henceforth, it begins with a general overview of background to Multiple Intelligences and writing skill. Statement of the problem, Significance of the study, Research assumptions, Research questions, Research hypotheses, Limitations of the study, and Definition of key terms are the other issues which comprise this chapter.

1.1. General Overview

Since the introduction of multiple intelligences theory (MIT) in Gardner's book entitled *Frames of mind* (1983), interest has been growing internationally in examining the role and assessment of multiple intelligences (MI) with regard to learning, achievement, and knowledge acquisition. Based on the evidence gained from research in biology, genetics, and psychology, Gardner (1983) suggests the existence of eight relatively autonomous, but interdependent, intelligences rather than just a single construct of intelligence. He redefines the concept of intelligence as "the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community" (Gardner 1993, p.15).

Gardner proposes that there is both biological and cultural basis for the multiple intelligences. One of the most important aspects of the theory of multiple intelligences is the emphasis that it places on the cultural context in which the intelligence operates (Smith, 2001). Since some cultures may focus on some types of intelligence, the others may put emphasis on other types of intelligence.

In Gardner's point of view (1983), intelligence is a combination of different abilities; he divides human intelligence into linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic intelligences and recently he adds Existential intelligence (Gardner, 1999). Gardner (1993) believes that it is important to consider each individual as "collection of aptitudes" (p.27) rather than being identified by a single IQ measures.

Emotional Intelligence is a part of Gardner's (1993) interpersonal intelligence. Goleman in 1995 has suggested that emotional intelligence (EQ) is an intelligence by its own right (Brown, 2007). He explains that emotional mind is pretty quicker than rational mind, without the hesitation of thinking what to do. Therefore, he added emotional intelligence and also placed it at the highest level of Gardener's eight multiple intelligences. Bates (2008), was inspired by Goleman's idea of Emotional Intelligence and argued that we can teach Emotional Intelligence using the power of the story.

Intelligences interact in complex ways. None of these intelligences is superior to the others and each individual has his/her own strengths and weaknesses. Gardner asserts that these intelligences rarely operate independently and they complement each other to solve a problem and develop while an individual develops language skill (Brualdi, 1996).

Gardner also claims that the list of intelligences may expand and include more intelligences. Also some intelligences may be rejected (according to the 8 criteria that Gardner (1983) mentions) because they do not meet these criteria any more (Smith, 2001). Armstrong (2002) suggests a list of proposed intelligences which includes spirituality, moral sensibility, sexuality, intuition, creativity, olfactory perception etc; however, these intelligences must meet Gardner's eight criteria to be accepted as different types of intelligence.

Howard Gardner's theory of MI has rapidly been incorporated into school curriculums since its emergence in 1983, in educational systems across the United States and other countries (Christine, 2003). Many teachers accept the MI theory and are attempting to teach students in the manner that will enhance their dominant intelligence(s).

A lot of writing in the area of second language learning and teaching focuses on individual differences of learners, and the need to develop more student-centered learning programs (Smith 2001, p.48). This emphasis is repeated by learning-style researchers, who have made a significant contribution to language teaching by increasing our awareness of the need to take individual learner variations into consideration and to diversify classroom activities in order to reach a wider variety of learners.

According to Fahim and Nejad Ansari (2006), to understand how different intelligences can help second language learning, we must understand that not all learners possess information linguistically. Most of those who teach writing are not aware that students do not necessarily write to learn and take notes to learn the subject matter. "Some may learn in other ways and then write to record." (p. 57).

Language learning activities may be more successful when they encourage the use of several intelligences, because of the various strengths that students have in different intelligences, allowing different opportunities to understand new materials or concepts (Smith, 2001). So the idea of incorporating alternative teaching methods into a course curriculum is a key point in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner (1983) encourages the use of alternative teaching strategies that are student-centered rather than teacher-centered.

According to Gardner, assessment of an individual's intelligence determines the student's learning style and allows educators to make a new instruction to fit each individual (Dobbs, 2002). Christine (2003) mentions that, in the MI classroom, learner is the most important focus of the educational system. The same

researcher also mentions that if we recognize multiple intelligences, we can give the students opportunity to demonstrate what they have understood.

According to McClaskey (1995), it is possible to teach intelligences. He claims that one way to teach intelligence is to offer students opportunities to understand their own learning process. The researcher tried to teach intelligence by devoting a lot of time "to help individual students recognize their own habits and styles and improve them" (p. 57). He believes that "students' strengths can be used to develop other intelligences in which they may show less promise."(p. 58)

Syllabus designers offer using MI theory as a paradigm for modifying foreign language learning activities to engage all the intelligences in each individual during classroom instruction (Price, 2001).

Dobbs (2002) asserts that when children have an opportunity to learn through their strengths, they may become more successful in learning all subjects including the "basic skills". And one of these basic language skills is writing.

Based on Furneaux (1999), writing is essentially a social act; "you usually write to communicate with an audience, which has expectations about the text type (or genre) you produce" (p. 56). According to Farhadi et al. (2004), writing can be considered as a kind of skill by which learners try to communicate their thoughts and ideas, especially through free writing. Harklau (2002) declares that "writing should play a more prominent role in classroom-based studies of second language acquisition" (p. 329). He also argues that not only students should learn to write but also they should write to learn. According to his idea, nowadays, "reading and writing pass from being the object of instruction to a medium of instruction" (p. 336).

