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The Impact of MI-Oriented Tasks on the Accuracy of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Speaking

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Abstract: *An overemphasis on fluency emerged with the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT) caused to marginalize accuracy to the extent that for the plethora of second and foreign language learners who strive to gain a communicative command of English the capacity to participate in accurate acts of communication seems farfetched. Since the advance of Communicative Language Teaching, different methods have emerged to assess the accuracy of language learners. One way to enhance the accuracy is to take into account the individual differences between the learners. Multiple Intelligences are regarded as a very specific domain where differences are distinctly taken into account. Integration of MI and Task-Based Language Teaching can lead to creation of tasks that are in accord with learners' particular intelligences. In this study, two groups of Intermediate Iranian EFL learners were selected to be assessed on how well their speaking accuracy could be affected if they were taught with their dominant intelligence taken into account. The experimental group received tasks in line with their intelligence where the control group received the same tasks only without being grouped in terms of their intelligences. The results of the post-test using independent samples t-test indicated that the learners in the experimental group had achieved higher levels of accuracy of speaking. The result suggest that teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers can consider the use of MI-based tasks in enhancing learners' speaking in terms of accuracy.*

Keywords: *accuracy, multiple intelligences, TBLT, TSI*

1. INTRODUCTION

For most language learners, the ultimate definition of success is acquiring the communicative command over the language. There is no one to deny the importance of speaking skill in enabling learners to gain this command. Many scholars including Ur (1996) and Chastain (1988) viewed speaking as the most important language skill. Once able to speak, most learners would strive for optimizing their performance through accurate use of the language. Since the rise of Communicate Language Teaching (CLT) attempts have been made to evaluate learners' ability to speak the language accurately. Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) defined accuracy as the capability to produce grammatically error-free sentences.

Attempts to enhance this capability climaxed in Task-based Instruction (TBI). According to Feez (1998), TBI is a process-oriented approach in which purposeful tasks are given to students through which they can focus on communication, meaning and interaction. The way tasks should be incorporated in the classroom, however, has been the cause of controversy. Some scholars (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1998; White, 1988) have proposed incorporating tasks into traditional language-based approaches such as the present-practice-produce (PPP) process. In this process, the new language is taught to the learners, practiced by them through some kind of controlled exercises and then freely used in some kind of communicative activity. Ellis (2004) referred to this type of incorporation as task-supported instruction (TSI) which seems to be a better device to be used in EFL contexts where learners lack access to real communicative activities. For task-supported instruction to be more effective, it needs to be learner-centered, i.e. individual differences such as interests, styles, and intelligences have to be set as the basis of creating tasks. One way is utilizing the Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) (Gardner, 1983) which potentially

creates a real shift in the philosophy of education and language teaching (Smith and Smith, 1994). As Gardner (1983) claimed, the learner-centered approach to task selection might be strongly informed by Multiple Intelligence Theory (MIT). Gardner (1999) along with a number of other scholars and researchers (Carroll, 1993; Ekstrom, French, Harman & Derman, 1976; Stankov, 2000; Thurstone, 1938), utilized tasks to practice different intelligent types which stimulated subsequent trend in TSI to base task selection on learners' multiple intelligences to help students improve faster.

Linking MI-based and task-based studies can add a new dimension to language teaching. The findings emerging from the present study clarify the practicality of such a plan for teaching speaking to learners. Selecting pedagogical tasks based on learners' dominant intelligences can be a way of personalizing English pedagogy by providing more relevant and interesting learning opportunities in EFL classrooms based on learners' differences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies has been carried out recently to investigate the various effects of MI-based teaching on learners' speaking ability.

Sayed (2005) investigated the effect of using an MI-Based Training Program on developing first-year English students' oral communication skills. 30 first year English major students were the samples of his study. A training program based on Gardner's MI Theory to develop the students' oral communication skills, and an oral communication pre-posttest that was administered to the group of the study before and after their training were utilized as the tools of the study. Results revealed that the program had a positive effect on the students' oral communication skills as there were statistically significant differences between the pre and post administration of the test.

