

REINTEGRATION OF SRI LANKAN EDUCATION THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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1. Abstract

For many decades, Sri Lankan education system was long shaped by colonial traditions and centralized pedagogical norms. It has obstructed the holistic development of a dignified human person due to its' structural lapses and exam oriented pedagogy. Current adversities in our education system can be enumerated as **overemphasis on exams, curriculum misalignment, limited evaluation methods, outdated teacher training, neglect of vocational education and disparity in educational opportunities**. It is clear that current education system focuses only on Mathematical/logical and linguistic intelligences which undermines the unique capacities of a vast majority. Therefore, this paper studies the application of Multiple Intelligences Theory in order to re-envision the educational reforms. MI Theory would provide an all-inclusive framework to identify each student's uniqueness and facilitate the educators bring educational reforms which resonate the educational principles articulated in UNESCO.

KEY WORDS: Multiple Intelligence, Education System, Educators, Academic Performance, Students

2. Introduction

World is filled with different types of people and they have different intellectual competencies. Almost all the children in the world are born to the world with some unique set of talents. The current Sri Lankan educational framework has failed in identifying different types of intelligences because of its focus on rote learning and rigid examination-centric system. In this traditional education system, recognition of child's inherent talents is not considered as an important area. Educational journey in our country begins with the presumption that all the children have the same set of intellectual abilities. Our instruction method is mostly a teacher-centered one. With many structural inequalities, Sri Lankan education tries to pump more and more facts which appeals only to mathematical and linguistic intelligences. Moreover, the students have to face a very narrow type of evaluation system which is exam-oriented pedagogy. Above situation in Sri Lankan Education, not only hinders the holistic development of students, but also degrades the dignity of the human person. Final consequences of this educational process are the unemployed youth who haven't recognized their skills, employees with low productivity joining the public sector and waste of the manifold resources of the country.

Therefore, this paper tries to identify the current adversities in our education system and what are the possible solutions to them. This paper posits that Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) Theory offers a transformative paradigm to address these systemic issues, fostering an educational environment that values and nurtures every student's unique potential,

thereby upholding their inherent dignity. Integrating MI theory into classroom practices, selection of subjects from middle school, teacher training and parental guidance would create a path for a dignity based educational policy rooted in justice. This kind of reform would not only enhance future career achievement, but also form well rounded and capable individuals who can meaningfully contribute to Sri Lankan society.

3. The current adversities in Sri Lankan education system

Sri Lanka was proud to have satisfactory educational indicators of 95.6 % literacy rate and around 93.3 % enrolment in primary education. However, are these indicators sufficient to be happy about our education? It is a notable fact that there are a large number of students who are leaving school even without O/L qualifications. Especially, in the countryside and estate sector children leave school so early without facing the examinations. For decades, there were no palpable solutions to the plight of such students and the governments have failed to introduce appropriate modifications to education system. From the Colonial times the structures, teaching/ learning processes and assessment procedure has remained more or less similar. There is a significant mismatch between the system of imparting education and the requirements of the present day world of work. This process affects the self-image of the students who are poorly ranked in examinations.

As we focus on the current adversities of Sri Lankan education system, there are a big number of them. However, we can enumerate the main adversities as follows:

3.1 Overemphasis on Exams:

Sri Lankan education system heavily emphasizes on the competitive examinations, especially on Grade 5 Scholarship, GCE O/L and A/L exams. This leads to rote memorization and neglects creativity, emotional intelligence and practical skills. The creativity which was there in the child during his or her primary grades, slowly fades away with the exam mentality.

3.2 Curriculum Misalignment:

Present curricula give only theoretical knowledge and misses the practical aspect. As a result, students who come out of schools face the challenges of unemployment or underemployment. Particularly, most of the students who study arts subjects for A/Ls and arts graduates do not possess the skills needed for the present day labour market.

3.3 Limited Evaluation Methods:

Sri Lankan examination system is over dependent on the traditional written tests. Evaluation in school is very narrowly focused on the ability of students to memorize and reproduce the content at exams. As a result, there is no room for competencies like soft skills and creativity. As a result, the children who are gifted with artistic, musical, technical or interpersonal skills are undervalued.

