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Mapping the Multiple Intelligence Profiles of EFL Teachers and Their Alignment with Instructional Practices: Evidence from Baghdad Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed 120 EFL teachers from 24 public elementary schools in Baghdad using the Multiple Intelligence Inventory for Teachers (MIIT), a 45-item Instructional Practice Questionnaire (IPQ), and a structured classroom observation protocol. Descriptive statistics revealed that interpersonal intelligence was the most dominant profile in the sample ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.61$), followed by linguistic ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.64$) and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.68$), while naturalistic ($M = 2.68$) and logical-mathematical ($M = 2.79$) intelligences were the least developed. These patterns are consistent with the relational, physical, and communicative demands of elementary English language instruction, and depart meaningfully from MI profiles reported for Iraqi university-level EFL teachers. Correlation analyses demonstrated significant positive associations between teachers' dominant intelligence profiles and corresponding instructional strategies. These findings carry important implications for MI-informed teacher preparation, in-service professional development, and curriculum design in Iraq's elementary EFL sector.

Keywords: multiple intelligences, instructional practices

رسم خرائط لملامح الذكاءات المتعددة لدى معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ومدى توافقها مع الممارسات التعليمية: أدلة من مدارس بغداد الابتدائية

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المُستخلص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً نقدياً معرفياً استكشافياً لمجموعة من النصوص الحكومية البريطانية المختارة حول تقنية التعرف على الوجوه الحية. وتهدف الدراسة لتغطية فجوة في الأدبيات فيما يتعلق بأنواع الاستراتيجيات المعرفية المستخدمة في الخطاب الرسمي للحكومة لإضفاء الشرعية على تقنية الوجوه الحية والتلاعب بالرأي العام. ولتحقيق هذا الغرض، تقوم الدراسة بتحليل ثلاث مقالات من إنتاج مؤسسات رسمية في الحكومة البريطانية. تتبنى الدراسة المربع الأيديولوجي لفان دايك (1998) للتحليل على المستوى الكلي والنماذج المعرفية المثالية للاكوف (1987) للتحليل على المستوى الجزئي. تتبع الدراسة تحليلاً نوعياً مع تحليل كمي محدود لحساب التكرار الحاصل في الاستراتيجيات المعرفية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن مخططات التصور، والاستعارات، والمجازات المرسلة هي الأكثر استخداماً في خطاب الحكومة البريطانية في المتن المدروس. تبرز النتائج أهمية تعزيز الوعي النقدي في كيفية استخدام اللغة لإضفاء الشرعية على المراقبة، بما يمكن العامة، والإعلام، وصناع القرار من التعامل بوعي أكبر مع الخطاب الحكومي في هذا السياق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاءات المتعددة، الممارسات التعليمية

1. Introduction

The instruction of young learners is one of the most demanding types of professional practice in terms of cognitive and emotional resources. At the elementary level of EFL education, the teacher also functions as a language model, a motivational architect, a classroom manager, a storyteller, and a warm human presence whose connection with children aged between eight and twelve determines not just the process of English language acquisition, but the general disposition towards formal learning.

The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) developed by Howard Gardner (1983, 2006) provides a fruitful and highly utilized approach to considering cognitive diversity in education. MI theory challenges the myth of teaching competence as a one-dimensional cognitive approach, suggesting that teachers can consider the whole spectrum of intellectual abilities they may apply in the classroom by identifying at least eight relatively independent intelligences, which include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences.

MI theory application in EFL research has been majorly concerned with students as opposed to teachers, and with secondary or higher levels of education as opposed to primary. The present study addresses this two-fold gap, focusing on teachers at the primary level. Studies on English language teaching in Iraqi elementary schools are few, even though EFL teaching became an obligatory part of the Iraqi state primary education curriculum (from Grade 3) following the Ministry of Education curricular reforms of 2016 (Ministry of Education Iraq, 2016). Those teachers adopting this curriculum, who are mostly women, relatively young, and products of a teacher preparation system that has not entirely internalized communicative and learner-centered pedagogy models, are an underinvestigated population whose professional growth requirements are both large and immediate.

