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THE EFFECT OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION ACCURACY AT INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the effect of Multiple Intelligences Theory on Iranian EFL learners. The participants of the study were selected based on their results in an OPT exam. This study tried to determine the extent to which multiple intelligences theory affects the pronunciation ability of Intermediate learners. To answer this question, 40 intermediate learners of Kish Institute of Science and Technology in Rasht whose score fell between 1SD below and above the mean were randomly assigned to two groups of control and experimental. At the beginning of the study Mackenzie's MI inventory (1999) was run in order to determine learners' intelligence type, then a pre-test was run and the results of the groups were compared. The results did not show any specific difference between the groups. The experimental group received treatment by implementing Multiple Intelligences theory for teaching pronunciation. The control group received placebo which means no treatment has been done and learners received a normal routine of the semester as they always did. At the end of the study a pronunciation post-test was run and the result of the independent sample t-test showed a significant difference between the control and experimental group. The findings of the study indicated that implementing Multiple Intelligences theory can be an effective way to improve pronunciation of EFL learners.

Keywords: Multiple Intelligences, Pronunciation Accuracy, Intermediate Level, OPT

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation instruction is a prominent factor in foreign language teaching. Since sounds play an important role in communication, foreign language teachers must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. It is evident that communication is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer. This means that one must comprehend what he/she hears in the target language and must produce the sounds of the language he/she is trying to learn accurately. Unless he has sufficient knowledge of the sound patterns of the target language, he can neither encode a message to anybody nor decode the message sent by another person by learning the sounds of the target language within his mother tongue. Therefore, pronunciation instruction is of great importance for successful oral communication to take place since it is an important ingredient of the communicative competence (Hismanoglu, 2006).

According to Fraser (2000), ESL/EFL teachers need to be provided with courses and materials to help them improve their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation.

The theory of Multiple Intelligence was proposed by Howard Gardner in 1980's. This theory has important implications for teaching in general and for language learning in particular (Armstrong, 2007; Azar, 2006; Buchen, 2006; Campbell and Dickinson, 2004; Christian, 2004; Fogarty and Stoehr, 2007; Tracy and Richery, 2007; Viens and Kallenback, 2004; Barrington, 2004; Chan, 2006; Christion and Kennedy, 2004; Hall, 2004). Gardner (1999) defines intelligence as the ability to process information that is activated in a cultural contest for problem solving or creating products which are worthy in a culture. Gardner (1999) introduces 8 distinct intelligences which include verbal linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic and existential (Armstrong, 2000; Ormrod, 2006; Peariso, 2008). Still in development is a ninth intelligence, the existential intelligence. Gardner hopes to officially add it as an intelligence after more data has been collected and analyzed (Gardner, 2009). After the introduction of MI theory, changes have been made in

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curriculum and teaching methodology of schools. Many government and private institutions based their curriculum on MI theory after the publication of Frames of Mind by Gardner in 1983.Recently MI theory has been considered in language teaching. Language teacher started to relate MI model with learning styles and to consider the benefits of using MI theory to enhance learner's abilities individual needs. According to Snider (2001) MI theory-related materials have the strong potential to improve foreign language (FL) instruction because theory engages learner's innate abilities.

