

# Using Suggestopedia in ELT in Saudi Arabia: Implications for Pedagogy

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**Abstract**—Suggestopedia is one of methods that can be used by ELT teachers to cultivate students' motivation, to increase students' memorizing ability and to improve their listening and speaking capacity by helping students overcome a variety of potential psychological barriers that they might have before coming to a classroom and affect their studying negatively. This theoretical study is a quick guide as to how to gear English language curriculums to be based on the pedagogical principles of Suggestopedia. This research will be divided into four sections. Literature review will be the first section that outlines suggestopedia background including its origin, developer, and principles. The second section discusses suggestopedia in classroom including discussion about foreign/second language learning process. The third part will show the benefits and drawbacks of suggestopedia through the following principles: learning environments, the roles of teachers and students, target language aspect, the use of mother tongue, and teaching materials. The last section will summarize the strengths and weaknesses of suggestopedia and show some recommendations for further research. As with any research conducted within a restricted time-span, this research has some limitations that should be mentioned. It discusses suggestopedia as teaching method of foreign/second languages as well as it analyses advantages and disadvantages of this method through linguist viewpoints.

**Keywords**— ELT, Saudi Arabia, Suggestopedia, Curriculum

## I. INTRODUCTION

MANY teachers from different disciplines make significant efforts to find an appropriate teaching method for their students. Some of them create their own way of presenting a lesson, which can meet the principles of existing approach. Suggestopedia is a method of teaching that may be used subconsciously by many teachers who usually try to facilitate the learning process and help their students overcome a variety of potential psychological barriers that they might have before coming to a classroom and affect their studying negatively (Larsen and Anderson, 2011). If those teachers recognise that they already have been using this method, they should follow all of its principles and apply them successfully.

Suggestopedia, developed by the Bulgarian educationalist Lozanov, is defined as a foreign/second language teaching method that focuses on accelerating the learning process by providing students with a comfortable environment inside a classroom (Richards and Schmidt, 2010). As all teaching

methods, suggestopedia has certain principles that were examined to find whether it is an effective method or not. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how linguists consider applying this method in teaching a foreign/second language. This analysis will show the advantages and disadvantages of suggestopedia.

According to Lozanov (2009), using this method in foreign/second language teaching, as it was mainly applied, can accelerate language learning three to five times faster than conventional methods. However, in the review of his book, his method was criticized as pseudoscience or unscientific (Scovel, 1979). These opposing viewpoints will be analysed using the supporting evidence collected by other educationalists to confirm the validity of this method. For that reason, collecting different linguists' views regarding a teaching method through general principles can help teachers use what is considered to be beneficial and avoid what is described as useless.

Consequently, this paper will be divided into four sections. Literature review will be the first section that provides background information on suggestopedia, including the origin of the method, its developer, and its principles. The second section discusses suggestopedia in classroom including discussion about foreign/ second language learning process. The third part will show the benefits and drawbacks of suggestopedia through the following principles: learning environments, the roles of teachers and students, target language aspect, the use of mother tongue, and teaching materials. The last section will summarize the strengths and weaknesses of suggestopedia and show some recommendations for further research. As with any research conducted within a restricted time-span, this research has some limitations that should be mentioned. It discusses suggestopedia as teaching method of foreign/second languages as well as it analyses advantages and disadvantages of this method through linguist viewpoints.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language teaching methods have changed throughout history due to the fact that people tend to learn foreign/ second languages by joining formal education (Zainuddin et al., 2011). From the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, there was a gradual development of these methods that were originally associated with learning Greek and Latin. These methods were mostly concentrated on teaching language via grammar,

literature and translation (Titone, 1968). Subsequently, the focus of language teaching methods transferred to cover different aspects of target language.

By the twentieth century, many approaches and methods of teaching foreign/second language have emerged with more concentration on functional and interactional characteristics rather than structural and grammatical characteristics of language (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Suggestopedia is one of these methods that do not focus on teaching the structure of foreign/second language, but tends to expose a language to foreign learners by means of suggestive teaching and give the priority to the psychological and humanistic factors unintentionally neglected or intentionally ignored by most traditional or conventional methods of foreign language teaching.

According to Richard and Schmidt (2010, pp. 572-573), suggestopedia is 'a pedagogical application of "suggestology"; the method applies the influence of suggestion on human behaviour'; it is also known as suggestopedy, desuggestopedia, or the Lozanov method. The first two terms are formed by a combination of two words, namely, suggestion and pedagogy. Regarding the latter term, this refers to the developer of this method Professor Georgi Lozanov, a psychiatrist-psychologist, brain physiologist and educationalist, who studied psychological suggestion and applied his new suggestology science to pedagogy. Lozanov (1978, p. vii) defines suggestology as 'the science or the art of liberating and stimulating the personality both under guidance and alone' and presents suggestopedy as 'suggestology applied in the process of instruction.' Furthermore, the term "desuggestopedia" is now used to indicate the important position of desuggesting any potential limitations on learning (Larsen and Anderson, 2011).