The current study is a mixed-methods research involving 120 EFL teachers in 24 state elementary schools in Baghdad to answer two fundamental questions: What are the most common MI profiles of Baghdad elementary EFL teachers? And how do those profiles align with observable instructional practices? By responding to these questions, the study contributes to a growing body of research on MI and primary EFL teaching while producing practically viable results for teacher education policymakers, school administrators, and curriculum developers within the elementary education sector in Iraq.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences: Foundations and Relevance to Primary Education

The theory of multiple intelligences was initially articulated by Gardner in *Frames of Mind* (1983), a work that criticized the psychometric tradition of viewing intelligence as a fixed, unitary capacity best reflected by standardized tests. Gardner hypothesized, on the basis of converging evidence in developmental psychology, neuropsychology, anthropology, and the study of exceptional populations, that human beings possess a set of relatively independent cognitive competencies, each with a developmental trajectory, neural realization, and cultural manifestation. His original seven intelligences were later expanded to include naturalistic intelligence (Gardner, 1999), and existential intelligence was subsequently proposed (Gardner, 2006).

MI theory has found a particularly receptive audience in the area of primary and elementary education for theoretically understandable reasons. According to Gardner, young children are paradigmatic multi-intelligent learners, whose interaction with the world is physically, musically, visually, interpersonally, and linguistically diverse well before formal schooling processes narrow that diversity (Armstrong, 2018; Gardner, 1993).

Critics of MI theory have raised legitimate concerns about the absence of standardized performance-based assessment instruments and the risk of conceptual conflation between intelligence and learning style (Waterhouse, 2006; Klein, 1997). These concerns are acknowledged in the present study, which treats MI profiles as self-reported cognitive preferences rather than fixed neurological endowments, employing them as heuristic tools for understanding instructional diversity rather than as definitive psychological measurements.

2.2 EFL in Iraqi Elementary Schools: Policy, Practice, and Pedagogical Challenges

The institutional history of English language teaching in the Iraqi government primary school is relatively recent. Before 2016, English was taught only at the intermediate level (Grade 7). Its introduction as an official subject in the primary curriculum in 2016 created an immediate need for trained primary EFL teachers, a need that the existing supply channel had not prepared for (Ministry of Education Iraq, 2016; Al-Ameedi & Jasim, 2018).

These origins are reflected in identifiable features of Baghdad elementary EFL classrooms. Teacher-centered instruction, excessive use of textbook activities, and an overvaluation of mechanical repetition coexist, in varying degrees, alongside more child-centered practices. The extent to which individual teachers engage in more active, multimodal strategies appears to be influenced not so much

by formal training as by individual cognitive inclinations—exactly where MI profiles can be analytically useful.

2.3 MI Theory in Young Learner and Primary EFL Contexts

A limited but growing body of studies relates MI profiles of primary EFL teachers to their instructional decisions. Fer (2004), in a Turkish context, found that primary EFL teachers with higher bodily-kinesthetic and musical profiles reported significantly greater use of activity-based and song-integrated instruction compared to those with more linguistically dominant profiles. Similar trends were reported in an Egyptian elementary setting by Abdallah (2008), where educators with diversified MI profiles combining interpersonal, linguistic, and bodily-kinesthetic strengths created more linguistically rich and emotionally responsive classroom environments. Although based on non-Iraqi settings, these results offer a theoretically sound rationale for expecting systematic associations between teacher MI profiles and instructional practice in the Baghdad elementary context.

The contribution of musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences to primary EFL teaching is especially relevant. Both domains have been identified as particularly potent tools for young language learners: phonological awareness, prosody, and vocabulary memory are improved through music and rhythmic engagement (Rost, 2006; Schoepp, 2001), while Total Physical Response (TPR) and movement-based learning facilitate the embodied encoding of new language forms (Asher, 1977; Cameron, 2001).

2.4 Teacher Cognition and Instructional Decision-Making in Primary EFL

A productive theoretical complement to MI theory is the field of teacher cognition, which studies the beliefs, knowledge, and thought processes that guide teachers' professional behavior. Borg (2003, 2006) demonstrated that teacher cognition is a rich, experience-constructed phenomenon that manifests consistently in instructional behavior, and that the relationship between what teachers know, believe, and do is a persistent and practically consequential characteristic of teaching across all contexts.

In relation to the MI framework, these findings suggest that teachers with a particular intelligence will not only be more inclined to employ corresponding instructional strategies but will also apply them with greater spontaneity, confidence, and creative elaboration. On this view, MI profiles represent a form of cognitive capital that partly determines the quality and frequency of MI-consistent instructional practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative survey data with qualitative structured classroom observations to construct a comprehensive and ecologically valid picture of the MI profiles of Baghdad elementary EFL teachers and their instructional alignment (Ajami, 2026). The quantitative strand provided standardized, sample-wide data on MI profiles and self-reported instructional practices; the qualitative observational strand documented actual classroom behavior and situated the quantitative findings within the concrete institutional and pedagogical circumstances of Baghdad public elementary schools. This triangulation is particularly significant given the well-

documented gap between primary teachers' reported methodological preferences and their classroom practice (Borg & Burns, 2008; Johnson, 1992).

