



**Multiple Intelligences in Locally-published ELT Textbooks in Iran by 1. Mahdi Nasiri
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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the extent to which English textbooks which are locally designed for primary education in Iranian state schools reflect Multiple Intelligences. Based on the framework of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, a multiple intelligence checklist was developed to examine each textbook in relation to different intelligences as reflected through different activities and tasks. It has been found that the intelligence profile of English textbooks is predominantly logical-mathematical and visual/spatial. Musical and Verbal/Linguistic intelligence are identified as the least intelligence type, and no example of Natural, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence was found. However, any fair percentage of distribution for the remaining intelligence types was recorded.

Key Terms: Multiple Intelligence, Iranian Textbooks, Checklist

Introduction



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Multiple Intelligence Theory (MI) was developed in 1983 by Howard Gardner. Initially, Gardner proposed seven basic intelligences, which included verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, musical, logical/mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily/kinesthetic, to which later naturalist intelligence and spiritual/existential intelligences were added. In highlighting the underlying concept of MI theory, Gardner stated that ‘human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talents or mental skills, which we call ‘intelligences’, and he added that ‘individuals possess each of these skills to some extent; individuals differ in the degree of skill and in the nature of their combination’ (1993). Gardner highlighted that we all possess eight different intelligences, each of which can be developed to a high degree of performance given the right learning contexts.

Armstrong (1994) described several features of intelligences. First, he argued that each individual possesses capacities in all intelligences and that most individuals appear to possess some highly developed intelligences as well as some weak ones. Next, he stated that given appropriate instruction, most individuals have the capacity to develop each of the intelligences to an adequate level of competency. He also noted that intelligences usually work together interacting with each other. He illustrated this in relation to the process of making a cake, which needs linguistic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences.

Theoretical Background and Review of Literature

Multiple Intelligences in the ELT Curriculum

Since its proposal in 1983 by Gardner, the theory of MI has had a significant impact not only on the design of the foreign language curriculum but also on the design of textbook materials. In some EFL contexts, similar to Iran, like Turkey, the integration of the theory of MI into the curriculum of the English Language Teaching (ELT) at primary and secondary level education is quite a recent phenomenon. In 2005, in Turkey the ELT curriculum was revised to incorporate new methodological trends in ELT, and some current views were reflected in the formulation of objectives and the content of the curriculum. After this curriculum renewal process, the Turkish Ministry of National Education



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(MNE) updated English language textbooks to integrate MI into the teaching materials (MEB, 2006). The same types of measures in line with revising the pre-university textbooks in terms of incorporation of MI theory were taken. The outcome of this change, which will be comparatively studied in this study, proved very successful.

This study aims to investigate how locally-published textbooks in Iranian high school education reflect MI. An investigation into the textbooks is essential because textbooks are the most essential resources used by the teachers in language classrooms, and as such textbooks play an intermediary role in conveying curriculum objectives to students through the help of the teachers. In addition, since students have varied intelligences, it is crucial that textbooks are designed to address as many of the intelligences as possible in order to cater for the needs of the students. One of the incentives for carrying out this study is that most shortcomings attributed to English textbooks of Iran, to the best knowledge of the researcher, are rooted in lack of attention for incorporation of MI in these textbooks. Hence, scrutinizing Iranian high school textbooks was the main purpose of this study.

Method

Developing a MI Checklist

In the present study, a multiple intelligences (MI) checklist, based on the framework of the theory of MI (Gardner, 1983, 1993, 2000) was designed comprising definition of the nine intelligences and a matrix of activities for each of the intelligences. For example, a definition of the logical-mathematical intelligence involved one's ability to use numbers effectively, to think in logical patterns, and to engage in higher order thinking. A matrix of activities for logical-mathematical intelligence included students organizing information systematically, using numbers, shapes and patterns; moving from concrete to abstract easily; enjoying puzzles, and having an ability to explore patterns and relationships.

Analyzing ELT Textbooks



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Using the MI checklist, three English textbooks, currently used in high schools in grades 1-3 and the textbook of pre-university were carefully examined in relation to different intelligences, as reflected through the activities and the tasks in order to find out the extent to which each textbook caters for different intelligences. Using the MI checklist developed, each textbook was analyzed in terms of its coverage of different intelligences. In categorizing an activity to an appropriate intelligence, the first step was to decide which intelligence a particular task or activity predominantly catered for. For example, the activity “Do the actions” is clearly intended to cater for bodily/kinesthetic intelligence. Therefore, it was categorized into a single type of intelligence. However, a somewhat different procedure was adopted in categorizing activities that were designed to cater for more than one intelligence type, as illustrated below:

An activity such as “Work in pairs, Prepare *“The Iranian Revolution poster”*” was categorized as catering for both interpersonal and visual/spatial intelligences because the first part of the activity explicitly stated that it was intended for pair work and the second part addressed spatial intelligence of learners. The following is another activity that was categorized into more than one intelligence type: “Think of a device for blind people to solve one of their problems. Imagine that you are at an exhibition and you are presenting your device to someone. Talk about your device”. This activity was categorized into two categories: intrapersonal and verbal/linguistic intelligences.

