

Research Article

Indicators of Multiple Intelligence Theory in the *Karate Kid* Movie (2010): English Education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the indicators of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory as represented in *The Karate Kid* movie (2010) and to examine their relevance to English education. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, the study analyzes selected scenes, dialogues, character interactions, and narrative elements using Gardner's Multiple Intelligence framework. The findings reveal that the movie portrays six types of intelligence: visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence. These intelligences are manifested through physical training, social interactions, emotional development, environmental engagement, and auditory-visual elements embedded in the film. The results suggest that *The Karate Kid* functions as a multimodal instructional resource that aligns with learner-centered and differentiated approaches in English education. By integrating Multiple Intelligence Theory into film-based instruction, English teachers can design diverse learning activities that address varied learner strengths, enhance student engagement, and support holistic language development. This study contributes to the field of English education by highlighting the pedagogical value of films as instructional media and reinforcing the relevance of Multiple Intelligence Theory in contemporary language teaching practices.

Keywords: Multiple Intelligence Theory, English Education, Film-Based Learning, The Karate Kid

INTRODUCTION

Understanding human intelligence remains one of the most significant and debated topics in educational psychology. Traditional models of intelligence, which



emphasize a single, general intellectual ability often measured through IQ tests, have dominated educational paradigms throughout the twentieth century (Zajda, 2019). However, this singular focus on IQ has proven insufficient for capturing the diversity of human cognitive abilities observed in real-world contexts, especially in culturally rich and multimodal learning settings. In response to these limitations, Howard Gardner introduced the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), proposing that intelligence is not a unitary trait but comprises a set of distinct intellectual capacities that individuals can develop to varying extents (Gardner, 1983; Morgan, 2021). This reconceptualization of intelligence has fundamentally reshaped how educators understand student learning, particularly in language education and learner-centered pedagogies.

Given this interdisciplinary landscape, *The Karate Kid* (2010), a widely watched film that blends narrative drama with themes of mentorship, perseverance, and physical discipline, offers fertile ground for exploring how MI theory manifests in media representations. The movie portrays a range of cognitive and emotional skills that align with MI categories, including bodily-kinesthetic intelligence in martial arts training scenes, interpersonal intelligence in student-teacher interactions, spatial intelligence in navigating environments, and intrapersonal intelligence through character introspection and growth. Research on this film has identified at least six intelligence indicators depicted across diverse cinematic moments, demonstrating the potential of films like *The Karate Kid* for illustrating and teaching MI concepts beyond traditional classroom materials (Fadhil & Prastiwi, 2024).

In the context of English education, analyzing *The Karate Kid* through MI theory presents significant pedagogical opportunities. English educators can leverage film content to design culturally responsive and cognitively diverse learning activities that resonate with students' varied intelligence profiles. For instance, classroom tasks may include scene-based discussions to promote linguistic and interpersonal intelligence, reflective journals to deepen intrapersonal understanding, and multimedia projects that engage students' spatial, musical, or bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. Such multi-modal approaches are consistent with MI research that underscores the importance of varied instructional methods for supporting student learning and motivation.

Furthermore, the MI framework encourages educators to reconceptualize assessment beyond traditional testing, incorporating authentic, performance-based tasks that allow students to demonstrate competencies across different intelligences.

Films such as *The Karate Kid* can be integrated into formative assessments that evaluate learners' interpretive skills, creative responses, and collaborative problem-solving abilities, providing a more holistic picture of student progress than conventional assessments alone.

The convergence of Multiple Intelligence Theory, film media, and English education reflects a broader shift in educational research toward inclusive, multimodal, and learner-centered pedagogies. While MI theory has faced critique concerning empirical validation in some domains, its impact on educational practice and instructional design remains substantial, particularly within language classrooms that prioritize engagement, diversity, and authentic communicative experiences. Analyzing films like *The Karate Kid* through the MI perspective not only enriches our understanding of how cognitive skills are represented in media but also offers practical insights for designing English learning environments that honor the diverse intelligences learners bring to the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gardner defines intelligence as a bio-psychological potential to process information that can be activated in culturally relevant contexts to solve problems or create products of value (Maftoon & Sarem, 2012). According to his framework, human cognition includes at least eight major types of intelligence: linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic, with ongoing discussions about a possible ninth type, existential intelligence (Gadheda, 2024). By expanding the concept of intelligence beyond linguistic and mathematical reasoning, MI theory encourages teachers to diversify instructional strategies and assessment practices to accommodate distinct learner strengths. Gardner's theory also challenges educational systems to rethink rigid standardized testing, advocating for inclusive learning environments that recognize diverse intellectual profiles (Liu & Jiang, 2024).