By applying MI theory EFL/ESL teachers can address the great diversity in learner, develop learner's intelligences and create an individualized learning environment (Christison, 1996). MI theory can be a new and effective method for presenting different strategies of teaching and can help students achievements ameliorated (Barrington, 2004; Kornhaber *et al.,* 2004; Cohen and Weaver, 2004; Curtin, 2005; Mitchel and Myles, 2006; Oxford *et al.,* 2004; Oxford and Lee, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Pronunciation is an important aspect of language and it needs special attention for both teachers who teach it and learners who try to learn it. It is one of the difficulties that students in the ESL programs and also in their communications in the real world face it; because in all of them the sensation is how to say something in a foreign language. Maybe all of us had experienced that there is nothing worth than attempting to talk to a foreigner and looking to his or her puzzling face across of you that transfers a kind of misunderstanding (Hariri, 2012). According to Hismanoglu (cited in Gilakjani, 2012) Pronunciation instruction is a prominent factor in foreign language teaching. Since sounds play an important role in communication, foreign language teachers must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. It is evident that communication is a mutual relationship between the speaker and the hearer. This means that one must comprehend what he/she hears in the target language and must produce the sounds of the language he/she is trying to learn accurately. Unless he has sufficient knowledge of the sound patterns of the target language, he can neither encode a message to anybody nor decode the message sent by another person by learning the sounds of the target language within his mother tongue. Therefore, pronunciation instruction is of great importance for successful oral communication to take place since it is an important ingredient of the communicative competence. Since Pronunciation is a crucial 'first level hurdle' for learners to master, if their performance cannot be understood, it cannot be rated on any other scale. Therefore, it is a vital component of proficiency in spoken English, yet it does not always receive the attention it deserves in either the teaching or the testing literature or in teacher training. One of the most facilitating theories to be used at this stage is multiple intelligences theory, introduced by Howard Gardner, Professor of Cognition and Education in 1983. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences involves the use of these intelligences in student learning to emphasize their strengths and aid success. It is geared towards the encouragement of students to use their talents and strengths to learn and interact with the content.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher will focus on effect of Multiple Intelligences theory on Iranian EFL pronunciation accuracy. Considering the problem stated and the purpose of the study the following research question could be developed:

Q1. Is there any significant effect of multiple intelligences on Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated:

H0: There is no significant effect of multiple intelligences on Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy at intermediate level.

Literature Review

The idea of teaching pronunciation in the classroom has not always been unanimously agreed upon. However, over the last few years many different studies have shown the importance of including explicit pronunciation lessons in the classroom. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010) make the claim that non-native speakers of English need to acquire a threshold level of pronunciation in order to be

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understood and lessen oral communication problems. Most language specialists agree that explicit pronunciation instruction is vital in language curricula (Wong, 1987; Kenworthy, 1987; Brown, 1990; Celce-Murcia *et al.,* 1996; Fraser, 1999; Jenkins, 2002; Levis, 2005).

Many other studies reveal the lack of patience that native speakers have when encountering non-native speakers with poor pronunciation (Mulac *et al.,* 1974; Kalin and Rayko, 1978; Callan *et al.,* 1983; Munro and Derwing, 1995). These studies bring a fuller understanding to how important it is for the language learner to achieve intelligible pronunciation. The importance of teaching pronunciation to Persian speakers is made even more significant by the fact that, according to Hayati (2010), it is given only some attention in the typical English language class in kindergarten through twelfth grades in Iran. Hosseini (2007) affirms this idea in showing how the emphasis in the public education system is placed on passing written exams rather than on achieving intelligibility in speaking. In light of this, a thorough understanding of the importance of pronunciation is an important key to the Persian learner of English. Vafaei (2013) believes that the EFL teachers or instructors do not pay enough attention to the pronunciation of words by intermediate learners. One reason can be that teachers may not know how to pronounce words correctly. By considering the results of her study, there seems to be a trend in students' progress with respect to English stress that could reflect a general trend in pronunciation development. In another body of research Jahandar *et al.,* (2012), investigated the impact of gender on pronunciation accuracy of advanced Iranian EFL learners and whether male or female learners will outperform in their performance of the pronunciation accuracy of phonological characteristics in their speech production. The results revealed that females outperform male subjects in producing accurate consonants, but not vowels, that it is not significantly noticeable to result in complete superiority of females over male subjects. Gilakjani (2012 a) asserts that all learners can do well in learning the pronunciation of a foreign language if the teacher and learner participate together in the total learning process in a communicative way, With the teacher acting as a 'speech coach', rather than as a mere checker of pronunciation, the feedback given to the student can encourage learners to improve their pronunciation. Gilakjani (2012b) also believes that teaching pronunciation should be a priority because language is primarily a means of communication and this communication should be understood by all. If one doesn't strive for a common pronunciation one runs the risk of not being understood by the target audience. Being able to speak English with proper pronunciation not only makes one's speech intelligible, but also builds up proper rapport with listeners.

