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EFL STUDENTS' FAMILIARITY WITH HOWARD GARDNER'S THEORY: A CASE STUDY AT SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the awareness, perceptions, and beliefs of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the South East European University regarding Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory. Focusing on the dynamic landscape of contemporary education, the study aims to understand the extent to which students acknowledge and identify with different intelligences and the potential implications for language learning strategies and overall educational experiences. The research employs an exploratory mixed-methods approach, including a case study design, surveys, and qualitative analysis, to gather insights from bachelor's and master's-level students. Findings indicate a moderate level of familiarity with MI theory among the participants, with significant agreement on the utility of the theory in understanding learning abilities. The study underscores the importance of recognizing linguistic intelligence and suggests implications for pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and the creation of inclusive learning environments. Recommendations include fostering collaboration among educators to share best practices and seeking institutional support for initiatives related to MI theory integration in teaching. The research contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective language education and its alignment with theories of cognitive diversity, providing actionable insights for educators and institutions.

Keywords: perception, EFL students, South East European University, Multiple Intelligence Theory

INTRODUCTION

Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences (MI), introduced four decades ago in Frames of Mind 1983, has generated extensive discourse and scrutiny, including reflections from Gardner himself, contributing to a rich and evolving understanding of intelligence. Countless individuals, such as educators, analysts, scientists, scholars, and learners, regard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory as profoundly influential. This theory has ignited widespread discourse, particularly within the realm of English academia, among both educators and learners. The recurrent deliberation within this sphere implies that the theory could potentially hold specific relevance for the acquisition of language skills.

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary education, recognizing diverse learner abilities has gained paramount importance. One theoretical framework that has significantly contributed to this paradigm shift is Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory. Originally proposed in 1983, Gardner's theory challenges the traditional notion of intelligence by identifying multiple distinct types, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. There are two more intelligences that we call candidate intelligences: existential intelligence and pedagogical intelligence. This departure from a singular concept of intelligence has sparked considerable interest and debate in educational circles. This study delves into the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, exploring how South East European University students perceive and relate to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. South East European University, situated in the region's diverse cultural and linguistic context, provides an intriguing backdrop for this investigation. The study seeks to understand the extent to which EFL students acknowledge and identify with different intelligences, examining potential implications for language learning strategies, classroom engagement, and overall educational experiences.

As we navigate the complexities of language acquisition, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the individual strengths and preferences of learners. This research aims to shed light on whether and how EFL students, within the specific cultural and academic context of South East European University, recognize and embrace the diverse intelligences outlined in Gardner's theory. By doing so, we hope to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on effective language education and its alignment with theories of cognitive diversity.

Objectives

This study aims to determine EFL students' awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and preferred intelligences toward the Multiple Intelligence Theory.

Hypothesis

H0: The study hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and preferred intelligences towards the Multiple Intelligence Theory (MIT). It is expected that the level of awareness and understanding of MIT among EFL students will influence their beliefs and attitudes towards language learning, as well as impact their preferences for specific intelligences.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are EFL students at South East European University aware of the Multiple Intelligences Theory?
2. How do EFL students perceive the concept of intelligence in the context of language learning?
3. Which types of intelligence do EFL students believe they possess or value the most?

The significance of the study

This study is of great importance in terms of learning methodology. Some benefits include informing pedagogical practices, enhancing student engagement, and guiding curriculum development. Understanding EFL students' perceptions of the Multiple Intelligences Theory can provide valuable insights for language educators. Knowledge of how students perceive their intelligence can contribute to developing engaging and relevant instructional materials. Findings from this research can guide curriculum developers in designing EFL programs that align with students' perceived intelligences.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There are different theories of intelligence, which show that intelligence is still a relevant concept in psychology. It would be illogical to deny the existence of intelligence and yet see debates about it in academic psychology books and papers. Intelligence has not been treated well in language teaching either, and some have even tried to deny its existence. Until

recently, intelligence was rarely mentioned in books about individual differences in language learners and was usually rejected as unimportant. This has given the impression that intelligence is taboo in language teaching. However, there are now some articles and book sections that address intelligence in language teaching, opening the door to more useful discussions on the topic (Ramin Akbari & Kobra Hosseini, 2008).

