

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: *Educational leadership plays a significant role in ensuring effective school management and organizational development. In contemporary educational settings, school leaders are expected not only to possess administrative and managerial competencies, but also the ability to understand individuals, build interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, encourage innovation and create positive school cultures. Therefore, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences introduced by Howard Gardner is considered a relevant framework in strengthening educational leadership practices (Gardner, 1983; Armstrong, 2009). This conceptual paper discusses the implications of Multiple Intelligences Theory on educational leadership by focusing on interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic and spatial intelligences in shaping effective educational leaders. The paper further explains how multiple forms of intelligence contribute to communication, self-reflection, creativity, decision-making and organizational effectiveness in schools (Northouse, 2022; Goleman, 1998). In addition, the paper discusses the challenges of implementing multiple intelligences approaches within educational systems and examines their implications for the professional development of school leaders. This conceptual paper is expected to contribute to the development of more holistic, inclusive and human-oriented educational leadership practices.*

Keywords: *Multiple Intelligences, Educational Leadership, Holistic Leadership*

Introduction

Educational leadership is widely recognized as one of the most important factors influencing school effectiveness and organizational success (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2011). School leaders play a major role in shaping school culture, enhancing teacher motivation, improving instructional quality and ensuring effective school management (Fullan, 2014). According to Peter G. Northouse (2022), leadership involves the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. In educational settings, leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities and includes the ability to inspire teachers, build collaborative cultures and manage organizational change effectively (Leithwood et al., 2020).

However, traditional views of leadership have often emphasized cognitive intelligence and academic achievement as the primary indicators of leadership capability. Conventional educational systems tend to value logical-mathematical and linguistic abilities more than other forms of intelligence (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Gardner and Hatch (1989) argued that traditional intelligence testing and educational practices focus excessively on linguistic and logical competencies while neglecting other important dimensions of human intelligence. Such approaches may limit the understanding of leadership potential because effective leadership requires broader human capacities such as empathy, creativity, communication and self-awareness (Goleman, 1995).

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences introduced by Howard Gardner in 1983 challenged the traditional understanding of intelligence. Gardner (1983) proposed that intelligence should not be viewed as a single general ability measurable through IQ tests, but rather as multiple independent intelligences that influence how individuals think, learn, communicate, and solve problems. Gardner and Hatch (1989) further explained that intelligence refers to the ability to solve problems or create products that are valued within particular cultural contexts.

The theory has important implications for educational leadership because school leaders constantly engage with diverse individuals and complex organizational situations (Armstrong, 2009). Effective school leaders need more than intellectual capabilities; they also require strong interpersonal communication, emotional understanding, creativity, reflective thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Yukl, 2013). Armstrong (2009) emphasized that Multiple Intelligences Theory provides educators and leaders with broader perspectives regarding human potential and individual strengths.

In recent years, educational organizations have become increasingly complex due to rapid social changes, diverse student populations, and evolving educational expectations (Fullan, 2014). As a result, educational leaders are expected to become more adaptive, reflective, collaborative, and innovative (Sergiovanni, 2007). Leadership effectiveness can no longer depend solely on technical knowledge and administrative competence. Instead, educational leaders must possess various forms of intelligence that enable them to manage people, communicate effectively, solve organizational problems, and build supportive school cultures (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Although Multiple Intelligences Theory has been widely explored in classroom instruction and student learning contexts, limited studies have conceptually discussed its implications for educational leadership development. Existing educational leadership literature tends to focus more on emotional intelligence, transformational leadership and instructional leadership, while the broader dimensions of Multiple Intelligences remain underexplored in leadership contexts.

Educational leadership research has produced extensive literature on leadership effectiveness, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership and emotional intelligence. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of leadership competencies in improving school performance, teacher motivation and student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). More recently, scholars have also examined the role of emotional intelligence in leadership development, highlighting its contribution to interpersonal relationships, decision-making and organizational effectiveness (Goleman, 1998; Mayer et al., 2004).

However, most existing leadership studies focus on specific leadership competencies or emotional capabilities rather than examining leadership development through a broader multidimensional intelligence framework. While emotional intelligence has received substantial scholarly attention, the application of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory in educational leadership remains conceptually underdeveloped. Limited studies have explored how different forms of intelligence such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic and spatial intelligences collectively contribute to leadership effectiveness.