Another study was conducted by Dorgham (2011) who analyzed the effectiveness of using MI-based instruction on developing speaking skills of the preparatory schools first graders. The implementation of a program based on MI proved the usefulness of multiple intelligences based instruction.

Ibrahim (2007) investigated the effectiveness of using a suggested strategy based on the multiple intelligences theory on assessing and developing the speaking skills. The samples were third year primary school Arabic native speakers students. Instruments of the study included the training program (student's book and a teacher's guide), multiple intelligences scale and a checklist. The results of the study showed the usefulness of the training program based on the multiple intelligences theory.

In another study, Salem (2013) investigated the impact of MI-based Instruction on developing speaking skills of the pre-service teachers of English. The researcher developed a multiple-intelligences based program to enhance the speaking skills paying a due attention to the individual differences among students. The sample of the study consists of sixty fourth-year Prospective teachers of English. The Quasi-experimental research design was used in the study as the researcher used the one group pre-posttest to assess the usefulness of using this approach. Results of the study proved the effectiveness of Multiple-intelligences based Instruction on developing speaking skills of the pre-service teachers of English.

3. METHOD AND DATA ANALYSIS

A. Participants

The research sample was a total of 48 male learners, within the age range of 15 to 25, at the intermediate level of proficiency and B1 based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The participants were attending two 30-hour conversation classes that were taught by the researcher as the course teacher. The learners were randomly assigned into a controlled group (CG) and experimental group (EG). The Multiple intelligences of the EG was measured first and they received a minimum of 10 tasks based on their dominant intelligences. A randomly selected number of the same tasks were assigned to be performed by all participants in the control group (CG) with no regard to their dominant intelligences. The initial homogeneity of the groups was assessed based on the obtained final scores in the past three terms.

B. Instruments

The researcher used four measurement instruments to collect the research data, including three sets of the participant's previous final test scores to ensure initial homogeneity of the groups, the Multiple Intelligence test (McKenzie, 1999), and two oral tests used as the pre-test and the post-test that were transcribed and analyzed from accuracy point of view.

C. Procedure

The researcher had two classes of 24 intermediate learners at the language school. To make sure that the participants were all at equal levels of proficiency, there had to be a test of homogeneity. Due to the policies of the school, the researcher could not conduct a proficiency test to check the homogeneity of the participants. Hence, three sets of each group's previous final scores were averaged and compared to find out any probable significant differences. The revealed scores indicated no difference. Thus, the groups were homogeneous regarding their level of proficiency.

The experiment began by the researcher explaining the aims of the study, the use of tasks, and inviting learners to participate actively. Since it was going to be the summer time, they had plenty of time to cooperate with the researcher. In the EG, the researcher distributed the MI-questionnaire, and asked the respondents to complete it in 30 minutes. All learners were asked to meet the researcher in another classroom, one by one, where they had their voices recorded on the first topic: "What are your plans for this summer?" Each learner spent a minute and half recording after a minute of thinking. Learners were informed that everything that had to do with this study was not going to affect their final score.

The learners' dominant MIs were specified based on the questionnaires and the treatment began from the very second session of the class. At the end of each Reading, Listening, and Grammar lesson, there was a 10 to 15-minute speaking activity. The topics of speaking were in accord with the theme of the lesson and in-line with the groups' dominant intelligent. Learners with the same type of intelligence were asked to sit in groups. Learners got involved in all the activities as they were being monitored. This treatment took 10 sessions. The same procedure was employed in the CG, however, the learners were grouped regardless of their dominant intelligences and each session a single task was selected randomly from the collection of 50 MI oriented tasks.

At the end of the 12th session, each participant's speaking was recorded on a different topic of "their dreams and plans for 10 years later." Learners were also informed that they can talk about various aspects of this topic including job, education, family, marriage, travelling, etc. The recordings were further transcribed and measured through "the proportion of error-free clauses relative to the total number of clauses" (see Foster, and Skehan, 1996; Skehan and Foster, 1997).