The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) suggests that intelligence is not a single entity but a collection of different abilities. According to Howard Gardner, eight specific criteria define what counts as intelligence. Gardner describes intelligence as the biopsychological potential to process information in certain ways, solve problems, or create products valued by a culture or community. MI theory proposes that we have multiple independent "computers" in our heads that deal with different types of information, such as spatial information, musical information, and so on (Gardner, 2016) (Tahiri, 2023). Gardner's concept of "five minds" is gaining attention in management as it offers useful ways of thinking about the future. Although it is not a theory, his idea builds on his previous research on Multiple Intelligences. Gardner suggests that individuals possess five minds, of which the first three are related to intellect: analytical, creative, and disciplined. The remaining two are related to respect (Macnamara, 2016).

Many inquiries concerning the most effective use of MI theory in foreign language instruction have been sent to Howard Gardner. At first, he thought that MI concepts might only make a little difference in bilingual education as compared to how they could be applied in the teaching of other disciplines, like biology or history. He now gives the following recommendations on ways in which MI theory might be beneficial. (Gardner, 2022) Children learn languages most likely in diverse ways. ‘’While many—possibly even the majority of others—prefer to learn through interpersonal interactions, viewing films, and other media, we are all most likely to learn when we are engaged with the subject matter and find the environment conducive to learning. It ought to be feasible to "custom-fit" the educational strategy to the learner, particularly in light of modern technology’’ (Gardner, 2022).

According to a recent article in Forbes magazine (Gilbert, 2023), linguistic intelligence is the most significant of all intelligences. The author of the article contends that our inner feelings and views are both shaped and externalized by linguistic intelligence and linguistic influence, or "LQ and I." The idea is that we may affect our behavior and, presumably, the conduct of others by learning the feelings that particular words evoke and substituting them with others (Gardner, MI Oasis, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The exploratory research methodology was utilized to investigate the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students on the Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory. The study focuses on understanding how South East European University (SEEU) students perceive and relate to the concept of Multiple Intelligences in the context of language learning. The study also focuses on measuring the level of knowledge of the SEEU EFL students about Gardner's theory.

Research Design

The research adopts a case study approach to delve into the nuanced perceptions of EFL students at SEEU regarding the Multiple Intelligences Theory. A case study design is deemed appropriate for its ability to provide an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within a real-world context.

Participants

This study focuses on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who are currently enrolled in the bachelor's and master's programs at South East European University (SEEU). Participants will be chosen through purposive sampling to incorporate a wide range of linguistic backgrounds and academic histories. In particular, the study will encompass students across different academic years, varying levels of English proficiency, and a combination of both local and international backgrounds. The sample size will be determined based on data saturation to guarantee a comprehensive comprehension of the participants' viewpoints.

Data Collection

Survey

A comprehensive questionnaire with seven questions in English was distributed to a larger sample of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The questionnaire aims to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the students' perceptions and knowledge of multiple intelligences. The survey will have both open-ended and closed questions, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the participants' attitudes and beliefs.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

The data obtained from open-ended questions is transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. This process involves identifying recurrent themes and patterns in the participants' responses, providing a qualitative understanding of their perceptions.

Quantitative Analysis

The data collected from the survey is analyzed using statistical charts to generate descriptive and inferential statistics. This quantitative approach aims to identify trends and correlations within the dataset. By doing so, it will provide a broader perspective on the overall perceptions of EFL students regarding the Multiple Intelligences Theory.

Ethical Considerations

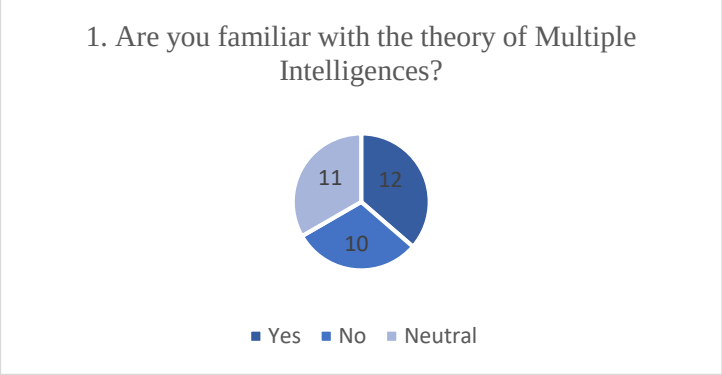
Ethical guidelines will be strictly followed throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The study will also adhere to SEEU's ethical standards for human subject research.

