Effective Utilization of Interpersonal Intelligence in Language Teaching – Based on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences

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Problems in Procuring Proficiency

All practicing teachers of English will agree to the fact that the average Indian students lack confidence to speak in English effortlessly. Notwithstanding India's close acquaintance with the English language for several centuries now, it is still a distant dream for most of the rural and some of the urban Indians to speak fluently in English. Thus this is a major problem that should be addressed as quickly as possible. The classes have long been highly 'teacher-oriented', in the sense that the learners did not get much opportunity to use the language inside the classroom to check their proficiency.

This paper argues that the practicing teachers should identify the means to provide these opportunities to the students. This should be done with a view to making them confident speakers of English, thereby enabling them move faster on the roads to higher education and gain an upward social and professional mobility.

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Nevertheless, based on the premises that have hitherto been laid by the language experts, we can argue that the hiccup in speaking fluently in English is mainly because we never conceive anything in that language before we speak it. In other words, we do not think in English before and/or while we speak in that language and this hampers our ease in communication, in terms of putting our content in the appropriate form. It is high time that the Indian teachers of English find a convenient way out to help our students to get rid of the fear to communicate in English and become confident communicators ever. Towards this aim, this paper tends to propose the theory of Multiple Intelligences as an ideal tool to suit the methodologies used to fulfill the communicative needs of an average Indian learner of English.

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

According to Howard Gardner (1983), the proponent of the theory of Multiple Intelligences, an intelligence is "the ability to solve a problem or create a product that is valued in a culture" (p. 13). Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, which is built upon the rationale of the communicative approaches, has a lot of implications to language teaching.

In his opinion, learners vary in intelligence across a combination of seven or eight different areas and he suggests ways in which the theory may be applied to promoting broader educational goals. One such important application of this theory is to assist in understanding teaching and learning processes.

The theory of multiple intelligences recommends that teachers should structure their presentation of material in a variety of ways so as to help students achieve understanding and initiate learning. This theory, when used in the language classroom, can enhance the learners' ability to learn how to listen, read, write and speak English - in short, to communicate effectively in English.

This paper concentrates on making effective use of one of the intelligences and its potential to be employed as a methodology based on this theory. This paper also tries to establish that through the vehicle of the theory of multiple intelligences, the teachers can adopt a variety of ways to teach the complex language skills of English to the Indian learners.

Gardner's List of Intelligences

The intelligences proposed by Gardner are:

1. **Verbal -Linguistic Intelligence** – it is the ability to understand the phonology, syntax and semantic of a language and to use it to convince others of a course of action, to communicate knowledge through the language and to reflect upon the language itself. Examples include the storyteller, orator, poet, editor, and novelist.

2. **Logical – Mathematical Intelligence** – it is the ability to explore patterns and relationships between things. It is the understanding and use of logical structures including patterns and relationships, and statements and propositions, through experimentation, quantification, conceptualization, and classification. Examples include the scientist, mathematician, logician, computer programmer and statistician.

3. **Bodily- Kinesthetic Intelligence** - it is the ability to control and use the bodily parts to communicate something and to handle objects skillfully. Examples of those proficient in this intelligence include the actor, mime, craftsperson, athlete, dancer, and sculptor.

4. **Musical Intelligence** – it is the sensitivity to music. It is also the ability to understand and express components of music, including melodic and rhythmic patterns, through figural or intuitive means or through formal analytic means. Examples include the composer, pianist, percussionist, music critic and singer.

5. **Visual – Spatial Intelligence** – it is the ability to perceive the visual world accurately, to perform transformations and modifications upon one's initial perceptions, and to be able to re-create aspects of one's visual experience. Examples include the architect, mapmaker, surveyor, inventor, and graphic artist.

6. **Interpersonal Intelligence** - it is the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals with respect to moods, temperaments, motivations, intentions and to use this information in practical ways, such as to influence, persuade, manipulate, mediate, organize or counsel people toward some purpose. Examples include the union organizer, teacher, therapist, administrator and political leader.

7. **Intrapersonal Intelligence** – it is the ability to access one's own emotional life through awareness of inner moods, intentions, motivations, potentials, temperaments and desires, and the capacity to symbolize these inner experiences, and to apply these understandings to help one live one's life. Examples include the psychotherapist, entrepreneur, creative artist and sage.

8. **Naturalist Intelligence** – it is the capacity to recognize and classify the numerous species of flora and fauna in one's environment, as well as natural phenomena such as mountains and clouds. It is also the ability to interact subtly with living creatures or with the ecosystems. Examples include the zoologist, biologist, veterinarian, forest ranger, and hunter.