The material used in this study included the course book along with its workbook and 10 major tasks in the CG and 50 tasks in the EG. The course book for the intermediate levels at the school where the study was carried out is American English File 3 (Oxenden & Latham-Koenig, 2011). The book is multi-united and each unit has a particular theme. According to the authors, the book has an emphasis on communicative competence and has a balance of skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar that gets students speaking with confidence.

Multiple-intelligence directed (MI-directed) tasks which can be used in teaching speaking were adopted from R.I.C. Publications (2004) which is a course book designed by a group of Australian teachers. This course book is a classroom resource for applying the theory of multiple intelligences to allow students to use their dominant intelligences to aid understanding and to work on their weaknesses.

The tasks that were also chosen to be utilized as the speaking activities for the classroom were all carefully selected based on the dominant intelligences of the learners. These tasks were selected from various sources including the following:

1. *Frames of Mind* by Howard Gardner, 2011
2. *What are you good at?* – Lesson plan © BBC | British Council, 2005
3. *Multiple Intelligences in the classroom, 2nd edition*, by Thomas Armstrong, 2000
4. *Multiple Intelligences in the classroom, 3rd edition*, by Thomas Armstrong, 2009

5. *Quick Activities for Multiple Intelligences - Improving Your Teaching* Excerpted from Edupress - Developed by Concetta Doti Ryan, M.A.
6. http://www.multi-intell.com/MI_chart.html

It is worth noting that to match the suggested activities with the corresponding tasks in the course book the researcher had to make slight modifications to maintain the essence of the tasks on the one hand and to make them conform to the norm and requirements of the school. The changes were checked by two experienced teachers and teacher trainers and were finally controlled by the supervisor.

D. Data Analysis

This study set forth to find out the impact of multiple-intelligence task supported instruction on the accuracy of Iranian Intermediate EFL learners' speaking. . The accuracy measures of the pre- and post-test were analyzed through independent samples t-test.

The accuracy measures of the groups were calculated as the proportion of error-free clauses relative to the total number of produced clauses (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1997). Then, the descriptive statistics were calculated, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *The descriptive Statistics of the Groups' pre-test Accuracy*

	grouping	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pre_accuracy	CG	24	.49	.22	.04
	EG	24	.60	.26	.05

The mean score of the control group and the experimental group, as displayed in Table 1 are .49 and .60, respectively. A slight difference was observed in the data obtained. To probe the significance, the researcher submitted the data to an independent-samples t-test, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *The results of the Groups' pre-test Accuracy*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
pre_accuracy	Equal variances assumed	1.56	.21	-1.57	46	.12	-.11	.07	-.25	.03
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.55	44.69	.12	-.11	.07	-.25	.03

Based on the results displayed in Table 2, there was no significant differences between the accuracy of the groups' speaking on the pre-test, F(1.56, 44.69), p=.12>.05. Thus, it was concluded that the two groups were at the same level of accuracy at the onset of the study.

To find out whether the experiment had any positive influence on learners' accuracy, the results of the post-tests were retrieved and analyzed as below. The descriptive statistics of the post-test are displayed below. For the ease of comparison, the results from the pre-test are displayed once again.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures*

	grouping	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Min	Max
pre_accuracy	CG	24	.49	.22	.04	.11	1
	EG	24	.60	.26	.05		
post_accuracy	CG	24	.50	.25	.05	0	1
	EG	24	.69	.17	.03		

As shown in Table 3, the mean score of the accuracy increased from .49 to .50 in the control group whereas this increase was more evident in the experimental group whose means score increased from .60 to .69. Yet, to test the significance of the difference between groups, an independent samples t-test was run on the data. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *The independent samples t-test on accuracy of two groups in post-test stage*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
post_accuracy	Equal variances assumed	1.66	.20	-5.93	46	.00	-.31	.05	-.42	-.20
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.93	41	.00	-.31	.05	-.42	-.20

As can be seen in Table 4, the difference between the groups' accuracy of speech reached the significant level on the post-test, F(1.66, 41.00), p=.00>.05. Therefore, the research question that addressed the impact of MI-oriented task-supported instruction on the accuracy of intermediate Iranian EFL learners was answered positively. That is to say, MI-oriented TSI enhanced the accuracy of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' accuracy of speaking.

