

USING SUGGESTOPEDIA IN EFL/ESL CLASSES: A CASE STUDY OF MALYSIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Learning environment plays a vital role regarding learning outcomes. Second language (L2) teaching/learning process is thought to be tough in Malaysia educational system. Suggestopedia is a way of providing better learning environment to the learners for teaching a second or foreign language. This method enhances learners' interest towards learning and they feel relaxed that makes them learn quickly. This method uses soft music to cope up with the psychological barriers that hinder during the process of learning. Such barriers include class room or situational anxiety, boredom, traditional ways of teaching/learning, exhausting routines and fear of facing the teacher or using second language. All these barriers are due to different social pressures, political conditions in the country (that influence every person around) and educational methods/practices that the students have to face and their interest level drops to a level that is harmful during the process of proper learning. To cope up with these problems during L2 learning, Suggestopedia can prove to be useful and powerful technique by the institutes and teachers. This study aims to find out the effectiveness and importance of Suggestopedia in L2 class to get the desired results and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Suggestopedia, Language Learning Method, L2 teaching in Malaysia

Introduction

Teaching and Learning situations are dependent upon overall education system. In Malaysia, it is always debatable that the educational system needs to be improved. Different social and political factors also influence the learners and their state of mind defines what they are getting from their surrounding and how it is affecting their learning abilities especially second language learning. For this purpose, the learners need such an environment and joyful technique that may help them learn better with relaxed minds.

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Known as father of ‘accelerated learning’, Dr. Georgi Lozanov an expert Psychotherapist and Educationist from Bulgaria is the one who introduced and used the humanistic approach in perspective of learning. He believed that learners do not use more than 5% to 10% of their mental capacity. Their brain can process and preserve much more knowledge and material if they are provided with given optimal conditions that are necessary for learning. For him Learning is a ‘matter of attitude’, ‘not aptitude’. So, he worked on finding the way of better learning.

In 1970s, Lozanov proposed an effective teaching method that can help the learners decipher better in a relaxed and soothing way known as Suggestopedia. He believed that, for learning, optimum state is required and this state is acquired when the learner’s mind is focused and relaxed. To attain such certain calm and concentrated state of mind, music is used in suggestopedia that creates a comfortable and relaxing environment, and a relationship between the teacher and the student. It is the learning with soft music played in the background that makes the learners remove hindering barriers in the process of their study and learn faster than usual. This method is the very need for Malaysia learners today as they are facing crucial socio-political environment along with the traditional ways of teaching in their educational system that is negatively affecting their minds and learning abilities. They should have an opportunity to learn with some soothing and embalming ways to get better learning outcomes as through suggestopedia memorization in learning accelerates by up to 25 times as compared to other conservative methods of learning.

Suggestopedia is an endeavour to:

- i) Improve the power and ability of learner’s brain
- ii) Reduce the level of anxiety through cosy environment
- iii) Develop the concentration level

Lozanov (1978) is of the view that suggestology is a language teaching approach not a theory of language. This approach tends to make psychological and environmental improvements. The learners face different social pressures about learning or using some 2nd language. The teaching methods and materials used in the classroom make them psychologically/emotionally overburdened, fed up and disturbed. The same is the scenario faced by Malaysian learners. They face a lot of social, political and cultural issues along with the impacts of their local and mother tongue. So, the Malaysian learners need some other interesting way to get through all these situations and that way can possibly be related to suggestology.

Hypothesis, research questions and objective

The discussion provides a strong ground to conduct an experimental study based on the hypothesis that Suggestopedia can be an interesting technique of teaching L2 and it can come up with positive outcomes. This hypothetical view leads to the research question as ‘What is the impact of Suggestopedia in Malaysian L2 classrooms?’ and ‘To What extent Malaysian L2 learners feel it easy to learn through Suggestopedia? Experiment to find the answers to these questions would be attached to this objective as, to find out the effectiveness of using Suggestopedia on Malaysian L2 learners.

