

# Using musical intelligence based techniques to coach young ESL learners in acquiring grammar

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**Abstract**— *Despite the facilities provided by the Sri Lankan Government, the students in most of the rural schools are not motivated to learn English due to various reasons. On the basis of this premise, this research explored the effectiveness of using techniques using Musical Intelligence, a component of Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory, to teach past passive forms to a group of 30 students in H/ Janananda K/Vidyalaya, Ridiyagama. The methodology of this action research involved tools of collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data: a pre-test, post-test, questionnaire (multiple intelligence test) and informal interviews conducted with a selected group of students. The pre-test was conducted to measure the students’ existing proficiency in using simple past passive forms in writing sentences. All the 30 students scored 0 marks in the pre-test, so they were considered as beginners of learning passive forms. Thereafter, a questionnaire was distributed to identify the levels of musical intelligence of the students. After they were taught past passive forms using two activities based on Musical Intelligence, a post-test was conducted to measure the students’ achievement. The results appeared positive in many respects. The informal interviews conducted with the selected students revealed that they enjoyed learning passive forms while singing and acting out the given song. Thereby it could be established that using activities that are applicable to students’ visual and spatial intelligence was effective in making a stress-free environment in the classroom. It also motivated the students to engage in the activities with fun. Further, they also practiced the target language forms in a meaningful context. The future researchers can further study its effectiveness in teaching other language forms of English.*

**Keywords**— **Multiple Intelligence Theory, Musical Intelligence**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learning English has been made compulsory for all students from Grade 3 to Grade 12 in Sri Lankan schools. Since 1950s, teaching English has been a major educational policy of successive governments in Sri Lanka (Karunaratne, 1993). Recently the Government has promoted several schemes such as “English as a Life-Skill” in order to develop English

language proficiency of students. It is noteworthy that Sri Lanka owes a free education system and the average teacher to pupil ratios is one to twenty. Further, the basic literacy rate is 91.2% (Wijeratna, 2009). Thus, these facts claim an excellent education standard compared with many developing countries. However, such high rates do not really depict the reality of rural schools in the country where resources of education are not homogeneously distributed.

“English Language Teaching (ELT) is still in the doldrums and looks likely to remain there for the foreseeable future” (King, 2006). Students in rural Sri Lanka encounter many difficulties in learning English. On the other hand, there is a diversity of the standards of English language proficiency between urban and rural students. The problems prevailing in both learning and teaching English in the country are visible from the fact that in 2010, 33.87% of students in Hambanthota District received pass grades in the English language paper of G.C.E (Ordinary Level) examination. There are several problems in English language teaching in rural schools: lack of experienced teachers, resources and facilities. Further, the environment where the schools are located and poverty influence their proficiency in English.

H/ Janananda K/V is one of the unprivileged rural schools in Hambanthota District. It is situated in a village called Ridiyagama, 9 km away from Ambalanthota town. It has 167 students and 2 English teachers. Most of them are from families of low income. Despite the facilities provided by the Government, still the English education in the school is not effective and the students are not motivated enough to learn English due to various factors such as lack of interest, attention and participation in classroom activities. They also avoid doing homework regularly. Some students cannot comprehend and respond to the instructions since their level of comprehension is low. The students of this particular school are not exposed to English Language. Further, they are not encouraged to learn English by their families. Most of the parents have a low level of education and they are either farmers or laborers. Besides, the students do not find why they should learn English. To motivate the students there should be an effective strategy, and the teachers have to make lessons more attractive and appealing to different intelligences of students. Including multiple activities that appeal to

different intelligences is of vital importance. However, the traditional teacher-centered approach only provides much attention on developing linguistic intelligence of the students, and it is not adequate to produce motivated learners in the selected school.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies in the field of Second Language teaching have been conducted to explore various teaching methodologies to make second language teaching successful. In that regard, learning strategies play an important role in Psycholinguistics. Multiple Intelligence Theory (MIT) is a concept introduced by Howard Gardner, a psychologist in his book, *Frames of Mind* (1983). He claims that humans do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of intelligences (Gardner, 1983). He listed seven intelligences: musical/rhythmic, verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial/bodily-kinesthetic, logical/mathematical and intrapersonal / interpersonal. According to Gardner, most of the learners have all of these intelligences, but in each person one or more of them is more pronounced (Gardner, *ibid*).