Therefore, a significant conceptual gap exists in understanding how Multiple Intelligences Theory may provide a holistic framework for educational leadership development. This paper seeks to address this gap by synthesizing literature from educational leadership and Multiple Intelligences Theory to explain how various intelligences contribute to leadership competencies, organizational effectiveness and professional development among educational leaders.

Despite the growing importance of holistic leadership approaches, many leadership development programs still prioritize administrative and managerial competencies over interpersonal and reflective skills (Bush, 2020). Consequently, there is a need to explore how Multiple Intelligences Theory can contribute to the development of more effective educational leadership practices. Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to discuss the implications of Multiple Intelligences Theory for educational leadership and to explain how the theory contributes to the development of more holistic educational leaders.

Literature Review

Multiple Intelligences Theory

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences was introduced by Howard Gardner through his influential book *Frames of Mind* in 1983 (Gardner, 1983). Gardner rejected the traditional psychometric perspective that intelligence could be measured solely through IQ tests and academic achievement. Instead, he proposed that individuals possess multiple forms of intelligence that function relatively independently from one another (Gardner, 1999). Gardner defined intelligence as the ability to solve problems or create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings. This definition broadened the concept of intelligence by emphasizing practical abilities, creativity, social interaction, and cultural relevance rather than merely academic performance (Gardner, 2006).

Based on research in psychology, neurology, anthropology, and cognitive science, Gardner identified several distinct intelligences. Initially, he proposed seven intelligences, namely linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and

intrapersonal intelligences (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Later, naturalistic intelligence was added to the framework (Gardner, 1999).

Eight Major Intelligences by Gardner

Gardner and Hatch (1989) identified linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. Later, Gardner (1999) included naturalistic intelligence as the eighth intelligence. Each intelligence represents a unique way of processing information and interacting with the environment. One of the major contributions of Multiple Intelligences Theory is its recognition that individuals possess unique intelligence profiles (Kornhaber, 2004). Gardner argued that no two individuals share identical intelligence patterns, and people may demonstrate strengths in some intelligences while showing moderate abilities in others. This perspective challenges deficit-oriented views of intelligence and promotes a more inclusive understanding of human potential (Campbell et al., 2004).

In educational contexts, Multiple Intelligences Theory has influenced teaching strategies, curriculum design, and classroom practices (Armstrong, 2009). Teachers are encouraged to recognize diverse learning styles and provide varied learning experiences to accommodate students' strengths (Moran et al., 2006). Beyond classroom instruction, the theory also offers meaningful implications for educational leadership because school leaders need to understand and manage diverse individuals within educational organizations. Furthermore, Multiple Intelligences Theory aligns with humanistic perspectives in education, which emphasize the holistic development of individuals rather than solely academic achievement (Sergiovanni, 2007). Educational leadership informed by this theory may encourage more inclusive, empathetic, and people-centered leadership practices.

Multiple Intelligences in Educational Leadership

1. Interpersonal Intelligence and Educational Leadership

Educational leaders interact continuously with teachers, students, parents, policymakers, and community members. Therefore, the ability to build positive relationships is essential for leadership effectiveness (Northouse, 2022). Leaders with strong interpersonal intelligence are better able to motivate staff, foster collaboration, manage conflicts, and create harmonious working environments (Goleman, 1998). According to Daniel Goleman (1998), emotional and social competencies are critical components of effective leadership. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, active listening, and effective communication are more likely to gain trust and cooperation from organizational members. In schools, interpersonal intelligence contributes to stronger teacher morale, improved teamwork, and positive school culture (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Moreover, interpersonal intelligence is closely linked to transformational leadership practices (Yukl, 2013). Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers through meaningful relationships, emotional support, and shared vision. Educational leaders with strong interpersonal intelligence are more capable of understanding teachers' needs and supporting their professional growth (Hallinger, 2011). Interpersonal intelligence also contributes to conflict management within schools. Educational organizations often involve diverse perspectives, personalities, and expectations, which may lead to misunderstandings and disagreements. Leaders who understand interpersonal dynamics are more capable of resolving conflicts constructively and maintaining organizational harmony (Bush, 2020).

Although intrapersonal intelligence shares similarities with emotional intelligence and reflective leadership, important distinctions exist. Emotional intelligence primarily focuses on the ability to perceive, understand and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Mayer et al., 2004; Goleman, 1998). Reflective leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes continuous critical reflection on professional practice and decision-making (Schön, 1983). In contrast, Multiple Intelligences Theory provides a broader framework that incorporates not only emotional and reflective capacities but also linguistic, interpersonal, spatial and other forms of intelligence. Therefore, Multiple Intelligences Theory offers a more comprehensive perspective for understanding leadership development within educational contexts.