Literature review

Before putting the words regarding reviewed literature on the paper, it is important to discuss the details of Suggestopedia presented by Lozanov and other experts. Lozanov (1978) stressed on the importance of a meaningful communicative connection between the learners of a language and the given materials regarding target language. In perspective of Suggestology, Larsen-Freeman (1986) discussed following aspects to be encouraged and emphasized,

- i) Using stories for learning process
- ii) Interactive environment for the learners
- iii) Listening practices to learn language
- iv) lexical translation to learn a language
- v) Memorizing
- vi) Drama

Suggestopedia is explained by Richards, *et.al.* (1990) as a process all about using music along with these aspects:

- i) Using Visual images
- ii) Dialogues
- iii) Situations
- iv) Translating and presenting the language
- v) Relaxation exercises

Suggestopedic Principles

Larsen, *et.al* (2001) presented the principles of Suggestopedia as:

i) The goal

Suggestopedia is the term derived from suggestion and pedagogy. Sometimes, it is used to refer as accelerated learning. Students often set a limit while working with their learning abilities. They need to maximize their mental powers for better learning outcomes. The goal of

suggestopedia is to accelerate the language learning process by minimizing the psychological barriers from learners' mind.

ii) The roles of the teacher and the Learners

Teacher, student relationship is similar as between parents and children. The teacher is a trusted authority during the process of learning and in the classroom. The learners can retain information from their teacher if they have complete confidence in their teachers' abilities. The learners feel more inclined towards learning and secured, if they fully trust in their teacher and are comfortable with the behaviour of their teachers. They cannot learn properly if they feel that the teacher is there only to show authoritative behaviour and criticize them negatively.

iii) Qualities of the teaching/ learning process

The teaching-learning process should be revolving around the needs of the learners. Suggestopedia is a 'learner-centered' process. While using suggestopedia, a lively environment is designed consciously that is free of anxiety and boredom. Group cooperation is supposed to be supportive and positive. Classroom should be decorated cheerfully with flowers, bright colours and a collaborative seating order to allow eye-contact among the teacher and learners with a freedom of mobility. All such settings make learning a joyful and interesting process. The learner can feel free, relaxed, and playful to practice the presented material in an interesting and creative manner.

iv). Nature of classroom interactions

From the very beginning of the course, the teacher begins interacting with the group of learners and individuals. Afterwards, the learners start interacting with each other.

v) Students' feelings

The reason of naming this method as suggestopedia is that students have to be as 'childlike' as they can, putting all authority in the hands of the teacher to instruct them and learn them while making them feel relaxed through their surroundings. Thus the students become "suggestible", Brown (2001). Thus, the attention is properly given to students' feelings in order to enhance their confidence level.

vi) Emphasis on Language Skills

Communicative speaking is emphasized in suggestopedia. Suggestopedic courses are meant to direct the learners to act communicatively (Richards, J. C 1992).

vii) The Role of Learner's Native Language

Translation in learner's native/mother language is used to understand and clarify the meaning of the dialogue. In the classroom, native language is used by the teacher as well during the

course instructions (when necessary). With the passage of time, the usage of native language by the teacher becomes lesser and lesser.

viii) Accomplishment of Evaluation

Formal tests are used to evaluate the normal performance of the students in the class. These formal tests threaten the relaxing atmosphere that is considered to be essential for accelerated learning.

ix) Teacher Responding to Students' Errors

In this method, teacher corrects students' errors in a gentle manner so as to keep them confident and relaxed.

Procedure of suggestopedic instructions

Lozanov (1978) explored that the learners need better attitude for better learning. The key factors that add effectiveness in the process and method of suggestopedia include a rich environment for sensory learning as colours, pictures, music, active participation of learners in songs and activities, dramatised text, positive expectation of success and using different interesting methods. Four main stages are used in Suggestopedia.

i) Presentation

Presentation is the preparatory stage. In this stage the teacher helps the students to move into a relaxed and positive state of mind. Such a relaxed state of mind makes them feel good about learning process and they get prepared for it. Some Physical and mental exercises as muscle relaxing and calming of mind through music are done. When the students are relaxed and feel themselves submerged with the soft music and imagine themselves in a safe, cosy and calm place. Then they envision themselves learning the presented material regarding their lessons in a quick and easy way. This activity is done with them for some minutes and then they are returned back to their attentive and active state of awareness.

ii) First Concert/Active Concert

The teacher instructs and sets the classroom as a living room using a round central round table with arm chairs (ordinary) around it. The classroom walls are decorated with colours and posters. The posters may contain information about 2nd language as vocabulary and grammar. The teacher acts in a sensible way dynamically and actively. The participants (learners) take part in the activity by choosing new names and different nationalities. After getting into these new recognitions, some different autobiographies (fictional) are given to them. Then they assume themselves into their new personalities/roles and interact with others to introduce themselves through drama, imitation, song and games (Murcia, 1991: 42).