Limitations

This research recognizes limitations, including potential participant bias, cultural influences, and the generalizability of findings beyond SEEU. These limitations will be considered when interpreting the results.

FINDINGS

A total of 33 bachelor's and master's-level students completed an electronic questionnaire designed with Google Forms.



Graph 1: SEEU students' familiarity with Multiple Intelligences theory

Out of the 33 respondents, 12 claimed familiarity with the Multiple Intelligences theory, 10 claimed to be unfamiliar with it, and the remaining 11 were neutral.

2. How do you perceive the Multiple Intelligence Theory in your learning context?

Theme	Subthemes	No. Respondents
Perception of Multiple Intelligence theory by EFL students in their learning context	Useful and helpful Theory	8
	Theory that finds out your best way of learning	5
	Each person has a unique combination of Intelligences, and individuals may excel in one or more areas	14
	Teachers should use different ways to teach, so everyone can learn in the best way	6

Table 1: *MI perception by EFL students in their learning context*

The table above displays the results of qualitative data obtained from an open-ended question that was included in a Google Form questionnaire. The responses provided by the participants varied and were coded accordingly, with the number of students who provided each response also recorded in the table.

Statements	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
3. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory has greatly helped English as Foreign Learners to understand their learning abilities.	5	1	27	0	0

6. Multiple Intelligence Theory has greatly helped me to understand my abilities and my learning strategy	3	16	8	4	1
7. Linguistic Intelligence is the most important of all Intelligences.	26	0	4	0	3

Table 2: *Answers of EFL students towards statements given in the questionnaire*

The following is a summary of the results obtained from a questionnaire that focused on questions 3, 6, and 7. The questionnaire mainly consisted of sentences from which the students had five options to choose, indicating whether they agreed, disagreed, or were neutral. Regarding question 3, which asked if Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory has greatly helped English as Foreign Learners understand their learning abilities, the results showed that out of the 33 participants in the research, 27 agreed with the statement. One participant fully agreed, while the remaining five remained neutral. None of the respondents expressed disagreement with the statement. Regarding question 6, multiple intelligence theory has greatly helped me to understand my abilities and my learning strategy. Out of 33 respondents, 3 remained neutral, 16 fully agreed, 8 agreed, 4 did not agree at all, and 1 disagreed. Out of 33 respondents, 26 remained neutral, 4 agreed, and 3 disagreed that linguistic intelligence is the most important intelligence.

Statements	True	False
4. Linguistic Intelligence is my Intelligence profile	27	5
		1. Qualitative Response (*If Linguistic Intelligence aligns with your strength, focus on language-rich activities for effective learning and personal development)*
5. Each person is unique in their way, and no person has the same Intelligence profile	33	0

Table 3: *SEEU EFL students' responses for questions 4 and 5 from the distributed survey*

The following results were obtained from the students' answers to questions 4 and 5 and are presented in Table 3. For question 4, which asked whether linguistic intelligence was their intelligence profile, 27 out of 33 respondents confirmed that it was true, while 5 respondents said that it was not true. One respondent gave a different answer, which is

published in the table. For question 5, which stated that each person has a unique intelligence profile, 33 respondents confirmed that it was true.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The survey began by assessing the familiarity of 33 bachelor's and master ’s-level students from South East European University (SEEU) with Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. Graph 1 illustrates that a significant portion of respondents (36.4%) claimed to be familiar with the theory, while 30.3% expressed unfamiliarity. The remaining 33.3% adopted a neutral stance.

The qualitative data gathered from an open-ended question revealed various themes regarding the perception of multiple intelligences theory by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in their learning context. The majority of respondents (42.4%) found the theory to be useful and helpful, emphasizing its role in identifying the best way of learning. A substantial number (42.4%) recognized that each individual possesses a unique combination of intelligences, with 42.4% asserting that teachers should employ diverse teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles.

