

## ỨNG DỤNG THUYẾT ĐA TRÍ TUỆ VÀO DẠY TỪ VỰNG CHO TRẺ EM

*Bùi Phú Hưng, Đỗ Phát Lợi*

*Dạy tiếng Anh là ngôn ngữ hai hay ngoại ngữ đối với trẻ em có thể rất phức tạp vì trẻ em có trải nghiệm giới hạn và những đặc điểm riêng. Thuyết đa trí tuệ đưa ra nhiều ứng dụng cho việc giảng dạy tiếng Anh. Bài viết này trình bày cách ứng dụng thuyết này vào những đường hướng và phương pháp dạy tiếng Anh. Với những phân tích sâu sắc, bài viết trình bày mô hình dạy từ vựng tiếng Anh cho trẻ em và đưa ra những kiến nghị về dạy từ vựng cho trẻ em với hy vọng các giáo viên tiếng Anh ở trường tiểu học sẽ hướng dẫn các em thành công trong việc tiếp thu và học tiếng Anh.*

**Từ khoá:** Thuyết đa trí tuệ, dạy từ vựng, trẻ em.

*Teaching English as a foreign or second language to young learners can be complicated since they have limited prior experience and distinct characters. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences has many implications in English language teaching. This paper is to shed light on how to incorporate this theory into current approaches and methods of English language teaching. With profound analyses, a model of teaching English vocabulary to young learners is proposed. Finally, recommendations on teaching vocabulary to young learners are made in the hope that primary school teachers of English will lead pupils to success in English language acquisition and learning.*

**Keywords:** Multiple intelligences Theory, teaching vocabulary, young learners.

## APPLYING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY TO TEACHING VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language can be a stressful endeavor as the teacher not only needs to know approaches and methods of language teaching to improve students' proficiency, but also understands learner variables. No classes of learners are supposed to be the same due to learners' differences, such as needs, interests, level, goals, beliefs, educational contexts, and range of age (Thornbury, 2012, p. 27).

In some cultures, the teacher does not pay sufficient attention to learner differences which can facilitate how students prefer to learn. A number of factors forming learning patterns have come into discussion and a tremendous amount of research has shown one's learning style preference is formed by both the surroundings and one's intelligence (Willing, 1988 & Irvine & York, 1995).

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Gardner (1995) has put forward a point on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences

which has implications for language teaching. Accordingly, a number of hypotheses are set by Gardner (1993) and other scientists (Kolb, 1984; Honey & Mumford, 1982; Reid, 1987 & Chapman, & Freeman, 1996).

- a) People with different dominant brain lobes prefer to learn differently.
- b) The teacher's techniques which match students' dominant intelligences can assist students' learning.
- c) If the teacher applies any technique which does not match students' learning style preferences, they may experience some difficulty gaining the target language items.
- d) Everyone has at least one intelligence as a lobe works more dominantly than the others.

In Vietnamese contexts, most educational studies have been investigating adults as these studies have been conducted by university professors and lecturers. Proposals and studies on teaching language to young learners is hoped to bring benefits to both young language learners themselves and their teachers.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Gardner (1983) first introduced seven distinct human intelligences, namely verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, musical/rhythmic, bodily/kinesthetic, logical/mathematic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Then, a third intelligence called naturalistic has been added (Gardner, 2000). Kolb (1984) identifies

five major learning styles called visual, auditory, kinesthetic or tactile, social and solitary as indications of five common intelligences.

Visual learners usually prefer to visually gain information and converse with others by using eyes to sense things as they have dominant visual intelligence as the result of the dominant development of occipital lobes, the visual processing center, at the rearmost portion of the brain. If teachers identify this intelligence among students, they should use visual aids to accommodate it. The whiteboard, drawings, pictures, diagrams, and mind maps, especially with color, can make students learn with ease.

Those with musical intelligence generally exhibit their interest in listening to sounds, singing and/or playing instruments as the temporal lobes, with primary auditory cortex dominantly develop and handle aural content. To facilitate this intelligence in students, language teachers can apply communicative language teaching and/or let them work with sounds. It is important to note that aural contents must be in association so that visualization can be concentrated on (Fig. 1). The teacher can use the anchoring technique to recall various states that music invokes in learners.