Farhadi et al. (2004) state that writing at higher levels requires using words to convey the intended meaning in the boundary of the subject matter by accurate and syntactically acceptable sentences. They also believe that the ideal type of

writing is free writing according to which learners can communicate and organize their ideas; it is also the most face-valid type of writing tests (Farhadi et al., 2004). Leki (cited in Harklau 2002) proposes that it is vitally important to understand second language writing development in its own right and to consider all the traits that affect writing and empower it.

Teachers need to have enough knowledge about aspects of writing, especially those involving mental and cognitive processes. One of the domains of recognizing these processes is studying the relationship between multiple intelligences and the writing skill. Based on this proposition, in this study, decision was made to investigate the relationship between learners' level of multiple intelligences and their writing skill. From among various multidimensional theories of intelligence, the theory of multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner (1983) has been one of the most influential ones and could be utilized to investigate whether learners' individual differences in terms of intelligence are related to their differential writing performance or not.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

For many years, the teaching of writing was largely ignored; "it was the Cinderella skill, forever tested but seldom taught" (Furneaux 1999, p. 56). Even in Entrance Exam of University (Kunkur), this skill does not have any place for reflecting candidates' writing ability, and it is less common than other skills to be measured. However, writing is one of the productive skills alongside with speaking, it is among the important skills and there are a lot of cognitive and mental factors that affect writing ability.

One may claim that individual differences might have effective roles in learning and determining learners' abilities. Since multiple intelligence tests provide research with facts, which are important in determining individual differences, the suspicion arouse about the relationship between writing ability and multiple intelligences as one of the factors of individual differences. Noticing the relevance of the theoretical foundations for multiple intelligences and learning, the decision

was made to investigate the relationship between writing skill and multiple intelligences test in practice.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Up to now, almost no study has set to explore the relationship between learners' multiple intelligences and their performance on writing, using MIDAS profile. The major concern of this study is to determine the degree of correlation between individuals' level of multiple intelligences and her performance on writing. Writing and speaking are considered as productive skills; however, learners might be more creative in writing than in speaking, since in speaking the focus is on meaning and interlocutors try to understand each other, but in writing the focus is on both meaning and form at the same time and even meanings are affected by form (Furneaux, 1999).

This study aims to investigate the nature of different intelligences in relation to the writing skill in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The results of this study can also highlight the necessity of taking individual differences into consideration in language assessment and how it may lead to variation in learners' writing performance. If it turns out that the multiple intelligences have any positive relationship with students' writing ability, there is a new trend in language teaching, especially teaching writing, to improve students' writing skill through taking individual differences into account. This study might increase interest and develop applications of multiple intelligences in EFL writing courses with a goal toward a self-directing, autonomous learner.

1.4. Research Assumptions

Regarding what was mentioned above; it is assumed that individual differences occupy an important position in any debate relating to teaching and learning. Accordingly, teachers are to be well informed of the fact that in every classroom there are students who are different from each other in many different ways (Gardner, 1983). Each student comes from a different social, economic, and

family background; each one has different areas of interest, different ways of expressing themselves, different strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers are to be aware of the fact that students have their own individual intelligence profiles. Multiple intelligences seem to have a lot in common with learners' language skills; one of these skills is writing ability. Although it has been assumed that each intelligence exists independently and can be measured (Gardner, 1983), some of the intelligences may have stronger relationship with learners' writing skills than the others. The researcher accordingly aimed at discovering the relationship, if any, between learners' multiple intelligences and writing ability.

1.5. Research Questions
This study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between EFL learners' writing performance and their performance on multiple intelligences scores?

2. If so, do all intelligences show equal relationship with L2 learners' writing ability?

1.6. Research Hypotheses
In order to answer the research questions in a systematic manner, two null hypotheses were made to be tested out. They are as follows:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between EFL learners' writing performance and their multiple intelligences.

Ho2: None of the intelligences has significant relationship with writing ability.

1.7. Definition of Key Terms

Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT): Gardner's psychological and educational theory regarding the existence of several distinct forms of intelligence possessed by each individual. He divides human intelligence into linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner, 1983).

MIDAS profile: Indicates areas of skill, knowledge and preferred learning style as reported by the individual or parents. These scores represent the approximate level of development in each area at the present time. This scale is based on the theory of multiple intelligences as described by Howard Gardner (Shearer, 1996).

1.8. Limitations and Delimitation of the Study

No experiment is without its limitations. The researcher is well aware that including even one more rater would increase the reliability and would result in more dependable results, yet this is one of the limitations of the present study. In addition, the sample size of this study was a group of 33 female students that may be considered as a small sample.

1.9. Chapter Organizations

Chapter One presents the introduction, the statement of the problem, significance of the study, the related research questions, research hypotheses, research assumptions and organization of the study. Chapter Two deals with the review of literature and research related to different views on intelligence, the basics of MI and its impacts on education, curriculum and achievement and its relationship with learning abilities, the nature of MIDAS Questionnaire, writing and its related literature. Chapter Three deals with the methodology and procedures undertaken for data collection and analyses. Chapter Four elaborates on the analyses of the collected data and discusses the results. Finally, Chapter Five offers a summary of the study along with conclusions, implications for language pedagogy, and suggestions for further research.