Procedure

The process of identifying intelligences in each textbook was carried out independently by two raters: the author of this study, who is a PhD student of TEFL, as well as another PhD student who is an IELTS examiner too. Both raters agreed on 97% of the categories. Differences in the remaining 3% of the categories were resolved through discussion. The results of the analysis reveal the intelligence profiles of individual textbooks. The following table illustrates various activities addressing different intelligences from the textbooks.



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Intelligence Type	Sample Activities
Verbal/Linguistic	Say what you have got in your suitcase. Say the clothes in your suitcase. Find in the words in the speech bubbles. Write an e-mail.
Visual/special	Trace the lines. Connect the dots from 50 to 90; then color it. Color the Iranian flag. Prepare a poster to design animal rights.
Musical	Listen and sing the song. Listen to the chants.
Bodily/kinesthetic	Do the actions.
Intrapersonal	Write about your life five years ago.
Logical/mathematical	Read the body parts and categorize them. Do the puzzle.
Naturalist	Listen to the sounds of the nature. What is the weather like?
Interpersonal	Manage your group and make a poster.

Table 1. Sample activities addressing different intelligences

Findings

Table 2 displays the distribution of intelligences in 4 ELT textbooks currently used in Iranian high schools.



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Textbooks	Intelligence								Type	
	Percentage	Verbal/ Linguistic s	Visual / Spatia l	Logical/ Mathematic al	Bodily/ Kinestheti c	Musica l	Inter persona l	Intra personal		Natur al
1st grade		18	27	54	-	18	-	-	-	117
		15.3 %	23 %	46 %	0 %	15.3 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	100 %
2nd grade		14	21	42	-	14	-	-	-	91
		15.3 %	23 %	46 %	0 %	15.3 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	100 %
3rd grade		12	18	36	-	12	-	-	-	78
		15.3 %	23 %	46 %	0 %	15.3 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	100 %

Table 2. The distribution of intelligences in Iranian 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade textbooks

As can be seen in the above table, the same ratio of intelligences are used for three grades of 1,2, and 3. Therefore, analyzing the table for one of the will be applied for the two others. Accordingly, we take 1st grade English textbook into consideration. The first grade English textbook caters predominantly for Logical/ Mathematical intelligence; between 46 % of the activities catering for logical/mathematical learners. The next most frequently addressed intelligence type is visual/spatial intelligence; 23 % of the activities addressing this intelligence. The next intelligences are verbal/linguistic and musical; each having 15 % of the activities specifying for them. Close analysis of the table suggests that Bodily/ Kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and natural intelligences have no room in the activities of Iranian high school textbooks.

To put it in a broader sense, I as a teacher of ministry of education, too, firmly believe that the teaching methodology dominant on Iranian context is Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Therefore, the related classroom activities will be in the form of drills. This connotes the existence of a great deal of logical/mathematical intelligences in Iranian textbooks. On the other hand, since we have no space for



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communicating in this teaching methodology, the expectation of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences looks irrational. The analysis of the above table lends credit to what I quoted about the current dominant teaching methodology and its relationship with multiple intelligences.

A couple of years ago, Iranian officials changed the overall content of 4th grade high school namely preuniversity book, which was similar to the other three high school books in terms of addressing multiple intelligences. The following table illustrates the corporation of intelligence usage in preuniversity textbook.

Textbooks	Verbal/ Linguistic s	Visual / Spatial	Logical/ Mathematic al	Bodily/ Kinestheti c	Musica l	Inter persona l	Intra personal	Natur al	Total %
Pre university	18 27 %	18 27 %	18 27 %	- 0 %	- 0 %	6 9 %	- 0 %	6 9 %	66 100 %

Table 2. The distribution of intelligences in Iranian preuniversity textbooks

According to table 3, the change on this book has improved the incorporation of multiple intelligences in it. This can be due to the fact that the revisers of the book very definitely influenced by the necessities of the time, communicative competence. In view of that, we can see the traces of interpersonal and natural intelligences therein. Yet, this change is not enough as musical/intrapersonal bodily/ kinesthetic intelligences are overlooked even in newest versions of Iranian ELT textbooks. Hence, lack of multiple intelligences in an equally distributed manner in Iranian textbooks can be counted as one of the reasons of inefficiency in Iranian learners' communicative performance.



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Conclusion

This study has examined four English textbooks in relation to different intelligences, as reflected through the different activities and tasks in order to find out the extent to which locally-produced EFL textbooks cater for different intelligence types. The results of the analysis revealed the intelligence profiles of individual textbooks. It has been found that the intelligence profile of English textbooks is predominantly logical-mathematical and visual/spatial. Musical and Verbal/Linguistic intelligence are identified as the least intelligence type, and no example of Natural, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence was found. However, any fair percentage of distribution for the remaining intelligence types was recorded.

Further studies

Further studies can be conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively to see the exact impact of multiple intelligence on learners' performance.

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