2. Intrapersonal Intelligence and Self-Reflection

Intrapersonal intelligence refers to self-awareness and the ability to understand one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and goals. Gardner and Hatch (1989) explained that intrapersonal intelligence involves access to one's inner feelings and the ability to use such understanding to guide behavior.

In educational leadership, intrapersonal intelligence contributes significantly to reflective leadership practices (Schön, 1983). Reflective leaders continuously evaluate their decisions, leadership styles, and organizational practices in order to improve effectiveness. Self-awareness enables leaders to recognize personal limitations and identify areas for professional growth. According to Northouse (2022), self-awareness is an important leadership characteristic because leaders who understand themselves are more capable of regulating emotions, handling stress, and making rational decisions. Reflective educational leaders are more likely to engage in continuous learning and adapt to organizational challenges effectively (Fullan, 2014).

Furthermore, intrapersonal intelligence contributes to authentic leadership. Leaders who possess strong intrapersonal intelligence are more likely to act according to ethical principles and maintain emotional stability in challenging situations (Sergiovanni, 2007). Reflective practices are particularly important in educational settings because school leaders regularly face complex decisions involving teachers, students, and organizational priorities. Leaders who engage in self-reflection are better able to evaluate the consequences of their actions and improve future decision-making processes (Schön, 1983).

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3. Linguistic Intelligence in Educational Leadership

Linguistic intelligence involves the ability to use language effectively for communication, persuasion, and expression. Gardner and Hatch (1989) explained that linguistic intelligence includes sensitivity to the meanings, sounds, rhythms, and functions of language. Communication is a fundamental component of educational leadership (Yukl, 2013). School leaders are required to communicate school visions, policies, expectations, and organizational

goals clearly to teachers, students, and stakeholders. Leaders with strong linguistic intelligence are more capable of delivering persuasive messages, conducting meaningful discussions, and building positive professional relationships.

According to Yukl (2013), communication skills are among the most important competencies associated with effective leadership. Leaders who communicate effectively can influence organizational members, reduce misunderstandings, and foster collaborative working environments. In educational organizations, linguistic intelligence is particularly important in instructional leadership practices (Hallinger, 2011). School leaders frequently provide feedback, conduct meetings, facilitate professional discussions, and communicate educational goals. Effective communication contributes to improved teacher understanding, organizational clarity, and stronger commitment to school objectives.

Additionally, linguistic intelligence supports conflict resolution and negotiation processes. Educational leaders often mediate disagreements among teachers, parents, and students. Leaders with strong communication abilities are more likely to resolve issues diplomatically and maintain positive organizational relationships (Bush, 2020).

4. Spatial Intelligence, Creativity and Innovation

Spatial intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, visualize, and manipulate visual-spatial information accurately. Gardner and Hatch (1989) described spatial intelligence as the ability to perceive the visual-spatial world accurately and perform transformations upon those perceptions. In educational leadership, spatial intelligence is closely associated with creativity, strategic thinking, and innovation. Educational leaders must often visualize organizational goals, design strategic plans, and develop innovative solutions to complex school challenges (Robinson, 2011).

Creativity is increasingly recognized as an essential leadership quality (Sternberg, 2003). According to Armstrong (2009), individuals with strong spatial intelligence are often capable of generating imaginative ideas and approaching problems from multiple perspectives. In schools, creative leadership contributes to curriculum innovation, instructional improvement, and organizational adaptability. Innovative educational leaders are more likely to introduce new teaching approaches, integrate technology effectively, and encourage collaborative learning environments (Fullan, 2014). Creativity also supports problem-solving because leaders must regularly address issues related to student performance, teacher motivation, and school management. Furthermore, spatial intelligence contributes to visionary leadership. Visionary leaders are able to conceptualize future possibilities and inspire others toward shared organizational goals (Northouse, 2022). School leaders with strong spatial intelligence are more capable of strategic planning and long-term organizational development.

Methodological Approach

This conceptual paper adopts a conceptual synthesis approach supported by a narrative review of literature related to Multiple Intelligences Theory, educational leadership, emotional intelligence, reflective leadership, leadership development and school effectiveness (Snyder, 2019). Relevant publications were identified through major scholarly databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC and Google Scholar with emphasis placed on seminal and highly cited works to support the development of the conceptual framework (Jabareen, 2009).