Sensitivity to sounds, rhythms, tones and music is called Musical Intelligence. This includes a strong auditory component. People who have musical intelligence have a good pitch and the ability to play musical instruments and compose music. They are even good at learning languages through music such as songs. Composers, writers, orators, DJs and singers have musical intelligence at a great level.

Music can be used as an effective tool to motivate learners who are fed up in learning English with the use of pen and paper only. In this study, Musical Intelligence was used to teach both present and past tense passive forms in order to measure the effectiveness of using music in teaching grammar. Young learners like songs that include English 'raps' even though they are unaware of the meaning of them (Kothalawala, 2004). In this particular activity, the students had to sing song with actions following the teacher. They used both musical as well as bodily-kinesthetic Intelligence.

### A. The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study includes the fact that the traditional teacher centered approach only provides much attention on developing linguistic intelligence of the students, and it is not adequate to produce motivated language learner in the selected school. Hence, Sri Lankan curriculum designers should make attempts to include grammar lessons based on Musical Intelligence.

### B. Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research is Musical Intelligence Based Techniques are effective tools that should be used to teach past passive forms to rural students who are unmotivated in learning English.

### C. Objectives

1. Measuring the students' competence in using past passive forms of English
2. Exploring the effectiveness of the activities based on Musical Intelligence to teach past passive Forms of English

## III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach includes an experiment that consist these four tools.

- MI Test
- Pre test
- Intervention (the song used)
- Post test

Further, informal interviews conducted with the English teacher and students and classroom observations were included in the qualitative approach.

### A. Participants

The sample includes 30 students studied in Grade 7 in *H/Janananda K/Vidyalaya, Ridiyagama* in Hambanthota. Majority of students were at pre-intermediate level of English, and few students were beginners.

### B. Pre-test

A pre-test was used to measure the students' existing proficiency in using simple past passive forms. The test was designed as a writing test that included 6 sentences in active voice. The students had to change the sentence to passive voice. The duration of the test was 30 minutes. The sub skills of using passive forms measured in this were the ability to use the correct past participle form, the subject and object of a sentence and the use of auxiliary forms.

### C. Multiple Intelligence Test

A Multiple Intelligence Test (MT test) was conducted to measure the intelligence levels of students. The questionnaire which was designed by Chrislet and Chapman was used in this study. The students' responses were collected using a questionnaire and the intelligence profiles for each student were created. The number of students who possessed each category of intelligence and the preferred methods of leaning were identified.

### D. Intervention

The intervention of this study includes a lesson based on musical intelligence. In the first stage of the lesson the past tense passive forms were introduced. In the second stage the students recited the poem with action which enabled them to internalize the forms and meaning. In the 3rd stage of the lesson they had to add one verse to the poem. Finally, the students wrote a similar poem about a happy teddy bear. This poem can be used to show how the doer becomes less important and the action becomes

more important in passive voice. This song was drilled with actions for two weeks at the beginning of each English period by the students.

The Poor Teddy

*I am the poor teddy of a naughty baby*

*Running away from his home.....*

*I want to tell you that*

*I'm so sad*

*....I just say what he did to me.....*

*I was squeezed*

*I was slapped*

*I was knocked on my head*

*I was pulled*

*I was dragged*

*I was kicked on my back*

*I was pinched*

*I was bitten*

*I was smashed on the floor*

*I was never cuddled*

*I was never kissed*

*That's what he did to me.*

by Thamara Kothalawala

*E. Post Test*

A post test was conducted to measure the achievement of the selected students in their ability of using past passive forms. It included 5 sentences written in active voice. The students had to change them in to simple past passive forms.

IV. RESULTS

*A. Results of the MI Test*

This graph depicts the results of the Multiple Intelligence Test (MI Test). It shows the intelligence profiles of 6 students only.