The popularity of MI theory in educational research is evident across multiple contexts, including early childhood, elementary, and second language classrooms. Studies in formal and informal teaching settings have documented how multiple intelligences relate to differentiated instruction and curriculum design, revealing that students benefit from learning experiences tailored to their unique cognitive profiles

(Alavinia & Farhady, 2012; Amalia & Nabilla, 2024). In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, MI theory has been applied as a conceptual lens for enhancing learner engagement, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and conversational skills through varied multimodal activities (Nazifah, 2023). Films and audiovisual media have emerged as effective instructional tools in this context, offering authentic linguistic input and opportunities for learners to engage across multiple intelligence domains, for example, visual-spatial intelligence through screen settings, interpersonal intelligence through character interactions, and intrapersonal intelligence through emotional engagement (Giannikas, 2018).

Given the significant role of MI theory in modern education, scholars have explored its pedagogical implications, applications, and limitations. Research indicates that MI-informed instruction can foster learner creativity and motivation, particularly when instructional materials are diversified to include physical movement, music, spatial reasoning tasks, and collaborative group activities (Namaziandost & Hwang, 2025). Empirically, the use of MI approaches has been associated with improved student motivation and inclusive classroom dynamics, although some meta-analyses suggest that the theory's effects on academic achievement require further rigorous investigation due to mixed outcomes and methodological challenges (Ghaznavi et al., 2021). Despite these debates, the MI framework continues to influence educational practice and research globally, particularly in contexts where learner diversity is a central instructional concern.

In addition to traditional classroom research, scholars have recognized the educational value of non-textual media, including films, in language learning and cognitive development. Film as an instructional medium has been shown to complement traditional English teaching by offering rich contextualized language input, exposing students to diverse dialects, socio-cultural norms, and narrative structures (Rajpopat, 2023). Importantly, films can engage learners across multiple intelligence domains simultaneously. For example, linguistic intelligence is exercised through dialogue comprehension and literary themes; musical intelligence through soundtracks and auditory cues; spatial intelligence through cinematic framing and scene transitions; and interpersonal intelligence through character relationships and social interactions (Giannikas, 2018). These multimodal features make film an attractive pedagogical resource for language educators aiming to address diverse intelligence

profiles in their classrooms.

The integration of MI theory with film analysis also aligns with contemporary educational trends that emphasize holistic learning, student engagement, and meaningful connections between educational content and learners' lived experiences. In English education, contextualizing language learning within authentic communicative experiences, such as film scenes, not only supports linguistic competence but also encourages critical thinking and cultural awareness. Films provide rich, narrative-driven contexts in which learners can interpret language use, analyze character motivations, and reflect on social and emotional themes, all of which can be mapped onto specific multiple intelligence indicators.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the indicators of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory as represented in *The Karate Kid* movie (2010) and its relevance to English education. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research focused on interpreting meanings, behaviors, dialogues, and visual representations embedded in a cinematic text rather than measuring numerical data. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore phenomena in depth by analyzing naturally occurring data, making it particularly suitable for studies involving films, narratives, and educational interpretations.

The descriptive nature of this research aimed to systematically identify, classify, and explain the types of intelligences portrayed by the characters in the movie. The study did not seek to test hypotheses or determine cause-and-effect relationships but rather to provide a detailed depiction of how multiple intelligences are reflected through character actions, interactions, and learning processes. This design aligns with previous studies in English education that utilize films as textual data to examine pedagogical values and cognitive representations.

Research Object and Data Source

The primary data source of this research was the movie *The Karate Kid* (2010), directed by Harald Zwart and produced by Columbia Pictures. The movie was selected due to its strong educational themes, clear mentor-learner relationships, and frequent depictions of learning processes both inside and outside formal classroom settings.

These characteristics make the film relevant for analysis within the framework of Multiple Intelligence Theory and English education.

The unit of analysis consisted of movie scenes, character dialogues, actions, gestures, and visual elements that indicated specific types of intelligence. The main focus was on the main characters, particularly Dre Parker and Mr. Han, as their interactions provide rich examples of cognitive, emotional, and physical learning processes. Secondary data sources included scholarly articles, books, and journals related to Multiple Intelligence Theory, film-based learning, and English education, which were used to support the theoretical framework and interpretation of findings.

Research Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument. In this study, the researcher conducted the observation, interpretation, and categorization of data based on the Multiple Intelligence framework proposed by Gardner. To support systematic analysis, an observation checklist and data coding table were developed based on the eight types of intelligences: linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence.

