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Multiple Intelligences of Students with Learning Disabilities :Its Implication for Business Curriculum Development in United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

One of the challenging issues in the educational parlance is learning disabilities. The study was conducted to modify business curriculum for students with in selected learning institutions in United Arab Emirates. Descriptive method/qualitative approach using observation and interview schedule techniques were employed in data gathering and analysis of population (n=125) of which female students comprised of twenty percent (20%) and males were eighty percent (80%). It was observed that one major struggle that learning facilitators had, how to effectively carry out the learning process with meaningful results and keeping in sight the existence of students from different nationalities. The research findings revealed that students needed updated instructional materials and the universities should modify the business curriculum for students with multiple intelligences. Curriculum modification was not limited to instructional modification or content modification but included a continuum of a wide range of modified educational components in business .On the bases of findings and conclusions derived from the study, and in consideration of the limitations of the study, the following were recommended: curriculum development/modification in business courses offerings ,training of personnel, training of faculty needed to have a compulsory component in “teaching and assessing learners with learning challenges ”. Similar in-service training was also needed for the already practicing faculty .Further, there was a clear manifestation of lack of resources in learning institutions where special students were found, modified curriculum and differentiated instruction materials for students’ with multiple intelligences must be introduced.

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1. Introduction

One of the hottest issues in the educational parlance is learning disabilities. The topic has reached to its point on how learning facilitators should deal with students whose learning needs are different from the ordinary learners. Much has been written and said about multiple intelligences, however, educators, psychologists and researchers do not stop in exploring the best possible ways to help the kind of learners develop and unleash their potentials to the optimum level.

In United Arab Emirates (UAE), the home of multinationals and a flourishing nation in the Middle East, issues on learning disabilities are seldom tackled. In the midst of a successful economy lies an integral concern in education which is a considerable number of students have learning challenges. It is a fact that in a nation like UAE whose people work from daylight to sunset and from sunset till dawn, parents have ultimately relied so much on the educational institutions for the learning needs of their children. A problem that is usually faced by the teachers is how to effectively facilitate the class to make it meaningful with due consideration to the different nationalities inside the classroom.

In view of the problem, the researchers were challenged to develop a business curriculum which will fit to the students' needs. The researchers attempted to utilize the Theory of Multiple Intelligences introduced by Dr. Howard Gardner from Harvard University which emerged from recent cognitive research and "documents the extent to which students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways. Students learn in ways that are identifiably distinctive. The broad spectrum of students - and perhaps the society as a whole - would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a numbers of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means."

2. Review of Related Literature

The study was grounded on the theory of Multiple Intelligences developed by Harvard University psychologist Howard Gardner and first appeared in *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. In *Frames of Mind*, Gardner explored the question: "What are the mental abilities that support the wide range of adult roles over time and across culture?" Gardner took a unique approach. Rather than defining intelligence in terms of IQ scores, he offered an alternative view and suggested that intelligence be described as the combination of psychological and biological characteristics that enable individuals to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultures.

Malson, (2005), in her presentation on MI Theory: Multiple Intelligence Theory with Regard to Special Education, she made mention of two researches made related to the topic. She shared that Cobb's multi-site case study using four Miami-Dade County elementary public schools to discover the effect of MI theory in teaching strategies on the reading achievement of fourth grade students, the results showed significant gains in their reading and behavioral skills (2002). Additionally, a qualitative study using the action research approach in the field of science to prove the merit of making science teaching more "meaningful," engage teachers in critical self-reflection, and to study the action research approach, brought positive results (Goodnough, 2000).

A quantitative and qualitative descriptive study by Schirduan and Case (2004) investigated the impact of MI curriculum on students that have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) using the Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scale, the Piers-Harris Children's Concept Scale, and the Teacher Perception of Achievement Level in Students with ADHD Survey to gather information for their study. As a result of this study, the authors maintain that "curriculum leaders need to be mindful of the means by which the learning needs of students with ADHD can be met by a curriculum driven by MI theory."

Rubado (2002) worked with a group of 17 middle school students who were having difficulty learning the general education curriculum and were at risk of failing, but were not being served by the traditional special education program. To meet their needs, she began integrating MI into her instructional practices and found that students naturally began to identify their intelligences. Over the course of the 10-week study, Rubado's students participated in numerous activities intended to foster understanding of intelligence. Other teachers likewise began integrating MI into their instructional practices and found that their students readily began to identify their intelligences in their work. It was found that students, through the process of self-reflection, began to identify their areas of strength in the context of MI and were able to identify which intelligences would enhance their performance. Through the use of a self - evaluation rubric, the students, many of them with special needs, discovered that they were using all the intelligences effectively, depending on the situation and realized that they were better-rounded than they had initially believed (Rubado, 2002). Most importantly, however, the researchers found, that the students realized that there are multiple ways to learn and that they possessed multiple types of academic strengths and life skills.