3.4 Outdated Teacher Training:

Another continuous challenge faced by our education system is the outdated nature of teacher training methods. Most of the teachers lack updated modern training and their professional development opportunities are limited. We can very scarcely find training

programmes on critical thinking, digital literacy and cross cultural learning. This situation makes our teachers ill-equipped to handle diverse student needs. Ultimately, the above said situation leads to an unproductive and dissatisfied teaching service.

3.5 Neglect of Vocational Education:

Now only we can see the entrance of vocational education into education system. For a long time, traditional approach of rote learning was prioritized in O/L and A/L examinations. Finally, vocational training was perceived as the last resort for the students who are not academically capable. As a result, many school leavers found themselves unprepared to enter into the corporate world. Such an atmosphere paved the way for higher rates of youth unemployment and underemployment. Negligence of vocational training in schools, has paved the way for many citizens to lose the meaning and purpose of their lives.

3.6 Disparity in Educational Opportunities:

The schools maintained by the government are mainly categorized into two. There are National Schools which are mostly located in urban areas and also there are Provincial Schools which are typically situated in rural areas. The National Schools receive more government funding and they have better facilities and recruit highly qualified teachers which paves the way for better academic performance. On the other hand, Rural and estate sectors suffer from poor infrastructure, limited resources and lack of qualified teachers.

4. Theory of Multiple Intelligences

In 1983, American psychologist Howard Gardner proposed that intelligence is not a singular entity, but it comprises of a spectrum of capacities. Gardner identified nine key intelligences that human beings possess. They are Linguistic Intelligence, Logical/ Mathematical Intelligence, Musical Intelligence, Bodily/ Kinesthetic Intelligence, Visual/Spatial Intelligence, Interpersonal Intelligence, Intra-personal Intelligence, Naturalistic Intelligence and Existential Intelligence. First eight of the multiple intelligences have usually been being studied especially in educational fields whereas the existential intelligence has not attracted much attention.

Some people have many forms of intelligences and they all remain equally strong. But most people have a varying set of intelligences but the level of such intelligences also differs from person to person. According to Gardner, they have different mindsets and they learn, understand and perform in different ways. Therefore, teachers and educationalists should be able to identify those intelligence types in students, bring out their skills, guide and direct their students so that they may find out the most appropriate career opportunities for them.

Next, it is advisable to have a clear knowledge about the types of intelligences, their characteristics and how to harness those capacities in school education.

4.1 Linguistic Intelligence:

Linguistic Intelligence is the ability to think in words and use language to express complex meanings. Such students use words well in both writing and speaking. These students have a broad vocabulary and they are interested in language subjects. They are good at reading, public speaking, memorizing and explaining things. They have the potential of becoming teachers, lecturers, authors, journalists and lawyers. William Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln

and Oprah Winfrey are renowned characters who displayed a high level of emotional intelligence.

4.2 Logical/ Mathematical Intelligence:

Mathematical Intelligence can be defined as the ability to think conceptually and abstractly. In other words, it is the intelligence to discern logical and numerical patterns. Students with mathematical intelligence are capable of reasoning and doing complex calculations. Exceptional problem solving skills, desire to conduct scientific experiments and thinking about abstract ideas are some unique characteristics of children gifted with logical and mathematical intelligence. For them, potential career options are Scientists, Mathematicians, Engineers, Computer programmers, Software engineers and Accountants. Sir Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein and Bill Gates are some famous examples for this type of intelligence.

4.3 Visual/Spatial Intelligence:

This is the ability to form mental patterns and to observe the world in different dimensions. Students with spatial intelligence can visualize the space with their minds. They have the mental capability to solve spatial problems of navigation. Their characteristics are identifying directions, interpreting maps, charts and graphs. They can analyze, understand, store and recall visual information well. These students observe the world in different angles and dimensions. They have the career opportunities to be architects, engineers, planners, pilots, sailors or artists. Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo Galilei and Stephen Spielberg are the counted as personalities with great visual intelligence.