In this way, the active presentation of the required material is done. The teacher assigns new dialogue and the students get their presentations prepared in the form of reading aloud material, dramatic performance, singing, choral reading and using new vocabulary for the coming week.

iii) Second Concert/Passive Concert

A relaxed state is created in this stage. The learners put their scripts away and close their eyes and listen to some Baroque music. During this relaxed state of learners, the teacher reads the text very softly in the background. The special music is selected to put the students into an optimum state of mind that results into an effortless acquisition of required lesson/material. During this second (passive concert) a baroque music is played but in this way Suggestopedia does not tend to make the students fall asleep. Rather, some livelier and faster pieces of music are there to keep the brain stimulated. After this passive concert ends, the learners leave the classroom silently (Harmer, 2003).

iv) Practice

At this stage, the learners come to conclude their activities and review different ways through which they learnt. The teacher acts as a consultant while the learners play games and sing classical songs. The learners interact in 2nd language while speaking spontaneously any correction or interruption.

Methodology

The research was designed to work with the Public Sector school students of 9th grade in different districts of Punjab. Total 200 students participated in the study including 100 girls and 100 boys (of age 14-16) from 4 schools of Bahawalpur and Lodhran Malaysia. Two groups were chosen from each school as control Group (Group A) and experiment group (Group B), each group consisting of 25 students. The study was conducted for the time period of one month. In their L2 classrooms, the students (experiment groups) were instructed about their L2 learning materials using Suggestopedia whereas the control group was taught in conventional way. The data was collected through questionnaire (test) that was put to comparative analysis using SPSS.

Effects of Suggestopedia

The above discussion gives thorough view about suggestopedia and the way it works. It is a way of instructions that has positive motivational, cognitive, emotional and social effects on the learning abilities and outcomes of the students.

i) Motivational Effects

Motivational approach suggests that in the process of learning, the intrinsic motivation or experiencing the joyfulness and competence is the decisive factor in perspective of

developing a long-term motivation for learning. The playful and interesting design of activities and exercises during the Suggestopedic instructions produces such motivational experiences as the attraction towards learning process, curiosity and joy of learning.

Therefore, an increase of intrinsic motivation is expected during the implementation of such method. The opportunity to select from different sets of activities as per learners' choice and interest makes them feel the self-determination and a sense of autonomy. Different activities embedded in rich context and healthy situations boost up the learning abilities making the learners understand complex remarks and difficult materials even with a simple or limited vocabulary. The overall positive effects on the motivation level of the learners bring them to experiences success with the feeling of competence and confidence.

ii) Cognitive Effects

Comfortable environment brings relaxing feelings in the learners and they start believing in their own powers with positive hopes changing the inputs into intakes. High and positive motivation level refines the faculties of cognition and result into the development of learning and knowledge following the stimulation of learning readiness. The students are put into situations during their exercises/activities that are complex and the authentic system of 2nd language is used. Such an exposure has a certain positive effect on increasing the listening comprehension and making them able to communicate in the 2nd language using everyday situations.

iii) Emotional Effects

Regarding the learning process, the most important thing to be ponder over, is to facilitate the learners in such a way that could reduce the embracement, anxiety and nervousness. Instructions and frequently practiced relaxation exercises through suggestopedia respond and justify such emotional needs and reduce their anxiety/nervousness. Therefore, it can be concluded that suggestopedia has positive effect on the learners and their emotional dimension regarding the learning process.

iv) Social Effects

The motivational and autonomous development has its long lasting effect even after the learners have completed the course. Such practices in learners' independent groups increase and promote their knowledge and confidence on long term basis. These groups impart a positive sense of shared process of learning. Suggestopedic instructions use the activities and exercises frequently that develop positive communication and broad social interaction. The most important aspect in this regard is that the learners become collaborative and highly acquainted with other fellows in the group. Consequently, it can be expected that in a

suggestopedic course the learners can properly and positively experience the ways of cooperation and communication with other students that enhances their 2nd language usage as well.