Among the studies that explore for the dominance of multiple intelligences, there is a study by Haley (2004). Haley's (2004) research on the ways teachers apply MIT in foreign and second language classrooms showed that students in experimental groups outperformed those in control groups while developing a high degree of satisfaction and positive attitude toward the content. Emig (1997) associates MIT with magic since it is highly advantageous for both students and teachers, because students feel more competent and confident in an MI-based classroom. Similarly, in agreement with Emig (1997) and Haley (2004), Hamurlu (2007) found that MIT-based instruction increased students' achievement in English classes and had positive effect on students' attitudes towards English assessment and evaluation of the instruments designed specifically for intelligence types have also drawn attention. In addition, in a study by Mettetal *et al.,* (1997), they investigated the impact of a MI curriculum in an elementary school. They used observation and survey for data collection. On the basis of their analyses of the data, three themes emerged (a) students, teachers, and parents were very positive about the concept of multiple intelligences; (b) they were positive about school wide implementation, including flow time, activity room, and enrichment clusters; and (c) classroom implementation of MI concepts was uneven across classrooms. The researchers highlighted the importance of MI in changing the attitudes of both teachers and students. Furthermore, to investigate the student's improvement on reading comprehension ability through MI-based project, Gaines and Lehmann (2002) conducted a study and investigated fourth grade students in a major metropolitan city. They also took the socioeconomic status of the students into account. The motive for conducting the research was recognition of the students' deficiency in reading comprehension. The use of MI strategies was found to improve the students' reading comprehension ability and it enhanced their academic performance as well.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants of the Study

The study was conducted with 40 Iranian students who had enrolled in an EFL course in Kish Institute of Science and Technology in Rasht, Iran. The course consisted of 10 sessions, and students received 15 hours of general instruction. In order to make sure of homogeneity, participants were selected out of a pool of 200 based on their result in OPT test, which is a standardized Cambridge exam so there was no need for checking the reliability and validity of the test. Having calculated the mean and the SD, participants with the score of 1 SD above and below the mean (±1SD from the mean) were selected to conduct the study. All participants had already passed 10 courses in the same institute, apart from that, none had any other experience of studying English. After selection of the participants the steps below were taken:

1. 40 students in the same level were selected randomly (randomization)
2. The selected participants were randomly divided in two classes of equal number (random assignment).

As stated previously each class included 20 participants.

Materials

The following instruments were used for the present study:

1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT) which is a standardized Cambridge exam, so reliability of the test is not needed to be tested.

2) A pronunciation test used to determine the ability of the learners in pronunciation. The reliability of the test was estimated 0.69 through Chronbach Alpha coefficient.

Two parallel version of tests were used for pre-test and post-test.

3) Mackenzie's MI inventory (1999). The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated 0.90 through Chronbach Alpha coefficient.

The procedure of the study is described below.

Data Collection Procedure

As the study was conducted throughout a general English course, communicative Language Teaching was used in both classes and all methods, except for pronunciation practice with using MI theory, in experimental and control group were the same. At the beginning of the study both groups were taken a pronunciation pre-test in order compare their pronunciation scores.

The scores were processed through a t-test calculation and the result did not show any significant difference between two groups. In the control group the learners received a normal routine instruction as they always do, whereas in experimental group in each session they were treated with MI based instruction on pronunciation. At the end of the study, as was previously mentioned took 1 month that is 15 hours of input, the students' pronunciation ability was tested again through running a post test (a parallel version of pre-test). The results of posttest were analyzed for further discussion via another independent sample t-test.

RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

As the data gathered from the current study were interval data (scores) and also normally distributed they were analyzed through running an independent sample T-test between the score of experimental and control Group. The results are discussed as follow:

Table 1: The summary of descriptive analysis for the data related to the posttest of the experimental and the control group of the study

	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pronunciation score	Control Group	20	49.2	7.28	1.628
	Experimental Group	20	61.9	10.22	2.286

As table (1) indicates, the mean of the experimental group is significantly higher than that of the control group. Therefore it can be inferred that the treatment was effective for more detailed information the table below is presented.