For purposes of better understanding of term "intelligence", 'intelligence' can be translated as "an ability to respond to certain modes of teaching and learning a second language, to sensitize oneself to the objectives of learning a second language and to get these modes

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internalized in one's system and make them habitual to generate independent thinking in the second language."

This paper proposes through relevant examples, the transfer of a lot of control from the teacher to the learners, thereby making them more independent and autonomous. The paper also underscores that this can be achieved purely by giving the learners ample chances to participate in the language activities inside the classroom, with the help of their own classmates, who have a pronounced element of successful socialization, the interpersonal intelligence. This participation of theirs, in turn, is reflected upon their improved communication outside the classroom too.

Interpersonal Intelligence – the Key to Effective Communication

Of all the intelligences mentioned above, this paper considers the Interpersonal intelligence as a crucial criterion that decides the effectiveness of the communication process and so poses to be a very important component that has to be honed in the language learners. The rationale for this choice is that it is this intelligence that gets any individual into the circle of socialization, through verbal and non-verbal means. As such, interpersonal communication, which is "the process of creating social relationships between two people by acting in concert with one another" (Fisher & Adams, 1994), largely depends upon language to accomplish this purpose. It is also believed that the interpersonal intelligence that is present in an individual facilitates the person to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people. Hence, on these sound premises, this paper argues that an effective utilization of this interpersonal intelligence is helpful in asserting an effective communication between and among people, both inside and outside the classroom.

To authenticate this stance, one can resort to Chomsky, in whose opinion any individual may adapt to a present social context and may use the language in the manner appropriate to that context. This means that a truly competent communicator is aware of and in fact highly conscious of the rules of the language in use within any given context; and he or she will try to use the language in the manner that is considered to be appropriate to that context. For instance, these competent communicators know the difference between the ways they have to speak to their superiors and to their subordinates. Accordingly, they decide their linguistic behaviour, conforming to the common social demands or practices. Here comes their interpersonal intelligence, which helps them to be very social and thereby educates them of the nuances of making a successful communication.

Thus, those people with a more prominent interpersonal intelligence are very social in that they try to be more apposite to the context and also facilitate others to be same. This paper suggests that a group of learners who possess this interpersonal intelligence can be utilized to make the rest of the class to be more active and participatory. To meet this end, the

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'interpersonals' or learners with strong interpersonal intelligence have to be indentified in the first place.

Identifying the Interpersonals

Learners with strong interpersonal intelligence can be easily identified in a classroom. They possess a set of characteristics that clearly distinguishes them from others. As mentioned earlier, these people are more social and assertive. They are praised otherwise as the 'live wires' that can trigger a current wherever it passes. They are adept in 'reading' the behaviours of others. Proven to be excellent leaders, they enjoy themselves being part of a group. They demonstrate their capacity as good organizers and they help their peers and work cooperatively with others.

Those who have a dominant interpersonal intelligence use both verbal (e.g. speaking) and non-verbal (e.g. eye contact, body language, etc.) to open any communication with others. The most commendable element of their behaviour is the way they manifest their extraordinary ability to relate to and understand others. So, these people try to see things from other people's point of view in order to understand how they think and feel. With all these traits as their forte, these extroverts can be easily identified by their inclination to work with others.

Interpersonal Intelligence in the Language Classroom

It is certainly the duty of the teacher to find out the different intelligences present in the students, as recommended by the theory of Multiple Intelligences. An assessment of the different intelligences present among the students can be done with the help of one or all of the Multiple Intelligences inventories provided by Christison (1996) McKenzie (1999) and Lin (2000). The Researcher of this paper has made use of a consolidated list of all these inventories, simplifying the language to ensure the learners' understanding of the idea put forth by each statement and to authenticate their appropriate response.

Once their responses are collected, they have to be categorized under different intelligences. Those learners with high scores in Interpersonal intelligence can be separated and the rest of the class can be grouped as the teacher decides. The most important component of this grouping is that the teacher should ensure that there is an equal distribution of these 'Interpersonals' in all these groups, that is to say, assuming that the entire class is divided into groups of five, each group should have at least one learner who has a strong interpersonal intelligence. After having grouped them, the teacher can administer language activities that involve the leading participation of the 'interpersonals'.