4.4 Bodily/ Kinesthetic Intelligence:

Kinesthetic Intelligence can be defined as the capacity to manipulate objects or excellent use of physical skills. Those gifted with Kinesthetic intelligence use their bodily organs very efficiently to perform various activities like sports, swimming, dancing, acting and creating things with hands. Such students have great mind and body coordination. Since they are good in motor skills, they remember something by doing rather than listening. Potential career choices for children with bodily intelligence are professional athletes, dancers, coaches, craftsmen, builders and constructors. Kumar Sangakkara, Cristiano Ronaldo, Michael Jordan and Michael Jackson are few world famous examples for bodily intelligence.

4.5 Musical Intelligence:

The ability to perform, compose or appreciate music is called Musical Intelligence. Such children are competent in identifying musical patterns, pitches, beats and rhythms. In every school, there are students who can remember songs and melodies than other subject matters. They enjoy singing or playing musical instruments. If they recognize that they are gifted, they would compose new music by synchronizing notes and patterns. They have the potential to become musicians, singers, rappers, DJ artists, music teachers or choir/orchestra conductors. Renowned personalities with musical intelligence are Beethoven, A.R. Rahaman and Eminem.

4.6 Interpersonal Intelligence:

Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand and interact with people well. Children endowed with interpersonal intelligence are talented in assessing emotions, desires and intentions of those around them. They display excellent social and communication skills. Assessing emotions, desires and intentions of others are the special talent of individuals with interpersonal intelligence. They can resolve problems within groups. Through their effective verbal and non-verbal communication, they become natural leaders. They have prospects of becoming psychologists, counsellors, sales persons, social workers, politicians or actors. Few unforgettable personalities with interpersonal intelligence are Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa.

4.7 Intra-personal Intelligence:

The ability to reflect on own emotions and guide their own behavioral pattern is called intra-personal intelligence. Such children have the capacity to understand oneself, their own feelings and emotions. Moreover, they enjoy self-analysis, day dreaming and exploring relationships. Since, they have an exceptional self-awareness, they can analyze their strengths and weaknesses. These students enjoy analyzing theories and ideas. Potential career choices for this type of intelligence are philosophers, theorists, psychologists, writers or novelists. Aristotle, Sigmund Freud and J. K. Rowling are few renowned personalities with exceptional intra-personal intelligence.

4.8 Naturalistic Intelligence:

Naturalistic intelligence can be interpreted as the ability to identify different plants, animals and weather formations. Such children are more in tune with nature and highly aware of the subtle changes in environment. Their special characteristics are finding patterns in nature, interest in camping, gardening, hiking and exploring outdoors. Most of such students like to learn more about flora and fauna. Botany, Biology and Zoology are their preferred subjects. Potential career choices for such students are botanists, biologists, zoologists, veterinarians or environmentalists. Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace and Antonie Van Leeuwenhoek are famous people endowed with naturalistic intelligence.

5 Application of Multiple Intelligence Theory to address Educational Adversities in Sri Lanka

It is a fact that our education system has failed to identify and accommodate the wide range of human capacities. Reintegration of Sri Lankan education system with the use of MI theory is not only a pedagogical shift but it is also an effort to embrace the full spectrum of human intelligence.

In honouring the different types of intelligences, Sri Lankan education can move towards its true aim of upholding the dignity of every human person and empowering the student body to contribute productively to the Sri Lankan economy. With the correct use of MI Theory and practical education reforms, the educators can validate the different capacities in students and foster inclusive and a dignity-centred learning. Now, let us explore how each intelligence type can be strategically applied in the schools.

5.1 Linguistic Intelligence: Communication skills beyond rote learning

Our examinations focus mainly on language proficiency and it limits the linguistic intelligence to rote memorization and textbook based learning. Instead the teachers are to reinvigorate linguistic intelligence by promoting storytelling, debates, creative writing and drama performances. Moreover, the students must be encouraged to perform podcasts and maintain journals on studied lessons. Planners in education are to integrate parables, folk tales and bilingual reading programmes into the lessons. Promotion of multilingualism would help bridging between communities.