Priority was given to seminal works and highly cited publications due to their significant contributions to the advancement of these fields. The conceptual argument was developed through thematic synthesis, whereby key dimensions of Multiple Intelligences Theory, particularly interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic and spatial intelligences were analysed and subsequently linked to leadership competencies commonly identified in educational leadership literature. Through this process, the paper proposes a theoretically informed framework that explains how Multiple Intelligences Theory may contribute to the development of more holistic, inclusive and effective educational leadership practices (Jabareen, 2009; Snyder, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual paper proposes that Multiple Intelligences Theory contributes to educational leadership effectiveness through the development of various leadership competencies. Interpersonal intelligence supports communication, collaboration, and relationship-building among school stakeholders. Intrapersonal intelligence contributes to reflective leadership, emotional self-regulation, and ethical decision-making. Linguistic intelligence strengthens communication effectiveness, persuasion, and organizational influence, while spatial intelligence enhances creativity, innovation, and strategic thinking in educational organizations. These intelligences collectively contribute to holistic educational leadership by enabling school leaders to manage organizational challenges effectively, foster positive school cultures, and support inclusive educational environments. Therefore, Multiple Intelligences Theory may serve as an important framework for strengthening leadership development and professional training programs in education.

Unlike Emotional Intelligence Theory which primarily focuses on emotional competencies, the proposed framework integrates broader dimensions of human intelligence, including communication, self-awareness, creativity and strategic thinking. This broader perspective enables educational leadership to be viewed as a multidimensional capability rather than a function of emotional competence alone.

Implications for Educational Leadership

Multiple Intelligences Theory offers several important implications for educational leadership practices and leadership development programs. First, the theory promotes a more holistic understanding of leadership effectiveness (Gardner, 2006). Traditional leadership approaches often prioritize academic achievement and administrative competence. However, Multiple Intelligences Theory emphasizes that effective leadership also involves interpersonal relationships, emotional understanding, creativity, and reflective thinking (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Second, the theory encourages educational institutions to recognize diversity among teachers and students. Since individuals possess unique intelligence profiles, educational leaders should adopt flexible and inclusive management approaches (Campbell et al., 2004). Leaders who understand diverse intelligences are more capable of supporting teachers' strengths and encouraging collaborative school cultures (Moran et al., 2006).

Third, Multiple Intelligences Theory highlights the importance of leadership training programs that extend beyond technical and administrative competencies (Bush, 2020). Leadership development programs should incorporate interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, reflective practices, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving (Goleman, 1998).

Fourth, the theory contributes to positive school culture development. Educational leaders who demonstrate empathy, communication skills, and creativity are more capable of building supportive organizational climates that encourage teacher motivation and professional commitment (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Finally, Multiple Intelligences Theory supports student-centered educational leadership. School leaders who appreciate diverse intelligences are more likely to support differentiated teaching strategies and inclusive educational practices that address students' diverse learning needs (Armstrong, 2009).

Challenges In Implementation

Despite its significant contributions to educational leadership, the implementation of Multiple Intelligences Theory in educational organizations still faces several challenges. One of the major challenges is the continued dominance of traditional educational systems that emphasize academic achievement, standardized examinations, and cognitive intelligence, particularly linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). As a result, other intelligences such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, and creative intelligences often receive less attention in leadership development and educational practices.

Another challenge concerns the limited understanding and awareness of Multiple Intelligences Theory among educational leaders and teachers. Although the theory has been widely discussed in educational literature, many school leaders still prioritize managerial efficiency and administrative performance over holistic human development (Bush, 2020). Consequently, leadership practices in schools may remain heavily focused on organizational routines rather than interpersonal relationships, creativity, and reflective leadership. In addition, educational leadership training programs often place greater emphasis on administrative management, policy implementation, and instructional supervision while giving less attention to interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and reflective practices (Northouse, 2022). This situation may limit school leaders' ability to develop leadership competencies associated with multiple intelligences, particularly interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences.

Heavy administrative workload is also a significant challenge for school leaders. Educational leaders are frequently burdened with documentation, reporting requirements, meetings, and policy implementation tasks, which reduce opportunities for self-reflection, professional learning, and relationship-building within schools (Fullan, 2014). As a result, leaders may struggle to practice holistic leadership approaches that require empathy, collaboration, and creativity. Furthermore, resistance to change within educational organizations may hinder the implementation of Multiple Intelligences Theory. Some educational stakeholders continue to associate intelligence primarily with academic excellence and examination performance (Kornhaber, 2004). Consequently, attempts to introduce broader conceptions of intelligence into leadership practices may face skepticism from teachers, parents, and policymakers.

