



## Multiple Intelligences based English Language Teaching: Step towards Lowering Affective Filter

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### Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of Multiple Intelligences (MI) based tasks and teaching materials in lowering the affective filter of first year B.Tech students of select engineering institutes. The study employs a mixed-methods design to look at student perception of English language learning and anxiety levels in the classroom. The researcher designed MI materials to administer in the intervention phase of the study and understand the effectiveness of MI-mediated tasks in lowering the affective filter and fostering motivation, confidence and self-esteem among students. An analysis of quantitative data collected from online questionnaire, pre-intervention and post-intervention, and qualitative data collected from semi-structure interviews post-intervention illustrate positive outlook towards language learning with a decrease in anxiety levels and increase in motivation and confidence levels of students.

**Keywords:** Multiple intelligences, affective filter, anxiety, motivation, confidence.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

The impetus for this paper stems from an activity conducted by the researcher at the beginning of English Language paper offered to first year engineering students. The activity expected students to mention their expectations of the course and the areas of improvement with respect to language learning or aspects of

language learning that they would like to improve. Most of the students expressed their perception of Language learning as a process different from the way other subjects are taught. Students revealed that they find it difficult to express themselves in English language classroom for the fear of making mistakes, anxiety, lack of confidence and motivation and the perception that language learning is a set of rules that are rather rigid. It is this perception of

language learning and associated affective factors that the researcher tries to address through MI mediated tasks with a focus on persuasive style of writing. The selection of this specific rhetorical form of writing is motivated by the challenges faced by undergraduate/engineering students at the time of employability and interviews. Additionally, a face-to-face interaction with the students in the classroom showed that students wanted to enhance skills that would help them in job interviews and persuasive writing skills has in itself the scope and potential. To this end, the researcher prepared a questionnaire to quantify students' perception before and after MI mediated tasks and a semi-structured interview post-administration of MI-mediated tasks. Also, a sample task with MI mediated tasks as the framework is mentioned in this paper.

### 1.2 Research questions and objectives

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What is the perception of students towards English Language learning, anxiety levels in English language classroom?
2. How can MI-mediated tasks change students' attitude and improve motivation of English language learning?

To address these three questions, the study focuses on three key objectives:

1. To evaluate student perception of English language learning and their anxiety levels in the classroom
2. To examine the effectiveness of MI-mediated tasks on students' attitude and perception of English language learning

### 3. Literature Review

According to the study "Affective factors involved in learning a foreign language" (Henter, R. 2014), first-year psychology students' English proficiency is influenced by

affective factors such as attitude, motivation, and anxiety. There are notable relationships between English performance, motivation, and anxiety.

Bao and Liu in the paper titled "The influence of affective factors in second language acquisition on foreign language teaching" look at "the need for continuous studies and countless practices. Besides, teachers also need to equip themselves with more pedagogical methodology and psychological knowledge, and make endless efforts to increase the students' self-esteem, lower their anxiety, arouse their motivation, and enhance their learning efficiency" (p.470) For students, self-esteem is crucial since it affects their motivation and confidence. Although different in context and scenario, a similar study by Zhu and Zhou shows that affective factors of boredom, anxiety, and hopelessness among junior high school students hinders English learning process. Hence, there is a need to reduce these negative affective factors.

Kiruthiga and Christopher examine the need of a supportive and enriching learning environment in enhancing language learning outcomes. This involves fostering affective factors like motivation and self-esteem while lowering affective factors like anxiety that act as barriers to language learning. Syafii, A et al. discusses the effectiveness of multiple intelligences in garnering positive learning outcomes in social studies discipline through a meta-analysis, hinting an optimistic impact on students' performance, and the need for future research in the area. Multiple intelligences theory, propounded by Howard Gardner emphasizes the existence of eight basic intelligences (linguistic, logical, musical, visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic) which define the human potential to solve problems. Every individual possesses these eight intelligences, although in varying degrees. Although the theory has its roots in psychology, over the years the relevance of the theory was much sought after in the field of

education. One such instance is Project Spectrum, a collaborative research from Harvard Project Zero that is based on the belief that children have a spectrum of intelligences which can be enhanced by education through stimulating materials and activities.

#### 4. Methodology

The study, conducted in 2024, involves 1<sup>st</sup> year engineering students of National Institute of Technology, Warangal, across disciplines such as CSE, ECE, Mechanical and Civil Engineering. It specifically investigates students' perception of English language learning in overcoming affective factors like anxiety that acts as a perceptual barrier. The study is exploratory in nature as it tries to investigate how affective factors like anxiety could be decreased in an English language classroom. It attempts to explore the possibility of incorporating MI mediated task to enhance writing skills, student motivation and perception of language learning.