4. CONCLUSION

The focus of the present study was to explore the impact of MI-oriented tasks on the accuracy of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking. The results in this study suggested that the learners' accuracy in the experimental group had increased considerably. This finding is in congruence with various other studies such as Coustan and Rocka (1999) who emphasized the use of MI in the classroom which increased accuracy. Also the result of accuracy test was similar to that of Saeidi's (2009). In her study, she found out that Multiple Intelligence Focus on Form methodology affected the performance of students on the accurate use of the target structures. Christison (1996) indicated that teachers who use MI theory to inform their curriculum development find that they gain a deeper understanding of students' learning preferences and a greater appreciation of their strengths. Students are likely to become more engaged in learning as they use learning modes that match their intelligence strengths. In addition, students' regular reflection on their learning broadens their definitions of effective and acceptable teaching and learning practices. Students' increased engagement and success in learning stimulates teachers to raise their expectations, initiating a powerful expectation-response cycle that can lead to greater achievement levels for all.

In other studies, researchers have investigated the impact of MI on speaking skill of learners. In her study on college students, Callison (2002) found out that the use of MI-related tasks in classes had a positive influence on public speaking abilities of college students. In another study, Saibani and Simin (2015) have investigated the relationship between multiple intelligences and speaking and found a significant relationship between the two variables. The findings from these two studies reinforce each other and receive support from Botelho (2003) who found that integrating MI theory with other approaches and techniques may enhance learners' overall abilities in all skills.

Various individuals can benefit from the findings of the present study, including the learners, EFL teachers, syllabus designers, and teacher trainers.

Methodologically, the findings highlight the importance of using MI and task-supported instruction into everyday classroom language instruction. Such an integrated approach might be of high value because they introduce learners to tasks which are specifically directed to their

strengths. Learners' potential to learn the new language can be fostered if teachers take learner variations into account. In addition, designing tasks around MI theory have a number of benefits in a speaking classroom. First, such tasks stimulate learners to engage more adequately in the learning process and, thereby, learn more efficiently. Secondly, utilizing the theory of multiple intelligences, teachers can expand the learning activities in ESL/EFL programs to increase students' learning opportunities (Barrington, 2004). Furthermore, teaching language skills communicatively creates dynamism in the classroom which can lead to a positive learning environment.

Speaking courses in various contexts in Iran are done with the use of already established books that may as well lack the considerations of MI. However, teachers can always plan for such tasks that incorporate learners' variables, intelligences to be particular, into the tasks and procedures of the classroom.

Teacher trainers, involved in preparing the next generations of teachers can also highly benefit from the findings of the present study. Firstly, they can use MI-oriented tasks as a medium to train the newly-recruited teachers based on their MI which can result in more competent teachers. Second, the use of MI-oriented tasks in teacher training can also influence the new teachers accuracy which is of significant importance because in EFL contexts teachers are almost all the language sample most learners have. Third, teacher trainees should be introduced to the use of MI in selecting pedagogic tasks to be used in their own classrooms.

The focus of this study was on speaking skill only. Other studies can focus on other language skills, or sub skills. It is also possible to investigate the influence of various other features of oral performance, including complexity, in relation with MI-oriented teaching.

Gender was a neglected variable in this study due to the imposed policies of the school where the study took place. It can be an interesting field of study to explore the influence of this type of teaching on males and females. In this study, the level of proficiency that was taken into account was the intermediate level. It is predicted that the results might vary if other various levels of proficiency, lower levels especially, go under study.

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