Table 2 presents the respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements related to the Multiple Intelligences Theory. Notably, 81.8% of participants agreed that Howard Gardner's theory greatly assisted foreign learners in understanding their learning abilities. Furthermore, a significant portion (51.5%) strongly agreed that multiple intelligences theory significantly contributed to their understanding of abilities and learning strategies. However, opinions varied on the importance of linguistic intelligence, with 78.8% expressing neutrality, 12.1% agreeing, and 9.1% disagreeing.

Table 3 provides insights into students' self-perceptions regarding their intelligence profile. A considerable majority (81.8%) identified linguistic intelligence as their profile, aligning with Gardner's theory. However, the qualitative response underlines the importance of tailoring learning activities to individual strengths. Additionally, all respondents (100%) acknowledged the uniqueness of each person's intelligence profile.

The study, encompassing 33 SEEU Bachelor's and Master's level students, sheds light on their familiarity with and perception of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. The findings highlight a moderate level of familiarity among students, with a significant

proportion recognizing the theory's utility in understanding individual learning preferences. Moreover, the majority agree that the theory of multiple intelligences positively affects their self-awareness and learning strategies. The study suggests that educators should consider integrating multiple intelligences theory into pedagogical practices, acknowledging diverse learning styles among students. Furthermore, the identification of linguistic intelligence as the predominant profile underscores the importance of incorporating language-rich activities in EFL instruction. While these results provide valuable insights, further research with a larger and more diverse sample could enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, exploring the practical implications of multiple intelligences theory in the classroom could offer deeper insights into its effectiveness in optimizing learning experiences for students.

In conclusion, this research has illuminated valuable insights into the awareness, perception, and agreement levels of SEEU Bachelor's and Master's level students regarding Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. The mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, has provided a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives.

The notable finding of a significant number of students identifying linguistic intelligence as their dominant profile aligns with Gardner's theory but also underscores the potential influence of educational and cultural contexts. This information can catalyze educators to tailor language-rich activities to cater to the prevalent learning strategies in EFL settings. The positive reception of the Multiple Intelligences theory among students, as evidenced by their agreement on its utility in understanding learning abilities, suggests its potential as a valuable pedagogical tool. Educators should consider integrating this theory into their teaching methodologies, recognizing the diverse ways in which students comprehend and engage with the learning material. The nuanced themes derived from qualitative data, such as the recognition of individual uniqueness and the call for varied teaching methods, emphasize the importance of acknowledging and accommodating diverse learning styles. This insight serves as a foundation for fostering inclusive and effective learning environments. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including the relatively small sample size and the specificity of SEEU students. Future research endeavors could expand the scope by including a more extensive and diverse participant pool, enabling a more robust generalization of findings. Additionally, investigating the practical implications of integrating multiple intelligences theory into teaching practices could offer practical guidance for educators. In

summary, the findings from this research not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Multiple Intelligences theory but also provide actionable recommendations for educators. Embracing the diversity of students' cognitive strengths and preferences can pave the way for a more inclusive and effective educational experience, fostering a dynamic and responsive learning environment for the SEEU community and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate Multiple Intelligences Theory in Curriculum Design: Educators at SEEU should incorporate Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory into the curriculum to cater to diverse learning styles, enhancing student engagement and comprehension.
- Diversify Teaching Methods: Teachers should employ a variety of instructional strategies that address different intelligences, such as visual, kinesthetic, musical, and logical-mathematical activities, to accommodate individual learning preferences.
- Focus on Linguistic Intelligence in EFL Instruction: Given the high identification with linguistic intelligence among students, EFL courses should include language-rich activities that leverage this predominant strength.
- Personalize Learning Activities: Develop personalized learning plans that align with each student's unique combination of intelligences, ensuring that their cognitive strengths are utilized to maximize their learning potential.
- Professional Development for Educators: Offer training programs for educators to familiarize them with Multiple Intelligences Theory and effective strategies for integrating it into their teaching practices.
- Conduct Further Research: Expand the scope of future studies to include a larger and more diverse sample size, which will enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of Multiple Intelligences Theory in different educational contexts.
- Evaluate Practical Implications: Investigate the practical implementation of Multiple Intelligences Theory in the classroom to identify best practices and potential challenges, guiding educators in optimizing their instructional approaches.
- Foster Inclusive Learning Environments: Create inclusive classroom settings that acknowledge and celebrate the diverse intelligence profiles of students, promoting a supportive and effective learning atmosphere.

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