##### 4.1 Participants and Data Collection Tools

The sample for the study consisted of 1<sup>st</sup> year engineering students of central institutes like NITs and private colleges affiliated to state universities. A total of 100 students participated in the survey conducted online using a Google form. The questionnaire for this online survey consisted of close-ended questions related to perception towards English language learning and anxiety. The items of the questionnaire were adapted from "Attitude/Motivation Test Battery: International AMTB Research Project (English version, Gardner, R C, 2004), Language Learning Orientations Scale – Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation Subscales (LLOS-IEA) (Noels, Pelletier et.al (2003). Quantitative data was

collected from the questionnaire to understand student perception of language learning and their anxiety levels during English classes. Qualitative insights were gathered after the intervention through semi-structured interviews with 30 selected students. This is to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness and students' experiences and challenges of using MI mediated tasks in the classroom. Also, the same questionnaire was administered after the intervention to see if there is any change in the student perception and anxiety levels of students. This study utilized a mixed-methods approach by combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research questions while addressing possible limitations.

#### 4. Findings and Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the findings. The researcher analyzed the mean score and standard deviations of the quantitative data from the questionnaire to examine student perception and anxiety levels in English Language classroom pre-intervention and post-intervention. On the other hand, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews was analyzed manually using thematic analysis.

##### Quantitative Insights:

This analysis (see Table 1) primarily tries to seek data pertaining to the 1<sup>st</sup> research objective:

1. To evaluate students' perception of English language learning, their anxiety levels in the classroom.

Table 1. Mean score and Standard deviation pre- intervention and post- intervention.

Items	Pre-intervention mean score	Pre-intervention SD	Post-intervention Mean score	Post-intervention SD
1. "Learning English language is really useful in getting a job"	4.32	1.1	4.41	0.91
2. "I really enjoy the process of English language learning in the classroom"	3.25	1.26	3.96	1.04
3. "English is an important part of the college programme"	3.93	1.04	3.99	1.01
4. "I try to learn English as much as possible"	3.47	1.2	3.58	1.02
5. "I would rather spend my time on other subjects than English"	3.39	1	3.31	1.04
6. "Learning English is a waste of time"	2.07	1.23	2.04	1.14
7. "I think the process of learning English is dull"	3.95	1.21	3.45	0.91
8. "When I leave college, I shall give up the study of English as I am not interested"	2.59	1.49	2.08	1.31
9. "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our English class"	3.03	1.34	2.57	1.24
10. "I never feel quite sure when I speak in English class"	3.12	1.15	2.77	1.15
11. "I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do"	3.41	1.11	3.24	1.07
12. "I get nervous and confused when I speak in English class"	3.31	1.12	2.98	0.94
13. "I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English"	2.9	1.35	2.44	1.24

Items 1 to 8 focus on student perception of English language learning. For instance, Item 1 looks at the employability aspect of language learning and mean score of 4.32 and 4.41 pre-intervention and post-intervention respectively indicate positive or favorable responses. However, standard deviation (SD) of 1.1 suggests variability in responses. In terms of pedagogy, students in pre-intervention rated the process of language learning as dull at 3.95 (SD=1.21) and post-intervention at 3.45 (SD=0.91). The decrease in mean score shows that students do not perceive language learning as passive and dull process post- intervention.

Items 9 to 13 focus on the anxiety levels of students in an English language classroom. There is a considerable decrease in the post-intervention mean score as compared to pre-intervention suggesting that MI- mediated tasks have lowered the anxiety levels of students. The reasons for this decrease in anxiety are further explained in the qualitative analysis under identifiable recurrent themes from semi-structured interviews.

#### Qualitative Insights:

This analysis tries to look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> objective:

2. To examine the effectiveness of MI-mediated tasks on students' attitude and perception of English language learning

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 30 students, who expressed their interest to be part of the interviews, to discuss their experience using MI-mediated tasks to improve their persuasive style

of writing. The questions focused on how MI-mediated tasks changed/ altered students' perception of English language, anxiety levels, challenges they faced while doing these tasks and their experience of using MI material. See Table 2 for sample responses from student interviews. Further, the responses or qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurrent themes (Braun and Clarke).

Table 2. Representative student responses from semi-structured interview

Interview questions	Sample student responses
1. How did MI mediated tasks change/ alter a. Your perception of English language learning b. Anxiety levels	"Now, I know there are many ways of learning something like language. I can learn through music, by doing things etc." "We can learn language (English) in multiple ways" "...language is not just a set of rigid rules, it can be fun learning" "...there are many aspects to learning language, not only grammar... like persuasive skills can help in getting a job and that can be learnt through language" "I can say that my anxiety levels have come down... I am not anxious about making mistakes"
2. What is your take on MI mediated tasks?	"I feel the tasks are interesting, there is something (some element) that appeals all students" "I felt that I could be part of some aspect of the tasks" "...innovative" "...can be adapted according to the requirement(needs).. in classroom..."
3. How did these tasks help you overcome the challenges you faced earlier in English language classroom?	"I feel involved in the class" "Earlier I used not volunteer for many reasons like lack of interest etc. but while doing MI mediated tasks I felt motivated..." "... engaging activities.."
4. How do you describe MI mediated task design/ MI mediated materials?	"I never knew even a news paper article could be used in classroom to teach language" "effective for students with diverse needs..." Innovative
5. What challenges have you faced while using MI mediated tasks in the classroom?	"in the beginning it was difficult to understand the tasks" "... it made us think, demanding"

Three predominant themes have been identified from the analysis of the data from semi-structured interviews: Inclusivity, Pluralization and Individualization of materials, Motivation.