Another challenge involves the difficulty of assessing and measuring multiple intelligences in leadership contexts. Unlike traditional intelligence measures, multiple intelligences are more subjective and context-dependent, making them difficult to evaluate quantitatively (Gardner, 2006). This creates challenges for educational institutions that seek to incorporate multiple intelligences into leadership assessment and professional development frameworks. Limited resources and insufficient professional development opportunities may also affect implementation efforts. Schools with limited funding and support may find it difficult to

provide leadership training programs that emphasize creativity, reflective leadership, and interpersonal development (Armstrong, 2009). In some cases, educational leaders may lack access to relevant training, mentoring, or professional support systems.

Moreover, cultural and institutional expectations may influence leadership practices in schools. In many educational systems, leadership effectiveness is often evaluated based on academic achievement, school rankings, and administrative performance indicators rather than holistic leadership qualities (Leithwood et al., 2020). This may discourage educational leaders from adopting people-centered leadership approaches associated with Multiple Intelligences Theory. Despite these challenges, Multiple Intelligences Theory continues to provide meaningful perspectives for improving educational leadership practices. Continuous professional development, supportive organizational cultures, and increased awareness regarding holistic leadership approaches are essential in promoting the successful implementation of Multiple Intelligences Theory in educational leadership contexts.

Future Research Directions

Future studies may further explore the relationship between Multiple Intelligences and educational leadership through empirical research approaches. Quantitative studies may examine the influence of specific intelligences on leadership effectiveness, teacher motivation, or organizational commitment within schools. Qualitative studies may also explore how educational leaders apply interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic and spatial intelligences in managing educational organizations. In addition, future researchers may develop leadership competency models based on Multiple Intelligences Theory, particularly within the Malaysian educational context. Comparative studies between school leaders in urban and rural schools may also provide deeper insights into the role of multiple intelligences in educational leadership practices. Such studies may contribute to the development of more contextualized and holistic educational leadership frameworks.

Future research may also investigate the comparative influence of Multiple Intelligences and Emotional Intelligence on leadership effectiveness. Such studies could provide empirical evidence regarding the relative contribution of different intelligence dimensions to educational leadership outcomes. Furthermore, researchers may develop and validate measurement instruments specifically designed to assess multiple intelligences among educational leaders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences provides a valuable framework for understanding educational leadership from a more holistic and human-centered perspective. The theory broadens the traditional understanding of intelligence by emphasizing that leadership effectiveness is not solely dependent on intellectual or academic abilities, but also on interpersonal communication, self-awareness, creativity, reflective thinking, and the ability to understand diverse individuals (Gardner, 1983; Gardner, 1999). This conceptual paper has highlighted the importance of interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and spatial intelligences in shaping effective educational leaders. Interpersonal intelligence enables school leaders to build positive relationships, motivate teachers, and create collaborative school cultures. Intrapersonal intelligence supports reflective leadership and emotional self-regulation, while linguistic intelligence strengthens communication and organizational influence. In addition, spatial intelligence contributes to creativity, innovation, and strategic thinking in educational organizations (Armstrong, 2009; Goleman, 1998; Yukl, 2013).

The discussion also demonstrates that Multiple Intelligences Theory has important implications for leadership development and professional training programs in education. Leadership preparation programs should not focus solely on administrative and managerial competencies, but also emphasize emotional understanding, reflective practices, communication skills, creativity, and collaborative problem-solving (Bush, 2020; Fullan, 2014). Such an approach may contribute to the development of more inclusive, adaptive, and effective educational leaders. Nevertheless, the implementation of Multiple Intelligences Theory in educational leadership remains challenging due to the dominance of traditional educational systems, limited awareness among educational leaders, heavy administrative responsibilities, and difficulties in assessing multiple intelligences within leadership contexts (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Despite these limitations, the theory continues to offer meaningful insights into leadership practices that prioritize human potential, diversity, and holistic organizational development.

Therefore, educational institutions and leadership training providers should continue exploring ways to integrate Multiple Intelligences Theory into educational leadership development. By recognizing and developing diverse forms of intelligence, school leaders may become more capable of managing educational organizations effectively, fostering positive school cultures, and supporting meaningful educational improvement for all members of the school community.

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