Each intelligence category was operationalized with specific indicators derived from relevant literature. For example, linguistic intelligence indicators included meaningful dialogue use, verbal expression, and storytelling; bodily-kinesthetic intelligence indicators involved physical movement, coordination, and skill execution; while interpersonal intelligence indicators focused on empathy, cooperation, and social interaction. These instruments helped ensure consistency and rigor during the data analysis process.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation and document analysis. The researcher watched *The Karate Kid* (2010) multiple times to gain comprehensive understanding of the storyline and character development. During the initial viewing, the researcher focused on general comprehension of the narrative. Subsequent viewings were more analytical, emphasizing specific scenes, dialogues, and actions that reflected Multiple Intelligence indicators.

Important scenes were transcribed, and timestamps were recorded to ensure accuracy and traceability. Notes were taken to describe contextual elements such as

setting, character emotions, body language, and interactions. This method is consistent with film analysis techniques commonly used in educational and linguistic research. In addition, relevant documents such as scripts, subtitles, and academic literature were reviewed to triangulate the findings and strengthen interpretation.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

1. Data Reduction

In this stage, raw data obtained from the movie were selected and simplified by identifying scenes and dialogues that were relevant to Multiple Intelligence indicators. Irrelevant scenes that did not contribute to the research focus were excluded. The remaining data were categorized according to the eight intelligence types.

2. Data Display

The reduced data were organized into tables and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Each table contained scene descriptions, dialogue excerpts, intelligence categories, and brief analytical notes. This systematic display enabled the researcher to compare patterns across different intelligence types and identify dominant intelligences represented in the movie.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusions were drawn based on recurring patterns and relationships identified during analysis. The researcher continuously revisited the data to verify interpretations and ensure that conclusions were grounded in the evidence. This iterative process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study examined the representation of Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory in *The Karate Kid* (2010) as a potential resource for English language teaching and learning. The analysis revealed that the movie illustrates six types of multiple intelligences, named visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence, as portrayed through various character actions, dialogues, and narrative arcs. These findings not only reflect Gardner's

conceptual framework but also provide rich opportunities for integrating multimodal learning strategies into English education.

Visual-Spatial Intelligence

The film convincingly demonstrates visual-spatial intelligence through sequences that require characters to interpret and navigate complex physical environments. For example, scenes in Beijing's urban settings, the Forbidden City, and kung fu training sequences demand that Dre Parker dynamically interpret spatial landmarks and movement paths, which mirrors visual intelligence indicators such as spatial orientation and mental imagery processing. Learners with strong visual-spatial intelligence excel in interpreting diagrams, videos, and visual narratives, capacities that English language educators can activate through film-based activities, picture descriptions, and scene retellings. Unterricht approaches like storyboard creation or scene mapping could encourage learners to articulate narrative elements visually while reinforcing vocabulary and comprehension (Fitria & Simbolon, 2024).

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

The Karate Kid centralizes bodily-kinesthetic intelligence via martial arts training and physical movement. From learning kung fu techniques to practicing disciplined motion patterns, Dre's progression exemplifies how physical engagement enhances cognitive understanding. Bodily-kinesthetic learners comprehend language better when movement or hands-on activities accompany instruction. In an English classroom, teachers might emulate this intelligence by incorporating role-plays, drama, physical enactment of dialogues, and gesture-supported vocabulary drills. These strategies have been shown to improve retention and engagement, validating Gardner's notion that intelligence is multimodal and not limited to verbal-logical ability (Aguayo et al., 2021).

Using martial arts metaphors and actions, such as students acting out training sequences while narrating in English, enables learners to integrate linguistic outputs with physical movement, thereby activating both bodily-kinesthetic and linguistic-verbal intelligences simultaneously.

Musical Intelligence

Although *The Karate Kid* is not a musical per se, auditory elements, such as background music and sound cues during training montages, engage musical intelligence. According to Gardner's framework, musical intelligence relates to sensitivity to rhythm, tone, and auditory patterns, which can influence language rhythm

and pronunciation learning. In English education, teacher-designed lessons that integrate film soundtracks with listening comprehension tasks can help learners discern intonation patterns, stress, and phonemic contrasts in spoken English. For example, students might be asked to identify emotional cues conveyed through music and language, bridging musical processing with linguistic interpretation.