5.2 Logical/ Mathematical Intelligence: Moving beyond calculations to critical thinking

In Sri Lanka, mathematics and science dominate the curriculum and learning these subjects depends on repetition or formula memorization. These subjects are often taught in isolation from real world circumstances. This type of intelligence can be deepened through use of project based learning to solve community problems. Critical thinking in children can be developed by using logic puzzles, computer coding, robotics and scientific inquiry in primary grades. Teachers must be competent to connect mathematical and logical patterns to nature and architecture. Allowing teen students to calculate their family budgets and analyzing agricultural patterns drive them towards problem solving based learning.

5.3 Visual/Spatial Intelligence: Designing with meaning

Most of the Sri Lankan classrooms do not use visual aids. As a result, students with visual/spatial intelligence are overlooked. Introduction of visual aids, maps, diagrams and digital tools into mainstream subjects would help empowering such students. Allowing students to engage in arts, paintings, murals and collages would further sharpen their visual skills. In early teenage such students can be encouraged to engage in multimedia activities like producing photos, videos and short films. In higher grades, such students are to be introduced to new architectural projects, multimedia production industry, interior and exterior designing. In this manner, identifying the spatial intelligence ensures that students who think visually are empowered.

5.4 Bodily/ Kinesthetic Intelligence: Value of hands-on learning

In our schools, physical intelligence is often confined to sports, neglecting the capacity to use human body to solve problems and create things. In order to improve bodily intelligence, use of Legos and clay modeling can be introduced in early stages of schooling. Further, the educators can introduce drama, role-play and dance into the teaching of History, Ethics and Literature. Hands on learning in science labs, agriculture and crafts would be made possible by improving the infrastructure in distant schools. It is a praiseworthy effort that recently Vocational Training stream was introduced to Advanced Level and our schools would be able to introduce students to agriculture, carpentry, mechanics and hospitality. Linking sports with leadership and teamwork development programmes may help student athletes to groom themselves into the future world.

5.5 Musical Intelligence: Using rhythm for cognitive growth

Although music is very much rooted into Sri Lankan culture, it remains distant in our schools. In applying MI theory, teachers can utilize rhythms, beats and songs to teach

history, languages and science. Musical techniques can be used to remember certain long list of facts. Especially in the middle school, students are to be encouraged to music composition and musical storytelling. Moreover, Music Therapy or mindfulness through music can be introduced into our education. Beyond the classroom, choirs, orchestras and school bands can foster discipline and collaboration. Usage of music and rhythm nurtures emotional intelligence and makes children more sensitive human persons.

5.6 Interpersonal Intelligence: Building of social harmony

Today Sri Lankan schools have become venues of competition rather than collaboration. So as to foster interpersonal intelligence, educators can use cooperative learning strategies, peer teaching and structured class discussions. Since Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country, during religion and ethical studies, students are to be taught about conflict resolution and empathy. At least once a year community and service projects are to be implemented so that children may engage with elders, differently-abled people, orphan children and rural communities. Our students must be given opportunity to create academic clubs and engage in peer tutoring. Likewise, we can transform our classrooms into communities of care and it would motivate them to be leaders, motivators, counsellors and social workers.

5.7 Intrapersonal Intelligence: Cultivating self-awareness

In our classrooms rarely receive opportunities to reflect about their inner lives. In such a manner emotional intelligence is overlooked, it leads to anxiety and distress. Therefore, MI based methodology suggests journaling, meditation and reflective exercises in classrooms. Introducing mindfulness practices rooted in local practices would help students to experience mindfulness in school. In the Advanced Level classes, career guidance counselling would help them to set up their personal goals. Such practices would drive them to explore their true identity, purpose and vocation. Ultimately, this would affirm each student's inner journey and protect their dignity.