3.2 Research Population and Sample

The target population consisted of all EFL teachers employed in public elementary schools across Baghdad Governorate, numbering approximately 1,400 teachers distributed across four administrative districts (Ministry of Education Iraq, 2022). The study sample comprised 120 EFL teachers (86 female, 34 male; $M_{\text{age}} = 31.2$ years, $SD = 5.8$) recruited from 24 public elementary schools across four districts: Al-Bnook ($n = 31$), Ur ($n = 32$), Adhamiya ($n = 28$), and Kadhimiya ($n = 29$). Schools were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional district representation. The gender distribution—71.7% female—reflects the broader demographic profile of primary school teaching in Iraq, where teaching is a predominantly feminized profession at the elementary level (Ministry of Education Iraq, 2022). All participants held qualified teacher status and were assigned to teach English language classes at Grades 3 through 6, consistent with the 2016 curricular framework. Teaching experience ranged from one to 22 years ($M = 6.8$ years, $SD = 4.3$).

3.3 Instruments

The Multiple Intelligence Inventory for Teachers (MIIT), a 72-item self-report instrument adapted from Armstrong (2018) and Shearer (2004), assessed teachers' self-perceived strengths across eight MI domains (nine items per domain), rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Internal consistency for the present sample was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$ overall, ranging from $\alpha = .76$ for naturalistic intelligence to $\alpha = .88$ for interpersonal intelligence). Classroom observations were based on a structured protocol derived from Haley (2004) and Pinter (2017), coded for the presence, frequency, and approximate duration of MI-aligned activities during 45-minute primary EFL lessons. A total of 360 observations were conducted across the full sample (three observations per teacher, distributed throughout the academic semester). Observers underwent standardized training; independent observations of 20% of randomly selected sessions yielded satisfactory inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = .78$). Observed activities were coded into eight MI-aligned categories: verbal-linguistic activities (reading aloud, vocabulary instruction, storytelling), bodily-kinesthetic activities (TPR, games, action sequences), musical activities (songs, chants, rhymes), interpersonal activities (pair work, group games, teacher-student dialogue), intrapersonal activities (quiet reflection, individual writing, self-assessment), spatial activities (picture books, flashcards, word walls, drawing), logical activities (pattern recognition, sequencing, classification), and naturalistic activities.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted over one academic semester (16 weeks) during the 2024-2025 school year. MI profile standardization from MIIT scores was achieved through within-person standardization; dominant intelligences were identified as those scoring one standard deviation or higher above the individual participant's mean across all eight domains. Multiple regression analysis identified the MI domains and teacher background variables most strongly associated with observer-rated instructional quality—a composite measure of activity diversity, learner engagement, responsiveness to student affect, and target language use. Thematic analysis of qualitative

observational data was conducted within a deductive MI framework, supplemented by inductive coding where unanticipated patterns emerged.

4. Results

4.1 Multiple Intelligence Profiles of Baghdad Elementary EFL Teachers

Table 1 presents the distribution of dominant, moderate, and weak intelligence profiles across the eight MI domains for the full sample of 120 Baghdad elementary EFL teachers.

Table 1

Distribution of MI Profile Strengths Among Baghdad Elementary EFL Teachers (N = 120)

Intelligence Type	Strongly Present (%)	Moderately Present (%)	Weakly Present (%)	Mean (1–5)	SD
Interpersonal	62.5	28.3	9.2	3.95	0.61
Linguistic	55.0	31.7	13.3	3.88	0.64
Bodily-Kinesthetic	46.7	35.8	17.5	3.71	0.68
Intrapersonal	38.3	40.8	20.9	3.44	0.73
Musical	30.8	38.4	30.8	3.02	0.79
Spatial	23.3	40.0	36.7	3.08	0.76
Logical-Mathematical	18.3	37.5	44.2	2.79	0.82
Naturalistic	14.2	33.3	52.5	2.68	0.85

Interpersonal intelligence emerged as the most developed domain ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.61$), with 62.5% of teachers scoring in the strongly present range. This finding is consistent with the relational demands of elementary school instruction, where teacher-child emotional relationship quality is both theoretically and empirically identified as a major predictor of learning engagement and wellbeing (Pianta, 1999). Linguistic intelligence ranked second ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.64$), reflecting the sample's specialization in English and the verbal-communicative requirements of EFL teaching at any level.