Interpersonal Intelligence

Interpersonal intelligence, the ability to understand and interact effectively with others, emerged as one of the dominant intelligences in the movie. Dre's relationships with Mr. Han, Meiyang, and his classmates reveal complex social dynamics that require empathy, perspective-taking, and conflict negotiation. Interpersonal intelligence indicators include collaboration, sensitivity to others' emotions, and social problem-solving, all evident in character development and conflict resolution sequences. In language learning contexts, teachers can leverage these dynamics by organizing group discussions, cooperative tasks, and peer-teaching sessions, reflecting the social interactivity of language use.

Films like *The Karate Kid* provide authentic scenarios where learners can analyze dialogue exchanges to enhance pragmatic competence, including interpreting social cues, politeness strategies, and cultural norms embedded in interactions (Fjällström, 2010). Such activities support not just linguistic accuracy but also communicative competence, aligning with current trends in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy that emphasize real-world social use of language (Fadhil & Prastiwi, 2024).

Intrapersonal Intelligence

The movie also highlights intrapersonal intelligence, the capacity for self-reflection, emotional regulation, and personal goal setting. Dre's internal struggles, moments of self-doubt, and gradual growth reflect how individuals engage in metacognition and emotional self-awareness. In English education, fostering intrapersonal intelligence can involve reflective journaling, self-evaluation tasks, and learner goal planning. Film scenes can serve as prompts for learners to reflect on their own experiences, attitudes, and language learning challenges, strengthening both emotional and linguistic awareness.

Empirical studies suggest that practices that encourage student reflection enhance language learning outcomes by promoting autonomy and self-regulated learning. Thus, tasks that bridge character reflections with learner narratives, for

example, “Write a journal entry as if you were Dre”, encourage learners to integrate language production with personal reflection, combining affective and cognitive learning domains (Rahayu et al., 2023).

Naturalistic Intelligence

Although less frequent than other forms, naturalistic intelligence appears in scenes involving outdoor settings, such as the training sequences in parks and natural environments. Dre’s physical integration with nature, observing environmental cues while practicing kung fu, provides opportunities to consider connections between learners’ surroundings and language acquisition. In an English lesson, educators could harness natural contexts by designing outdoor language activities or nature-themed storytelling tasks that prompt learners to describe natural elements and engage with environmental vocabularies.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

The identification of multiple intelligences in *The Karate Kid* has substantial pedagogical implications for English education. Scholars have argued that MI theory encourages differentiated instruction, tailoring tasks to multiple learner strengths rather than privileging conventional academic intelligences (Tafti, 2014). Using film as instructional material supports this approach because movies are inherently multimodal, they combine visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and social elements, aligning with MI theory’s core premise that humans process information in varied ways.

For example, visual-spatial learners may thrive engaging with film imagery and storyboards; auditory learners benefit from listening to dialogues; kinesthetic learners benefit from role-plays; interpersonal learners benefit from collaborative analysis; and intrapersonal learners benefit from reflective writing. Teachers can therefore design MI-informed lesson plans that incorporate film analysis with targeted tasks addressing various intelligence domains, supporting learner engagement and inclusion (Nor, 2015).

Moreover, research on MI in English teaching contexts has shown that such approaches can increase learner motivation, participation, and emotional investment in language learning (Imamyartha et al., 2021). By recognizing diverse learner intelligences, English educators can create more inclusive environments that honor individual differences while promoting communicative competence.

Integration with English Proficiency

The analysis suggests that integrating MI indicators via film not only enriches

cognitive representation but also strengthens core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, instructors might use dialogue transcripts to enhance vocabulary and grammar instruction; assign listening tasks based on scene dialogues; facilitate speaking activities through role-plays; and encourage writing reflections based on character experiences. These multimodal activities align with communicative language teaching principles and support holistic language development that goes beyond rote memorization toward authentic language use.

Limitations of MI Application

Despite the promising alignment between MI indicators and film use in English education, it is important to acknowledge ongoing debates regarding the empirical status of MI theory. Some scholars have critiqued MI for lacking predictive validity and robust measurement tools. However, even critics concede that engaging learners through multiple modes of representation can enhance learning experiences, even if the strict categorization of multiple intelligence types remains contested. Therefore, educators are encouraged to use MI as a pedagogical lens rather than a rigid diagnostic scheme.