The theory of MI brings with it many questions as well as the possibility to enlighten people about future growth within education. The current public educational system has long relied on the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, thus leaving out a significant number of students who truly do not learn best by these methods.

3. Methodology

The descriptive method was utilized and the sample size of 125 was conveniently selected from selected learning institutions in United Arab Emirates. The researchers described internal consistency utilizing the Cronbach's alpha to determine the quantitative and verbal interpretation of the data. The responses to the questions were analyzed and interpreted. The respondents composed of twenty percent (20%) females and eighty percent (80%)males were considered as the unit of analysis of the study.

4. Findings/Discussions

Demographic profile of participants in the study showed that only ten percent (10%) of them considered themselves as Naturalist, Musical, Mathematical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Intrapersonal, and Visual in intelligence. The remaining two categories, namely, Linguistics and Interpersonal were even slightly lower in frequency than the first six intelligences. The finding implied that students with learning disabilities viewed themselves low when it came to evaluate their abilities and skills. It was evidenced by literature on characteristics of students who learned differently.

Inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity were common behavioral problems (Inciong, 2006). An enumeration of these learning and behavioral difficulties provided verification that those students be deficient in skills and abilities needed to succeed in school and in the community.

Learning disabilities constituted a heterogeneous set of conditions with no single syndrome or nor a single cause . It was interesting to note, however, the common reasons cited by special education experts as to why children with learning disabilities manifest problems in coping with academic tasks. Taking aside genetic factors, environmental causes take into account inadequate learning experiences that include poor teaching and lack of instructional materials and reinforcing activities to motivate students to learn. This means that using traditional methods in instruction may not worked for students who had individual needs for learning who vary from one child to another.

According to Gardner, within the classroom environment there were many ways to determine a student's intelligence profile but one must be careful not to label students according to the result. Awareness of the intelligence(s) that a student showed strength should be used as a tool to help teachers on his/her teaching strategy. The intelligence strength and weakness could shift, grow, and vary over time and both the students and the teacher needed to accept and change accordingly. Gardner had opened up the entire realm of intelligence through his research and has allowed educators to question the notion of intelligence.

Although the theory of MI was a not an ultimate solution for educational weakness yet was one of considerations especially for those students with learning disabilities. Gardner himself did not see the theory of MI as a program that will lead to the development of a certain kind of person but rather as a description of how one's mind works.

On the demographic profile of students with learning disabilities when taken as a whole showed that in almost all the categories which include Naturalist, Musical, Mathematical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Intrapersonal and Visual Intelligences, only ten percent (10%) of the participants responded with a “Yes,” while Interpersonal and Linguistic intelligences were found the lowest among the categories, with only 9.84% and 9.76% of the students who answered Yes to the questions, respectively.

Many times they had giftedness or talent within an area that may or may not be detected with conventional assessment tools (Wagmeister et al., 2000). Strength could be evident in how the student survived a typical day in school or his/her particular expertise could come through in non-academic subjects.

5. Summary and Conclusion

Multiple Intelligences(MI) theory had some very important implications for both teachers and students. The teaching styles and strategies should suit students’ diverse abilities and attitudes. Multiple Intelligence Theory provided teachers with interesting styles that can be used for different students in different lessons.

Students with learning disabilities had special abilities that did not emerge in the traditional educational system. By using Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences(MI) as basis for a curriculum in the classroom, students will be able to display their strengths and interests.

MI had broad implications for special education. Because MI focused on a wide spectrum of abilities, it helped place “special needs” in a broader context. Rather than accepting what he was called the “deficit paradigm” which depends on labels, or can be viewed as a medical model, a growth paradigm would be more appropriate for students with special needs. Educators who viewed special needs in the context of the eight intelligences viewed all those students differently. “Using MI as a backdrop, educators can begin to perceive children with special needs as whole persons possessing strengths in many areas” (Armstrong, 2000). The best learning opportunities are those that are most successful for all students. What may need emphasis, however, is the way in which lessons are specifically tailored to the needs of individual students or small groups of students. An MI business curriculum development not only provided teachers with ways to personalize education for students, it could also helped to cultivate a passion for life and career goals.

Finally, based on the results of the study the following conclusions were drawn: Students with learning disabilities manifested lack or deficiency in rating themselves with regards to varied skills and abilities that comprise the multiple intelligences proposed in the MI theory of Gardner.

The lack of skills and abilities may stem from many factors, including those that characterized learning disability and can as well be attributed to learning and teaching strategies employed by teachers in schools that ultimately result to lack of motivation, trainings and coping skills in academic tasks.

Therefore, there was an emerging need for an educational system to review its curricular programs and practices in relation to how effectively those practices affected student motivation to learn and cope with academic tasks.

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