Observation and need in Malaysia

Most of the countries around the globe have set rules and systems for teaching second or foreign languages; even then they face problems during the process of language learning. The reason is that, language is sensitively related to the society, culture, politics, norms, and religion. The learners have to go through all these sets of pressures while learning a language. So, the educational system is updated and upgraded according to the teachers' and students' needs. But in a developing country, as Malaysia, the 2nd language learners are facing a lot of internal and external issues that are influencing the learners emotionally and psychologically. Such social and political issues make learners' minds occupied and they get negative influences that create barriers in the process of learning especially, 2nd language learning. Their system of instructions about 2nd language learning mostly plays a role of nightmare for them and finally, they come to the result that learning a second or foreign language is a hard task and we cannot justify doing it. Their anxiety and irritation leads them to negativity. This negativity is needed to be removed from young minds not only for the purpose of language learning but also for making them positive communicators. If they practice positive and healthy environment in only one out of six classes, they can get its nice influence throughout the learning process. In this scenario, Malaysian young learners need proper and positively communicative environment that may lead them to release their tension and negativity and give them a chance to think and feel fresh.

Suggestopedia is an approach/method towards teaching a second/foreign language that provides the students with a feeling of relaxation, interest and positivity consequently making them learn quickly (Hornby, 2005). When the learners would feel relaxed and tempting to take interest in the classroom environment, their confidence level will automatically increase and they would feel at ease with the tasks and instructions given by the teacher. Such activities (if practiced properly) can boost up the learning outcomes breaking down the negative 'belief system' that school is a boring place or learning is some hard job to do. In perspective of second language learning, such negative beliefs work more efficiently and the learners feel that it is really a hard task. Most of the Malaysian learners who have got to learn English as a second language in the schools, believe that, 'it is a tough language, so it is very difficult to learn it'. The second negative behaviour is from their teachers.

The current discussion is based on interviews and conversations with more than 50 teachers, lecturers and professors from 10 schools and colleges in Punjab, Malaysia. But the research while applying suggestopedia was not done because the responses of the teachers made the researcher think that first there is a need to aware the teachers about this method and its effectiveness. Because 90% of them think that language should be taught in a traditional way and the students should not be made feel easy or relaxed with the process of their studies. They should strictly follow rules of grammar and keep rotting every line given in his/her syllabus. Such self created and embellished by the society behaviours that work as big barriers and when the learners along with a lot of socio-cultural, socio-political and religious pressures enters the 2nd language classroom, his energies are drained due to the teacher's tough looks and strict behaviour. In these circumstances, the learners feel burdened, their performance and learning abilities start reducing. Lozanov (1978) conveys Suggestopedia as a method that aims to provide the students with peace of mind that is vital to facilitate them with high retention ratios that can help them flourish their abilities and reach their full potential.

The need is to change the system of those negative beliefs into a system of positive beliefs. There should be the notions and practices of, 'learning is fun', 'class environment is nice'; 'I like language classes' thus, activating the unconscious mental processes to result in great and powerful effects. Lozanov (1978) believes that unconscious mental activities of the learners can be brought into a higher value. Mental and Physical relaxation exercises enable the learners to adjust the aspects of their consciousness to receive the material of their lesson in an uninterrupted way by any of internal disruption as boredom, worry or fatigue. One of the most exclusive features of this method is the usage of soft classical music. During the learning process this music, according to Lozanov (1978), creates a soothing or relaxed state and he demonstrated that its usage developed high rates of learning in foreign language classes showing the ratio of three times more fast than the ones achieved during the best intensive learning programs in the United States.

Analysis and Discussion

After one month the feedback and outcome from the students was taken through a test. The result of experiment group was amazingly different from that of the control group. 76% of the experiment group, B (Boys School Bahawalpur) showed better results than the control group (A) in which the students only scored 48%. The students in Group A from Girls School Bahawalpur scored 50% and Group B scored 86%. The Students (girls) in District Lodhran Group-A scored 52% and Group B scored 81%. In the Boys school Lodhran Group A scored

37% and Group b scored 69%. All these results proved that the students get better understanding and optimum learning through Suggestopedia.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The above discussion throws light on the need of pulling the learners out of dull and difficult learning environment that is making them negative and aggressive. Interesting methods as suggestopedia should be used during 2nd language classes. Malaysiai learners need positive attitude development to cope up with increasing unrest around the world. Suggestopedia can help them release their tension/anxiety and make them feel positive, expressive and strong from within. The teachers should realize the need of delightful and relaxed environment and start practising suggestopedic instruction so as to increase learners' interest level, cognitive ability and overall conduct. As far as the question of norms and religion against music is concerned, there is a suggestion for the teachers to use all the other things as (suggestopedia requires) to make the environment lively and use some recordings (available on internet easily) with the names of Allah or a single name as 'Allah hoo' repeatedly recited with a light 'Daff' music played with it or only 'Daff' music can be played as the classical music to create a soothing environment is possible with all the suggestopedic settings and impacts.

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