4.2 Alignment Between MI Profiles and Instructional Practices

Table 2 presents alignment data for each intelligence domain, expressed as percentages of fully aligned, partially aligned, and misaligned practice, together with Pearson correlation coefficients between MIIT domain scores and corresponding IPQ subscale scores.

Table 2

Alignment Between Dominant MI Profiles and Observed Instructional Practices Among Baghdad Elementary EFL Teachers

Intelligence Type	Aligned (%)	Partially Aligned (%)	Misaligned (%)	Pearson r (p-value)
Interpersonal	74.2	18.3	7.5	$r = .72$ ($p < .001$)
Linguistic	70.8	20.9	8.3	$r = .67$ ($p < .001$)
Bodily-Kinesthetic	58.3	28.4	13.3	$r = .57$ ($p < .001$)
Musical	45.8	32.5	21.7	$r = .44$ ($p < .01$)
Intrapersonal	42.5	37.5	20.0	$r = .41$ ($p < .01$)
Spatial	37.5	40.0	22.5	$r = .36$ ($p < .05$)
Logical-Mathematical	22.5	38.3	39.2	$r = .21$ ($p < .05$)
Naturalistic	13.3	28.4	58.3	$r = .11$ ($p = .23$, ns)

Interpersonal intelligence showed the highest full-alignment rate (74.2%; $r = .72$, $p < .001$), reflecting the near-constant expression of relational capacities in elementary teaching. Naturalistic intelligence showed no significant alignment with observed instructional practice ($r = .11$, $p = .23$), consistent with the near-total absence of nature-connected or outdoor language activities in the observed sessions.

4.3 Predictors of Instructional Quality

Multiple regression analysis identified the MI domains and teacher background variables most strongly predicting observer-rated instructional quality. The final model explained 49% of the variance in instructional quality scores ($R^2 = .49$, $F(5, 114) = 21.98$, $p < .001$). Table 3 presents the standardized regression coefficients.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Predicting Instructional Quality from MI Profiles and Teacher Characteristics (N = 120)

Variable	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
Interpersonal Intelligence	.39	.08	4.88	< .001	[.23, .55]
Linguistic Intelligence	.33	.09	3.67	< .001	[.15, .51]
Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence	.22	.08	2.75	= .007	[.06, .38]
Years of Experience	.17	.07	2.43	= .016	[.03, .31]
Professional Development Hours	.14	.06	2.33	= .021	[.02, .26]

Interpersonal intelligence was the strongest individual predictor of instructional quality ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$), surpassing linguistic intelligence ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) in predictive strength—an inversion of the hierarchy reported in comparable university-level research that reflects the primacy of relational and motivational dimensions in elementary EFL teaching.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Interpersonal-Kinesthetic Primacy in Elementary EFL Teaching

The identification of interpersonal intelligence as the most prevalent MI profile and the strongest predictor of instructional quality in this elementary sample responds directly to theoretical arguments about the nature of effective primary EFL teaching. The current findings, grounded in systematic empirical research with 120 Baghdad teachers, provide quantitative support for what primary EFL methodologists have argued in pedagogical and developmental terms: that teacher-child relationship quality, instructional dynamism and physicality, and the musical and playful texture of the learning environment constitute not decorative additions but the structural core of effective elementary EFL instruction (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017; Rixon, 1999).

5.2 Musical Intelligence: Partial Liberation in the Primary Context

The substantially higher prevalence and alignment rates of musical intelligence in this elementary sample compared to Baghdad university data represent one of the most theoretically significant findings of the study. The pedagogical institutionalization of songs, chants, and rhymes in young learner contexts affords musically endowed teachers cultural authorization to exercise an intelligence

that would otherwise be suppressed in the formal university classroom. This finding illustrates a broader principle: intelligences do not manifest in isolation but interact with the affordances and constraints of institutional contexts. The elementary classroom—with its emphasis on play, song, and movement—constitutes a more MI-diverse instructional environment than the university lecture hall.

5.3 Naturalistic Intelligence: An Overlooked Pedagogical Resource

The complete absence of naturalistic intelligence alignment in observed lessons, despite a noteworthy subset of Baghdad teachers possessing it to a moderate degree, identifies what may be the most significant untapped potential in the elementary EFL context. Studies on nature-based language learning, though primarily developed in European and East Asian settings, have reported consistent positive effects on vocabulary acquisition, descriptive language development, and learner motivation when children engage with natural materials and outdoor environments (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2004). The absence of such activities in observed sessions reflects not a lack of natural curiosity among teachers but a deficit of pedagogical imagination regarding how such interests can be directed into English language teaching—a gap amenable to targeted professional development.