The idea behind the choice of these activities is that, with a leading performer in each group, the other members of the group feel confident themselves, taking the cue from their leader. In addition, these 'interpersonals'- with their typical ability to listening to others, using

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empathy, understanding others' moods and feelings, counseling, co-operating with their teammates, building trust and establishing positive relations with others – do definitely modify the performance of the other members of their group. The other members are inspired and in fact get motivated to come out with 'the' best performance of theirs too.

Activities for Active Communication

Almost any language learning activity can be converted or modified to suit the purposes of making all the learners participate in unison. With a little more inclination and extra effort, the language teacher can easily make the entire class 'active' participants of any interpersonal communication. Some of these activities that this paper projects as more successful are given below. The important point to be borne in mind while contemplating these activities is that, be it a pair activity or group activity, there must be at least one learner, in the pair or group, who is found to have a strong interpersonal intelligence. These 'leaders' will maneuver and steer through the entire activity.

1. **Role-Play**

   Any conventional role-play activity can be used with a few modifications. Instead of making an individual play a role, the class can be split into groups of four or five and can be asked to play an interview. The communication will be interpersonal in that, it can be

   - A popular actor or a cricket player being interviewed by a reporter or the same celebrity having a press meet (Pair activity - one to one/ Group activity - one to many).
     Here the learner with a strong interpersonal intelligence will be the one (the celebrity) who faces the audience's (his teammates as reporters) queries with confidence. Either way, the rest of the group will be compelled to participate and thus makes use of the language.

   - A conversation between the trainer and the trainees about their experience or opinion regarding the training (Again as a Pair or Group activity)

2. **Picture Stories**

   This is also one of the common language activities, where the groups are given different sets of pictures, based on which each group has to bring out a logically convincing story. Here too, the leader will contribute only in so far as the rest of the group will have to do much of the task.

3. **What am I to do?**

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This activity is very interesting in that it is more like a self-reading for every participant. After dividing the class into groups of four or five, every member of the group is asked to reveal to the rest of the group, a list of things that they want to get or achieve in their life, but are not able to get or achieve. They should also list their plans to achieve them. This activity needs a 'starter' to open the session frankly with his/her limitations, which will slowly heave in the other members to participate. This activity, in fact, instigates the rest of the class to participate, at least with a view to being applauded for being honest about their abilities and disabilities.

4. Let Me Speak Please

This is also a modified activity, where the class is divided into groups whose 'leaders' will be given a title to speak or write about. The moment the leader starts speaking or writing, every other member in the group should take turns in posing questions that will distract his/her concentration or attention and prevent him/her from completing the task. As time limit will be given, even the slow performers have to and will be made to pick up momentum. This activity is frivolous, but at the same time it compels the participation of all the members of a group, even without their being aware of it.

5. Drama

Another conventional activity where the class is divided into groups of not more than ten each and will be given a title or topic based on which they have to construct and enact a short play. This activity also demands the involvement of all the members. The 'interpersonals' get ample chances here to prompt the others to action by being more pronounced and prominent as well.

6. Tell Me What is Wrong

The groups are asked to discuss among themselves and construct five or six logically incorrect but grammatically correct sentences (e.g. 'I had dinner yesterday morning with a tiger on the rooftop of my house'). Once the activity is over, each group should come forward to present the set of statements that they have constructed, which will be countered, commented and corrected by other groups. Though in this activity, their concentration is on the logical errors of the statements, the learners also learn the grammatical accuracy of the same, incidentally. In that regard, this activity summons individual as well as pair and group work, which is again a prerequisite of communication skills.

It Works

The above are only a few activities that involve the participation of the interpersonal in stimulating the language class to action. As a matter of fact, this kind of approach backed by the theory of multiple intelligences encourages not only the teachers to consider the intellectual ability of the learners in a broader perspective but also the slow learners to partake in the activities and establish their very existence, before making others listen to them. Numerous teachers and academicians have applied these aspects of theory of multiple intelligences in their classrooms and schools and have experienced positive returns.

By offering to practice the strengths of the 'interpersonals', the teacher not only stimulates their improvement but also makes them happy, because everyone receives the sense of satisfaction in being an active participant of the activities. This in turn motivates even the so-called slow learners to take the same lines and to exercise their otherwise hidden talents, by participating in the activities. Thus, their confidence level is also raised. In other words, the teacher only lifts their self-esteem and confidence by making them realize that they can perform well too. Though an indirect way of increasing their response to the learning experience, this helps them to overcome their weaknesses and also to develop their strengths. And ultimately, that is the purpose of language teaching too.

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