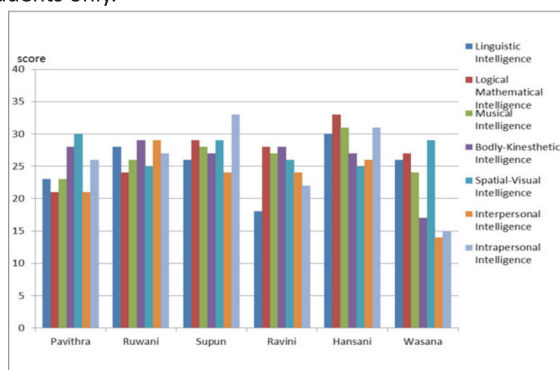


Fig 1. Intelligence Profiles of 6 Students

According to *Figure 1*, majority of the students had a high level of one or two intelligences, but one type of intelligence always surpassed the other intelligences. According to the data, the students had individual differences in intelligences. The students had a high level of musical intelligence.

*B. Results of the Pre Test*

All the thirty students of the sample scored 0 marks in the pre-test. Thus, they can be considered as beginners of learning passive forms. Students were unable to find the subject and object of the given sentences. Further, they were unable to use appropriate past participle forms. They were not aware of the appropriate forms and their use. Besides, they were unaware of the subject and verb combination of the passive forms.

The song was drilled within two weeks at the beginning of each English period, and after a week a post test was conducted.

*C. Results of the Post Test*

The post test was designed to measure the achievement of the selected students in their ability of using the past passive forms. The scores achieved by the sample of 30 students are shown in the following table. According to the Table 1, 21 students scored above 3 marks.

Marks-Out of 5	Number of Students
5	5
4	8
3	8
2	2
1	2
Total-5	Total-30

Table1. Marks Obtained by the Students in the Post Test

V. DISCUSSION

The students produced accurate passive sentences as they had internalized the structure of passive forms in the drill. The following are some passive sentences produced by them.

1. The eyes were pulled.
2. The legs were broken
3. I was never protected.
4. I was blamed.
5. I was hit.
6. I am treated.
7. I am protected.
8. I am washed and cleaned.

The results scored at the post-test depict that majority of the students had learnt how to use simple past passive

forms. The lessons which were used to develop their motivation and proficiency in passive forms are effective.

Students easily learn passive forms when they are presented in songs that can be practiced in the class as a drill. Fawn Whittaker (1981) in her article singing in ESL with Songs for the Grammar Class outlines the use of music that facilitates learning. She asserts that songs aid in all four major language-learning areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Further, in this activity, the students were taught how the doer becomes less important and the action becomes more important in passive voice. The song was used as a drill. The aim of a language practicing drill is to train learners to talk and master the basic structural patterns of the target language. Sometimes drill practicing is negatively criticized as they are 'meaningless' to students. However, this particular target group of students, who were weak in constructing passive forms, was trained in using the past passive forms with the use of a drill. Whittaker (1981) who integrated songs into teaching or reviewing grammar claims that a song can be used as an introduction to a drill, or perhaps in place of the drill. "Music will provide a break from class, so necessary when the primary method is drilling, and the students would have opportunity to learn patterns through memorizing the lyrics, perhaps without even noticing it" (cited in Stansell, 2005).

It is highly productive and effective in letting the students engaged in the activity with fun. They also practiced the target language forms in a meaningful context. It also helped to produce a creative teacher who is equipped with attractive activities in his or her teaching store.

The informal interviews conducted with the selected students revealed that they enjoyed by singing and acting and they found learning passive forms as an enjoyable task. Therefore, the activity was effective in making a stress free environment in the classroom. The theme of the song was on toys that resulted in the students feeling free to come out with their own experience of toys. As a student commented, "That's what my baby brother does to his doll".

## VI. CONCLUSION

Multiple Intelligence theory opens the doors to a variety of innovative teaching strategies, which can easily be applied in the English language classroom in which learners are less motivated.

The active engagement of learners makes them responsible for their own learning. The teachers only create an effective learning environment with the use of Musical Intelligence teaching techniques. Therefore, the results of this study can be used by English language practitioners of Sri Lanka to teach grammar through musical intelligence based activities. Also, the Sri Lankan curriculum designers should make attempts to include grammar lessons based

on musical intelligence. The future researchers can explore the new dimensions of using musical intelligence to teach English language.

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