Another common intelligence among children is physical because their motor cortex, at the rear of the frontal lobe develops. Those with this intelligence prefer to move and do hands-on

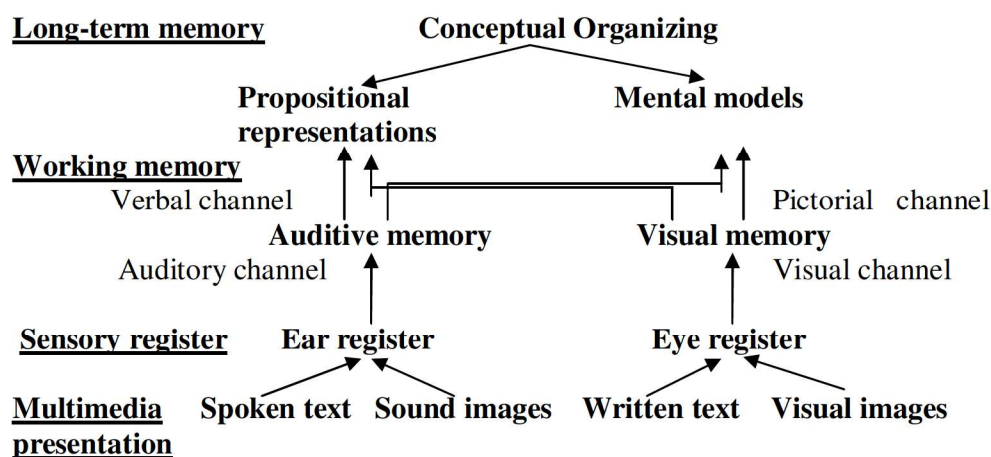


experiences. Teachers are advised to let these kinesthetic or tactile learners to take part in physical activities to learn. The perspective of letting students sit still and listen to teacher talking should be avoided. Games that require students to physically participate in should be employed by the teacher.

Some other learners may prefer to socialize with others maybe because they have dominant interpersonal intelligence which the limbic system is responsible for. They may find it easy to learn when working in a group. Recognizing social learners in the classroom, the teacher should design activities for group work or pair work as to assist their learning. By sharing their own key assertions and personal feelings or opinions with others, information is transmitted through different channels, synthesized and then forms memory in learners (Schnotz, 2005: 233).

Finally, some people are independent learners; that is, they prefer to learn individually as they have a developed intrapersonal intelligence which is formed by the development of the frontal and parietal lobes, and the limbic system. To support their academic success, teachers can let them spend a sufficient amount of time working on the assigned task alone. The teacher may leave learners some time to think about how to achieve the goal assigned by the teacher by developing their curiosity about the question.

In summary, it is inferred from the presentation of the five basic intelligences that a normal person may have two or more intelligence. Therefore, learners can receive different types of message from the surrounding by more than one way (Gardner, 1995 & Kolb, 1984). In case information can enter the learner's mind via several channels, memorization will be more likely to take place (Schnotz, et al).



**Fig. 1 Integrative Model of Text and Picture Comprehension (ITPC)**  
(Adapted from Schnotz, 2005, p. 233)

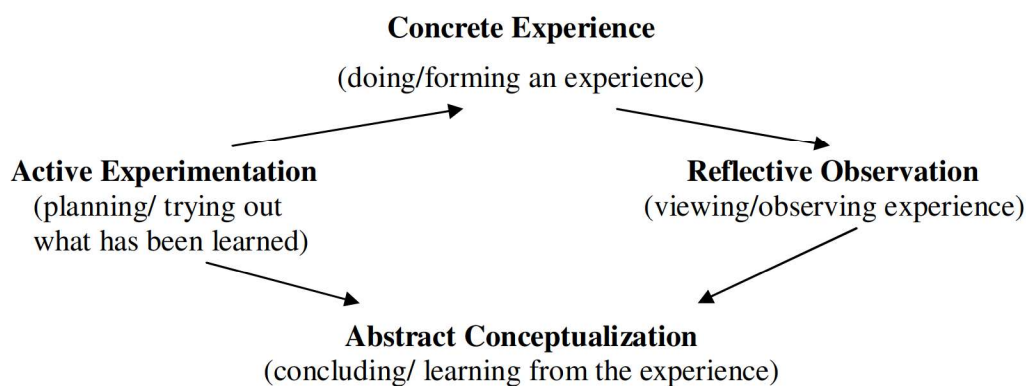
### **3. THE INCORPORATION OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY INTO TEACHING VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS**

The radical view of applying MI-inspired approach to English language teaching has received several criticisms. A major one is that Gardner's criteria for his theory are subjective; in other words, the number of intelligences can be extended over time and one may have more than one major intelligence (White, 2006, pp. 45-72). Also, it may be hard for the teacher to identify what intelligence a particular learner has. Gardner (1983) did experiments on sample with potential isolation of brain damage and distinctive development history and used psychological and psychometric tasks. How can teachers do this in the classroom? Another argument is from sociolinguists' view of this approach. Accordingly, this application seems to ignore social factors that influence one's learning pattern (Wertsch, 1985). Considering Vietnamese educational contexts, it is really difficult for an institute to classify students into classes by intelligence due to its limited number of students of the same intelligence. Also, a diversity of classroom activities probably gives learners more engagement and interest in the target language item (Thornbury, 2012, p. 27).