In 1978, UNESCO considered suggestopedia to be superior and suggested that it can be applied in the whole world (Lozanov.org, 2009). Foreign language researchers who have investigated and used this method report some positive results in the field of instruction (Lozanov, 1978; Schuster and Gritton, 1985). Prominent results of their research revealed that this method provides for the integration of the affective and humanistic factors so necessary in the foreign language classroom. Referring to its definition, this method integrates the principles of suggestology with those of pedagogy. Since this method is concerned with both the emotional or affective aspects of learning as much as the cognitive and psychomotor aspects, it is oftentimes referred to as a psychotherapeutic-psycho-hygienic educational process (Lozanov, 1978).

As such, Suggestopedia is based on three key principles viewed as interconnected and interacted. These principles are summarized as following: first, the principle of euphoria that refers to the ecstasy and absence of anxiety in a learning environment that has to do with the general atmosphere in which teaching and learning take place. Lozanov (1978) explained that the creation of a pleasant learning atmosphere can help students to lower their levels of tension, fear, anxiety

and all other emotions that produce a negative attitude towards learning in most conventional language classrooms. These feelings are normally aroused by a 'lack of confidence in one's ability to understand, memorize and utilize the material given in the lesson' (Lozanov 1978, p. 264).

Furthermore, the mental and physical stress associated with traditional learning and the social mores related to it easily impedes the students' cognitive activity; but when the learning atmosphere is full of joy and quietness, students tend to feel relaxed, euphoric, and thereby, open to receive learning signals strongly and permanently. According to Lozanov (1978, p. 265), the second principle is 'the unity of the conscious and the para-conscious' and the integration of brain activity, which focus on the human being as an integrated whole.

In other words, the tenets of suggestopedia indicate that there is a holistic approach of the development of emotional, cognitive and psychomotor aspects of the human personality, and that these aspects should be treated by integration upon learning and teaching.

The conscious and the para-conscious aspects of the mind function as an integral whole, considering the integration of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, the cortical and subcortical structures and the process of analysis and synthesis. Biologically, none of these components functions separately, this is also called the principle of globality in which Suggestopedia is grounded. Accordingly, Schuster and Gritton (1985) observed that presenting and globalising a lesson as one unit by means of artistry, didactics and psychology is immediately applied in classrooms.

The last principle underlying this method is the suggestive link that refers to the level of the reserve complex which calls for the creation of mutual relations in the process of instruction as it occurs in psychotherapeutic practice. Tacitly put, this principle refers to such principles of human learning such as group learning, collaborative and cooperative learning and the social aspects of learning. Suggestive links in suggestive group learning helps to improve memory and learning in the suggestopedic system. Potentials for learning can be aroused when people learning in a cooperative environment; as Lozanov suggests: "The level of the suggestive link is measured by the degree to which the reserves of the student have been tapped" (Lozanov 1978, p. 266).

Suggestopedia does not stand alone in the educational system, but it seems to be effective in facilitating learning. Surviving through second language acquisition is not easy on many students. Learning a new language creates fear and tension and sometimes teachers begin to wonder what may be the best way to approach students. Perhaps, there is no best way, but some methods are better than others and tend to produce better end results.

### III. SUGGESTOPEDIA AND LEARNING PROCESS

The use of desuggestion via Suggestopedia relates well to effective learning as this method frees the mind from the

barriers of social norms and misconceptions about education. By its definition, Suggestopedia is the application of the principles of Suggestology to pedagogy. Lozanov coined the term suggestology to refer to the area in psychology that addresses the nature and functions of suggestion in shaping and affecting the human character. It studies the relationships between people and their environment from a total viewpoint, including the conscious and non-conscious aspects of the human personality.

Lozanov (1978, p. 208) aptly observes that 'Suggestion is a constant communicative factor which chiefly through para-conscious mental activity can create conditions for tapping the functional reserve capacities of personality.' This readiness or openness for suggestion, the so-called "suggestibility" varies from individual to another. In addition, the amount of suggestibility in an individual learner varies from time to time. According to Lozanov (1971), humans are all constantly exposed to varied amounts of suggestion, no matter how conscious or unconscious they are. Individuals receive positive as well as negative suggestive effects either simultaneously or consecutively. While positive suggestions aid in the development of the personality and its capacities, negative suggestions are responsible for limitations of the personality and deterioration, or even destruction, of capacity. These suggestive factors are extremely important in our lives, but generally go unnoticed because they exist at a non-conscious level.

What Suggestopedia proposes is the use of mental reserves in organizing a coherent system that tries to coordinate the suggestive signals that learners receive. These signals are more or less non-conscious emotional signals. The system tends to mobilize the reserves of intelligence while eliminating past negative suggestions. It involves a dialectical process of desuggestion/suggestion. Students have to be freed from suggestions received from society since childhood and which limit their possibilities.