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Table 2: The summary of t-test between posttest scores of experimental and control group of the study

		Levene's test for equality of Variances				t-test for equality of mean				
		f	sig.	t	df.	sig (2-tailed)	Mean differences	std. error differences	95% confidence interval of the differences	
									Lower	upper
Pronunciation score	Equal variance assumed	5.148	.29	4.525	38	0.000	-12.70	2.806	-18.381	-7.028

According to table (2), the result of t-test (tobs= 4.5, p<.05) yielded significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The obtained t-observed is higher than the critical value of t in the t-student table with the degree of freedom of 38 (df =38) and the level of significance of 0.05 (Sig. = 0.05) for the two tailed (null) hypothesis as to be 2.o1. Such a result (tobs>tcrit) rejects the null hypothesis of the current study. In another words the sig obtained from the study is 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05 so we can make sure that the difference between the groups is significant.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the effect of MI-based instruction on intermediate learners' pronunciation ability. Results revealed that MI-based instruction is effective in enhancing the participants' pronunciation ability. Based on the findings obtained in the study, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the pronunciation ability of the students who have been educated by MI-based instruction learning method and the students who have been educated by the traditional language teaching methods. The students who have been educated by MI-based instruction learning method have become more successful than the students who have been educated by the traditional language teaching methods. This conclusion emphasizes the importance of identifying the intelligence profile of EFL learners and selecting the language materials and the teaching techniques/ methods accordingly.

Pedagogical Implications

Multiple intelligences theory has some very implications for both teachers and students. Teachers may have a preferred teaching style. He may regard this as the best, but he wants to innovate he should various teaching styles. Using various teaching styles and strategies will help meet the needs of the diverse students inside the classroom. These various teaching styles and strategies should suit students' diverse abilities and attitudes. That is what Multiple Intelligences theory does. It provides teachers with interesting styles that can be used with different with different levels.

Curriculum developers bear the greater burden of establishing any desirable and efficient norms and standards of EFL learning in a variety of educational fields. A long-term programming as well as the required budget need to be officially ratified in advance of educating the learners of the community. A great deal of EFL books taught in EFL situations are entirely planned, designed, and published by some well-known publications in the world having specific rationale behind themselves. A closer look at such materials that approach all language skills from a variety of perspectives and angles would make it clear that the term „intelligence" is not an overt point of departure in constructing and sequencing the materials. In order for the theory of MI to be potently implemented, all constituencies in the schools, EFL institutes, and other educational environments should be in pursuit of understanding and embracing this model. In a deeper sense, it means that not only the teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, and EFL practitioners but also students' parents themselves need some basic knowledge of MI theory for the implication to be as illuminating as possible. To share this information with all members of the educational contexts is an essential and critical phase in the process of appreciating multiple intelligences in every learning environment especially in Iranian EFL context. Many EFL teachers are evidently unaware of the benefits of such a contributing asset in the process of teaching. The more crucial consideration for teachers is to make sure that often during educational period; they have opportunities for those learners who are robust in some intelligence other than the linguistic and logical-mathematical to be greatly successful. Such a genuine teaching fashion would be highly rewarding for the students themselves because they will deeply witness and explore a new love of learning in their EFL life span.

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Suggestions for Future Research

At present, the notion of schools devoted to multiple intelligences is still in its infancy, and there are as many plausible recipes as there are educational chefs. I hope that in the next twenty years, a number of efforts will be made to craft an education that takes multiple intelligences seriously (Gardner, 1993).

Although previous research investigations provide some insight into the relationship between MI-based curriculum and increased student achievement, there is a need for continued research and application of MI. Additionally, there is limited research on MI-based science instruction and student achievement. Further experimentation and treatments should be conducted in order to expose the benefits of MI-based science education. Gardner (2004) hopes educators and institutions will continue to explore the implications of MI. Finally, educational institutions and teachers preparation courses should offer professional development courses addressing the positive implications between MI-based curriculum and student achievement and how MI-based curriculum can be integrated in elementary education. As Ozdemir *et al.,* (2006) suggest: teachers need to broaden their instructional and assessment repertoires to include strategies drawing on a wider variety of intelligence types. It is hoped that other researchers can examine the validity of the results by replicating the present study with learners in other countries and with different L1 backgrounds.

Moreover, the findings of the present study show that MI is a viable method to investigate issues in applied linguistics and it is hoped that other studies will focus on the role of MI in other areas of language learning and teaching in applied linguistics.

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