The Karate Kid (2010) vividly illustrates multiple intelligence indicators that can be harnessed for English teaching and learning. The film's multimodal narrative provides natural contexts where learners can engage in diverse cognitive and emotional tasks that reflect visual-spatial, kinesthetic, auditory, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. Integrating these indicators into English pedagogy supports differentiated instruction and inclusive learning practices that are both meaningful and engaging for learners. Future research should explore empirical impacts of MI-based film instruction on learner outcomes, including language proficiency growth and motivational shifts.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the indicators of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory as represented in *The Karate Kid* (2010) and to examine their relevance within the context of English education. Through qualitative descriptive analysis of scenes, dialogues, character interactions, and narrative structures, the findings demonstrate that the movie embodies multiple forms of intelligence, namely visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic

intelligence. These intelligences are portrayed organically through the learning processes and character development experienced by the main characters, particularly Dre Parker and Mr. Han. The presence of these intelligence indicators affirms Gardner's proposition that human intelligence is pluralistic and contextually embedded rather than singular and abstract.

One of the most significant conclusions drawn from this research is that *The Karate Kid* functions as a multimodal learning text that aligns closely with the core principles of Multiple Intelligence Theory. The film presents learning as a holistic process that integrates physical movement, emotional awareness, social interaction, environmental engagement, and reflective thinking. This portrayal challenges traditional views of learning that prioritize linguistic and logical abilities alone and instead reinforces the need for inclusive educational practices that recognize diverse learner strengths. In the context of English education, this finding highlights the pedagogical potential of film as an instructional medium capable of engaging multiple cognitive domains simultaneously.

The dominance of bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligences in the movie is particularly noteworthy. Martial arts training sequences emphasize disciplined physical movement, coordination, and embodied learning, illustrating how knowledge can be internalized through action and repetition. These representations suggest that language learning, especially for learners with strong kinesthetic preferences, may be enhanced when physical activities such as role-plays, simulations, and gesture-based instruction are incorporated into English classrooms. Similarly, the strong depiction of interpersonal intelligence through mentorship, peer relationships, and conflict resolution underscores the social nature of learning. Language acquisition, as reflected in these interactions, is shown to be deeply connected to communication, empathy, and collaboration—elements that are central to communicative language teaching.

Furthermore, the portrayal of intrapersonal intelligence in *The Karate Kid* provides valuable insights into the emotional and reflective dimensions of learning. Dre's internal struggles, self-doubt, and gradual development of confidence illustrate the importance of self-awareness and emotional regulation in educational processes. In English education, fostering intrapersonal intelligence through reflective journals, self-assessment tasks, and personal response activities can support learner autonomy and motivation. This study therefore reinforces the idea that affective factors are not

peripheral but integral to successful language learning.

Visual-spatial and musical intelligences, although less dominant, also contribute meaningfully to the learning narrative presented in the film. Cinematic visuals, spatial navigation, and auditory elements such as background music enhance meaning-making and emotional engagement. These findings suggest that English educators can leverage visual and auditory stimuli from films to support comprehension, vocabulary development, and pronunciation practice. Film-based instruction thus offers a rich environment where learners can engage with language through images, sounds, and narratives, aligning with multimodal learning theories and contemporary digital literacy practices.

Another important conclusion of this study relates to the implications of Multiple Intelligence Theory for differentiated instruction in English education. By identifying diverse intelligence indicators in a single film, this research demonstrates that one instructional resource can address multiple learner needs when used strategically. Teachers who adopt an MI-informed approach can design varied tasks, such as discussions, creative writing, dramatization, visual projects, and reflective activities, based on the same film material. This approach not only enhances learner engagement but also promotes equity by providing multiple pathways for learners to demonstrate understanding and competence.

Despite these contributions, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The analysis was confined to a single movie, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study focuses on interpretation rather than empirical measurement of learning outcomes. While the findings support the pedagogical relevance of Multiple Intelligence Theory, they do not empirically assess its impact on English language proficiency. Therefore, the conclusions should be interpreted as conceptual and pedagogical insights rather than definitive evidence of instructional effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the study contributes to the growing body of literature that positions film as a valuable pedagogical tool in English education. By integrating Multiple Intelligence Theory into film analysis, this research bridges educational psychology, media studies, and language pedagogy. It encourages educators to move beyond traditional teaching methods and embrace more holistic, learner-centered approaches that reflect the complexity of human intelligence.

In conclusion, *The Karate Kid* (2010) provides a rich and meaningful representation of Multiple Intelligence Theory that is highly relevant to English education. The film's depiction of diverse intelligences supports the notion that learning is multifaceted and socially situated. For English educators, this study underscores the importance of designing instructional practices that accommodate diverse learner intelligences and leverage multimodal resources such as films. Future research is recommended to explore the empirical effects of MI-based film instruction on language learning outcomes, learner motivation, and classroom interaction across different educational contexts. Through such continued inquiry, English education can evolve toward more inclusive and effective pedagogical practices that honor the diversity of learners' cognitive and emotional capacities.

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