Most of the students felt included as the tasks were flexible and adaptive according to the proclivity of the learner. This in turn fosters student engagement coupled with retention as they are, for example, physically (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence), verbally (linguistic), involved in the tasks. Presenting materials in a multi-faceted way with authentic materials, like news papers, fosters pluralization, as the same content is presented in multiple ways through different intelligences and individualization as the MI mediated materials come with an inherent scope of catering to different intelligence proclivities. Finally, an inclusive learning environment and pluralization of materials boost motivation, confidence and self-esteem of learners thereby decreasing the affective filter.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study examined B.tech students' perception of English language learning in terms of anxiety and motivation and explored how MI-mediated tasks could lower the affective filter and increase motivation level. To this end, MI mediated tasks have been designed and administered in the classroom. It is found through online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews that post-intervention there is an increase in the motivation level of students, positive attitude towards language learning and decrease in anxiety levels. Considering this, it is vital for curriculum developers and instructors to understand the role of individualization and pluralization in creating or designing content that caters to the cognitive ability and experiential learning of students. One of the limitations of the study is that it is cross-sectional although it has a potential and scope of a longitudinal research. Hence, the researcher feels that the study could

be carried out as a longitudinal study, providing scope for further research. Yet another limitation is that the researcher could not investigate and assess the effectiveness of MI-mediated tasks in enhancing persuasive writing skills of students within the scope of this paper.

## SAMPLE PERSUASIVE WRITING TASK

Persuasive style of writing tries to convince the reader of the validity of a certain argument or proposition. It is mostly subjective, colored with individual's opinion, perspective, justification and evidence to support an argument.

The task aims to familiarize students with persuasive style of writing. It focuses on developing the micro and macro skills of writing essential for persuasive style of writing through MI mediated tasks. The tasks are designed eclectically to incorporate various aspects of persuasive style of writing while keeping at core the multiple intelligences approach. The rationale behind using MI mediated tasks is to pluralize the ways in which students can learn a particular aspect of persuasive style of writing in a motivated manner. Also, each task uses a combination of intelligences, not one intelligence in isolation.

As David Nunan mentions in his book, "Task-based Language Teaching" a pedagogical task "is a piece of classroom work that involves learner in comprehending, manipulating producing or interacting in the target language while the attention is focused on mobilizing grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate the form" (p.4). However, he emphasizes that the task should have a sense of completeness with a beginning, middle and an end. This definition also implies that meaning and form are interrelated and grammatical knowledge aids/helps in expressing meaning.

Thus, in the present and subsequent modules, the primary aim of the tasks at hand is

to encourage students to activate a range of micro and macro skills pertaining to that particular style of writing.

#### TASK- 1

##### Objectives

- Aims to make students understand the structure of a persuasive speech
- To recognize rhetorical devices in the speech
- **Outcomes-** The learners will be able to
- Identify the structure of persuasive speeches/ writing
- Use rhetorical devices in persuasive writing

**MI Inputs:** Linguistic, Interpersonal, Musical

##### Task description

**Pre- task:** Learners are made to sit in groups of five, discussing or recalling a situation in life when they had to justify their action and persuade people to understand the validity of their argument. Some of the students can share it with the class and know if their friends have been in similar situations.

Learners listen to a couple of persuasive speeches like "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King. Students need to make a note of phrases that caught their attention, pay attention to the opening statements and structure of the entire speech. Discuss with teammates the observations made.

**While- task:** After discussing, students should move around in the classroom and find a partner (with similar interests) and discuss a problem in their college. Then, they should come up with a persuasive song/slogan together, using the structure, rhetorical devices they have identified from the pre-task persuasive speeches, for the problem they identified.

**Post- task:** Find out three famous speeches that shaped history (for example: Barack Obama's

"Against Going to War with Iraq")

#### TASK-2

##### Objectives

- Aims to develop analytical skills
- **Outcomes-** The learners will be able to
- Logically analyze ideas and place their arguments in a coherent manner.

**MI Inputs:** Linguistic, Interpersonal, logical mathematical, visual spatial

##### Task description

**Pre- task:** Students are given an editorial write up from a newspaper. They should read the article in groups and discuss key points. Then create a flow chart or a mind map linking key ideas or concepts presented in the article. Also, make a list of linking words or words that connect ideas (modal verbs)

**While- task:** After discussing, students should form groups of five. Then, they should imagine themselves as journalists and write an editorial write up about sustenance and global warming/ climate change. They can make use of the flow chart from the pre-task.

**Post- task:** Students are provided editorial write ups from news paper and critically analyze for coherence. The students could also provide rating

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