A question is if the theory of Multiple Intelligences is effective in teaching vocabulary to young learners. For one thing, there is evidence that institutions have been successful in applying this theory (Gardner, 2000:83). The teacher can employ a diversity of activities in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom so that students have opportunities to explore their own strengths and develop their intelligences. For another thing, young learners often exhibit their own intelligences during the class hours due to their limited exposure to the social factors (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, Irvine & York, 1995), which the teacher can base on to know their major intelligences.

There is some matching between major ELT (English Language Teaching) approaches and methods with intelligences. For example, the silent way and task-based learning facilitate solitary learning (intrapersonal and logical intelligences). Suggestopedia and audio-lingual methods support musical intelligence with the use of music in teaching. The CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) and behaviorism emphasize interactions (interpersonal intelligence). Total physical response provides convenience for those with kinesthetic intelligence.





**Figure 2. Learning Cycle** (Adapted from Kolb, 1984)

A tremendous amount of research has made conclusions on the Learning Cycle (Fig. 2) which the teacher should follow in the classroom (Kolb, 1984). Accordingly, the class procedure should comprise of four main steps. First of all, learners need to observe or experience the target items. In this step, the teacher's role is really crucial in that wrong information or wrong technique of teaching may lead to misunderstanding in learners. Secondly, learners enter abstract conceptualization in which learners make sense and conclusions. Any misunderstanding or confusion needs to be clarified in this stage. Learners may raise questions, but the teacher should check if learners make the right sense. After learners make sense of instruction or the task, they begin to act by planning and trying out what they have learned. This stage is so-called active experimentation. In a common sense, the teacher should let students work in pairs or groups. Finally, concrete experience is formed when learners have already completed or virtually fulfilled the task required.

From the aforementioned analyses and discussions, it is obvious that the teacher

should apply a diversity of classroom activities. The classroom procedure should be divided into several phases, each of which has its own objectives and is designed with different activities to accommodate different possible intelligences in the classroom. The teacher also needs to bear in mind that activities should encourage all students to get engaged in. Any activity which fails to engage learners will not lead to personal language development (Thornbury, 2012, pp. 21-28).

#### 4. SUGGESTED LESSON PROCEDURE

On teaching a group of target words, the teacher can follow the steps below. For a practical purpose, refer to the lesson for young learners at pre-intermediate level in the Appendix (Dellar & Walkley, 2010). To successfully perform the teaching of vocabulary of clothing items, the teacher should prepare these real items in advance of the class time.

Step 1: The teacher asks students to match target words (clothing) and pictures. Then, it is possible that the teacher says the words describing items

one by another and asks students to run its location to sort it out from the pile. Afterwards, the teacher raises the items one by another and asks students to say what they are. (Awards can be given to motivate students).

Step 2: Students spend some time on their own thinking about their answers to the questions given.

- a) In what situations do people often wear these kinds of clothes?
- b) Describe the kind(s) of clothes you prefer to wear? Why?

Step 3: Students have opportunities to compare their answers to the questions in groups.

Step 4: Students use the vocabulary taught to complete an assigned task individually or in groups.

Step 5: The teacher asks students to do a listening or reading task in which the just-learned vocabulary is used.

Step 6 (optional): Students are asked to do a speaking task. For instance, they can make conversations in pairs or groups on shopping and the clothing they have bought. For classes with a low level of proficiency, the teacher can give students further prompts (maybe an example conversation or expressions of compliment). Students are advised to maintain the conversations as long as they can.

The suggested model can facilitate the working of all intelligences. In particular, the first two activities give opportunities to those students who prefer to learn visually, physically, and solitarily.

Alternatively, the teacher can give detailed descriptions and then ask students to match the words and their referents (Ur, 2009). In Step 3, interpersonal and aural intelligences are given opportunities to develop with group discussion. Afterwards, those students with linguistic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and logical intelligences have opportunities to demonstrate their own strengths. This step is quite flexible in that students can choose to work individually (intrapersonal intelligence) or in groups (interpersonal intelligence) and the gap-fill task requires them to simultaneously take advantage of their linguistic and logical intelligences. Alternatively, the teacher can ask students to complete a text or write about their fashion style preferences. Step 6 is used to consolidate and check their knowledge of vocabulary as well as give them more opportunities to demonstrate their language use.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1. *Evaluation of the model*

Regarding second language acquisition and learning, the target input is to provide students with vocabulary items rather than words in that the items go with an appropriate article or appear plural, which can facilitate students' acquisition of their meanings in context. This is significantly important to young language learners as they prefer language acquisition to learning (Ur, 2009, p. 60 & Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 30).