5.4 Cognitive Diversity and Teaching Quality at the Primary Level

The finding that Multimodally Rich teachers—those with balanced scores across five or more intelligences—consistently received the highest instructional quality ratings is consistent with MI-teaching quality research at other educational levels (Armstrong, 2018; Shearer & Karanian, 2017) and yields the study's strongest practical implication. Effective elementary EFL teaching in Baghdad does not demand extraordinary proficiency in any single intelligence but requires a repertoire of cognitive activities enabling the teacher to engage children through varied modalities, sustain energy and diversity across a 45-minute lesson, and respond flexibly to different learner approaches.

6. Implications

6.1 For Pre-Service Teacher Education in Iraq

The research findings carry concrete implications for primary EFL teacher preparation in Iraqi colleges of education. First, MI assessment should be established as a pre-service professional self-reflection tool, enabling student teachers to relate their cognitive profiles to specific lesson design options, activity types, and classroom management practices. Second, primary EFL teacher selection procedures should be broadened to evaluate interpersonal and bodily-kinesthetic capacities alongside linguistic competence; current selection instruments—standardized language proficiency tests and academic grade point averages—assess only the narrow linguistic-logical axis of teaching competency demonstrated in this study to be insufficient for elementary EFL effectiveness. Third, practical coursework in young learner pedagogy should explicitly address MI dimensions and their manifestation in EFL activity design, providing student teachers with specific curriculum-aligned activities in each domain and opportunities for both simulated and real classroom practice.

6.2 For In-Service Professional Development

The modest but significant effect of professional development hours on instructional quality ($\beta = .14$), combined with the low baseline CPD access among the sample ($M = 9.4$ hours per year, $SD = 5.1$),

signals a clear need for investment in continuing professional development infrastructure for Baghdad's primary EFL teachers. Short-cycle, school-based CPD workshops focused on MI-informed lesson design—providing practical tools for incorporating bodily-kinesthetic, musical, spatial, and naturalistic activities into the English for Iraq curriculum—represent cost-effective interventions that do not require structural reform. Peer observation partnerships, where teachers observe each other's MI-diverse practices and exchange activity ideas, offer a particularly sustainable and culturally appropriate CPD model in a context of limited external trainer availability.

6.3 For Curriculum Design and Ministry of Education Policy

At the policy level, the English for Iraq primary curriculum and accompanying teacher guides should be reviewed to ensure that MI diversity is systematically embedded rather than incidental. The existing curriculum includes songs and games but treats them as auxiliary resources rather than primary pedagogical vehicles; updating teacher guides to highlight their MI rationale and provide specific implementation guidance would authorize and prepare primary EFL teachers to deploy them confidently. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should consider developing an MI-informed teacher observation and evaluation framework that expressly values activity diversity, multimodal engagement, and child-responsive instruction alongside the currently prioritized linguistic and managerial competencies.

7. Limitations

Several limitations of the current study warrant acknowledgment. The sample is predominantly female, which corresponds to the demographic reality of Iraqi primary teaching but limits generalizability to male-dominated primary teaching contexts. The self-report nature of MI profiling—a methodological staple supplemented here by observational data—remains a limitation, as teachers may rate themselves more favorably on socially valued domains (interpersonal, linguistic) and less favorably on domains perceived as less academically serious (musical, bodily-kinesthetic). Although the observational protocol demonstrated acceptable inter-rater reliability ($\kappa = .78$), observations were conducted in regular observed lessons, introducing the possibility of reactivity effects that may not capture the full range of teachers' everyday instructional practices.

8. Conclusions

This study provides the first systematic empirical mapping of MI profiles among EFL teachers in Baghdad's public elementary schools and offers a contextually grounded analysis of the alignment between those profiles and observable instructional practice. The findings reveal a distinctive professional cognitive landscape: interpersonal and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences are markedly more prevalent and more influential in this primary sample than in comparable university-level research, reflecting the relational, physical, and playful character of effective young learner pedagogy.

The applied significance of these findings is immediate. The elementary EFL teachers of Baghdad are cognitively heterogeneous professionals whose full pedagogical potential is not being systematically developed within the current teacher education and professional development system. A pre-service training system that recruits and prepares teachers primarily on the basis of linguistic

and academic abilities, a national curriculum that treats multimodal activities as optional additives rather than central pedagogical instruments, and a professional assessment system that rewards only restricted linguistic and managerial competencies together constitute a structural context in which the cognitive richness of the primary EFL teaching force remains incompletely exploited. Addressing these structural gaps through MI-informed selection, preparation, professional development, curriculum design, and evaluation is both practically necessary and educationally imperative.

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