5.8 Naturalistic Intelligence: Reconnecting with environment

As a South Asian country Sri Lanka battles with climate change. Therefore, development of naturalistic intelligence is of vital importance for our sustainable living. Within the school system, nature walks, gardening and environmental stewardship are to be introduced as a part of science subject. Moreover, local ecosystem and indigenous knowledge must be used in teaching subjects like biology and geography. Especially, indigenous farming knowledge and herbal medicine can be utilized with this regard. Establishing eco clubs, School botanical gardens and recycling projects would also be useful to the students. Particularly, the livelihood of students in rural areas can be empowered if we properly harness naturalistic intelligence within them.

6. A Roadmap for Education Reforms

6.1 Reforming the school curriculum and pedagogy

First and foremost, Sri Lanka should shift from the heavy content syllabus. Instead the curriculum should be redesigned in a way the students can understand the multiple pathways in education. With this regard, teachers must be trained to teach using different methods like project- based learning, hands-on activities and group assignments rather than the monotonous teaching of textbooks. For an example when a history lesson is completed students are to be given options to choose their project or assignment. Then, students with linguistic intelligence may compose a booklet, those with mathematical intelligence may create a timeline chart, students with bodily intelligence would perform a drama and students with spatial intelligence may build a diorama of historical events.

6.2 A Change in Assessments

Prevailing examination system is a major block in measuring the real intelligence levels of the students. The educators should develop methodologies that measure creativity, collaboration, innovation and problem solving skill alongside the academic knowledge. Written tests should not be the only evaluation tool. In order to assess a student's worth, different evaluation methods such as performance-based activities, portfolios, self-reflections, peer evaluations and experiments can be used. If proper assessment systems are implemented, it would reveal diverse and unique talents of most of the students and the education system will be able to produce more productive citizens

6.3 Updated and Professional Teacher Training

Training of educators in MI strategy includes differentiated teaching methods, project or module based learning and equipping teachers with modern technology. The most important thing is allowing teachers to understand types of intelligences and they are to be trained how to identify different intelligences in students from their younger days. Teachers should be taught how to create multi- modal lesson plans and implement alternative assessment methods. Special file should be maintained by class teachers which carries report of yearly remarks and displays the prominent intelligence types of each student. These reports are to be studied by the class and subject teachers who receive the new batch of students every year. Regular professional development programmes and workshops are needed to update the teachers with new global developments un education sector.

6.4 Overcoming the Disparities

There is clear disparity in the distribution of resources in our education system. There is a lack of most of the resources in rural schools. In implementing MI Theory these issues can be reduced. The educational authorities must ensure that the rural schools are equipped at least with the most needed facilities such as computer and science labs. Apart from that, the educators must be wise enough to capitalize on the best intelligence types which can be harnessed in each area. A rural school which may not have advanced technology can make use of the natural surroundings in the area and foster more naturalistic intelligence. In certain areas, teachers can make use of community resources like farmers, local

musicians and craftsmen to develop naturalistic, musical and kinesthetic intelligences. Allowing the students to support in problem solving within the local communities and engage in charity projects in the area would improve their interpersonal intelligence. Therefore, this approach can bring about a more productive model of education.

7. Conclusion: A Holistic Vision for Sri Lankan Education

The reintegration of Sri Lankan education through Multiple Intelligences Theory is an effort to embrace the full spectrum of human intelligence. Implementation of MI Theory helps in overcoming the educational adversities in Sri Lanka to a greater extent. This approach further affirms different ways students can grow and express their full potential. By creating this system, the educators are able to uplift every student with his/ her inherent skills and uphold the dignity of every human person. Training our teachers and educators along these reforms, they may understand that education is sacred vocation which protects the human dignity and builds a society based on equality and justice.

It is crystal clear that adopting MI theory would change the culture of learning. It would move the focus of the society from “what is your grade?” to “what are your strengths?” Moreover, this attempt would foster a positive mindset, where students understand that intelligence is not fixed, but can be improved over time. These reformatations are very important in reducing the academic pressure faced by many students. Ultimately, education based on MI theory would create more confident and well-rounded human persons in our society. Therefore, reintegration of Sri Lankan education through the application of MI theory is a decisive factor in uplifting the dignity of the citizens of Sri Lanka.

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