In a similar fashion, the teacher lets the students obtain the pronunciation of the vocabulary unconsciously by saying the



items one by another. However, the teacher also creates opportunities to check the students' pronunciation by asking them about what each picture shows. An important point here is the teacher does not appear as a pronunciation checker, but as a speech caretaker (Harmer, 2010, p. 46 & Krashen, 1988, pp. 1-4).

Grammatical rules are implied in the presentation of vocabulary. The teacher provides plural forms of countable nouns which are commonly used in a pair like *trousers* and *shoes* and the others are in singular forms with an article, such as *a shirt* and *a tie*. This lets students may later use these items mechanically as at the moment when they are exposed to (Brown, 1973 & Dulay & Burt, 1975, pp.209-233).

One thing that stands out from the model is the teacher concentrates on language use rather than language usage throughout the performance, which is in line with current perspectives on English language teaching and learning. Accordingly, the teacher needs to provide a maximal coverage of language in use as form-focused teaching cannot improve students' fluency and thus should be removed from the school curriculum (Richards, 2013).

From psychological views, the teacher organizes activities which encourage students to use the target vocabulary to talk about themselves and communicate interesting messages as young learners are quite self-centered and the teacher should let them relate the lesson to their own lives (Lindstromberg, 2004 & Lewis, 2007).

From linguistic perspectives, the model explores most aspects of vocabulary, including meanings, pronunciation and grammar (Step 1). However, grammar is context-sensitive as it depends on the context of the text in which it is used (Thornbury, 2002, p.69). The follow-up activities (Steps 3, 4 and 5) then give students opportunities to use the vocabulary in contexts in forms conversations. Also, discourse is taken into account (Steps 3, 4, and 5). Although the Natural Approach is employed (Krashen, 1988), the students have time to access the spelling (Step 4) by using the target items to fill in the gaps (Ur, 2009, p.60).

## 5.2. Recommendations

It can be seen from the aforementioned model and analysis that applying the MI-inspired approach to teaching vocabulary to young learners is feasible in that students can develop their own strengths and receptive and productive skills. Also, the model given provides students with opportunities to use language in context.

Teachers should identify the intelligences which students exhibit during the class time in order to apply appropriate techniques to accommodate the students' learning. In case of a short-term course, the teacher is advised to focus on the five most common intelligences, namely visual, musical, physical, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences (Willingham, 2005).

Primary and secondary school teachers of English should take this model into

consideration. In particular, they need to offer a wide variety of activities to facilitate major intelligences in the classroom and explore different aspects of vocabulary. This diversity in teaching techniques may help avoid monotonous teaching.

The presentation of vocabulary is brief enough to leave time for practice, but the meanings and pronunciation of the items are directed more than once as learners need reoccurrence of the target items so that a long-term memory is formed, especially when the teacher applies an acquisition-oriented approach (Ur, 2009, pp.16-17).

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## Appendix

(Adapted from Dellar & Walkley, 2010)

### 1. Vocabulary

Label the pictures below with the words in the box.

a shirt	a T-shirt	a skirt	a suit
a hat	a tie	a dress	a coat
jeans	shorts	trousers	shoes





**2. Answer the following questions on your own and then compare your answers in pairs or groups**

- c) In what situations do people often wear these kinds of clothes?  
 d) Describe the kind(s) of clothes you prefer to wear? Why?

**3. Complete the following sentences with the items in Part 1. Use each item only ONCE.**

- a) My leather.....are good quality. My parents bought them for me on my birthday. They help protect my feet.  
 b) The sister's red.....is beautiful. She often wears it on special occasions. It is shorter than a dress.  
 c) My father wears a.....and a.....to work every day. They make him look formal as a businessman.  
 d) I have to wear a.....with long sleeves to school every day.  
 e) My brother and I prefer to wear casual clothes on picnic. We often wear a..... and..... They make us feel comfortable. We don't like wearing shoes.

**4. Listen to Maria and Quentin talking about shopping and then complete the following table.**

(In the conversation, Maria and Quentin are shopping. They talk about what they are wearing, what they have bought for themselves and their families.

What they are wearing	What they have bought for themselves	What they bought for their families

**5. Make conversations in pairs or groups on shopping and the clothing you have bought.**

Expressions of compliment:

- I like/love your.....
- That's a nice/lovely...../ They are really nice.
- What a great.....
- It looks cool./ They look cool.

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