To provide for the development of the whole personality, it is incumbent upon teachers or parents to look for a way to avert restrictive and limiting social norms. For this to happen, suggestopedic teaching should be adopted to induce learning conditions, which de-condition and de-suggest language learners by activating and stimulating all their functions, which are not usually used in full capacity. It is also incumbent upon teachers to bypass, what Lozanov names, the anti-suggestive psychological barriers (Lozanov, 1971). The underlying purpose here is to protect the personality against any harmful effects by accepting or rejecting the various suggestive mental effects (Lozanov, 1978, p. 164) as follows:

1. the Critical Logical Barrier rejects things that do not seem to have a well-intended logical motivation; it is built by conscious critical thinking.
2. the Intuitive-Affective Barrier rejects that which does not provide security and confidence; this one is unconscious.
3. the Ethical Barrier rejects anything that is against the ethical or moral principles of the individual.

These barriers are mutually-dependent and they interact together and, therefore, it is impossible to distinct or isolate them or their effects. These barriers can also block the use of the individual's overall potentials for learning, for they are related to one's attitude, motivation, expectancy and interest (Lozanov, 1978, p. 126). According to Larsen-Freeman, (2000, p. 73), Lozanov proposed that "we might be using only five to ten percent of our mental capacity". Though this is now considered a myth first spread by Wilder Penfield, an American neurosurgeon, about the time of Lozano, it was then strongly believed that this was true that people use from five to ten percent of their brain potentials while the rest stays in reserve, available but unused, like an unused RAM or free disc capacity on the computer.

It is essential then to sidestep or avert these barriers through applying different means of suggestion. This is not to overcome or emplace something on the barriers, but to tone in the suggestions in order to do away with the negative side effects of the barriers that impede total functionality of mental capacities. According to Lozanov (1978, p.170), 'The more a suggestion harmonizes with the logical requirements of the personality...the quicker and easier is the suggestion realized.

In actual fact the overcoming of barriers signifies harmonization with the barriers.' Once the barriers are properly bypassed or avoided, the reserves of the mental potentials can be utilized, bringing forth hypermnnesia - uninhibited communicative competence. The suggestive factors that can bypass and avert these barriers as well as stimulate mental capacities are significant to activating suggestopedia.

However, these factors are grounded in sub-conscious relationships between the learners, the learning process and the teachers. These factors focus on those tricks and techniques, which create an appropriate emotional environment likely to increase receptiveness to the content of learning in an anxiety-free situation (Lozanov, 1978). These various subjective factors fit together, reinforce each other, and their use forms a coherent group (Lozanov, 1971). Thus, the whole individual can develop all his/her capacities, all his/her creativity, based on a global approach which considers the learning individual as a total being, thereby considering the conscious and the non-conscious, the logical and the affective, the emotional and the rational, the physical and the intellectual (Lozanov, 1978).

Suggestopedia uses some uncommon methods of presenting learning content and material to accelerate and enhance classroom learning. Schuster and Gritton defines this method as follows:

"[Suggestopedia] uses aspects of suggestion similar to advertising and unusual styles of presenting material to accelerate classroom learning. The essence of this technique is using an unusual combination of physical relaxation exercises, mental concentration and suggestive principles to strengthen a person's ego and expand his or her memory capabilities while material to be learned is presented dynamically with relaxing music (Schuster & Gritton, 1986, p. 1).

From the viewpoint of educators, it can be generalized that this method can be utilised to the advantage of practically every learner. This is possible, because it is in no respect the taking possession of one individuality by another. The simple educational tenet underlying this idea is that mental and bodily relaxation induced by music together with perseverance and regularity can be conducive to improved academic performance: "The only requisites are the performance of a few elementary exercises, a moment of muscular and mental relaxation, in conjunction with perseverance and regularity" (Baudouin, 1921, p. 8)

The educational tenets of suggestopedia are practical enough that virtually most teachers can master them in practice. An ideal teacher can guide her students to enable themselves to practice suggestopedia to the good of their own self-directed learning. By using the tenets of suggestopedia, language teachers simply apply the laws of nature which dictate that once freed from stress and worry, individuals can learn better and more effectively and music can do that.

Language curriculum should be designed and developed based on needs analyses and the recognition of learning styles of the various language learners. The use of suggestion/de-suggestion techniques implied in this method should therefore address the teaching of thinking as a skill; all learning/teaching materials should be frameworked by thinking. That is why they call thinking the fifth skill after listening, speaking, reading and writing. In this way, thinking should be introduced as a process for developing the relevant language skills. It should also be taught within the broad scope and sequence of the language curriculum in whole. Finally, teaching thinking should be emphasised as a problem-solving skill that each student should master. Predictably, research has illustrated that students appear to achieve optimally and with greater success when they are listening and thinking, when their teacher challenges their intellect (Tama, 1986).

By dint of relaxation, students can learn (a) to be competitive; (b) to enjoy attending classroom sessions; (c) and to retain a greater amount of information. And further, by dint of voluntary attention, students become aware of the context of frame being used to process information and develop a higher level of control of the information. The information will help the students establish a certain goal, predict and plan ahead, and express themselves through reasoning and projection.

There is nothing magical about suggestopedia - it simply promotes learning. Therefore, the ability to perceive how suggestive principles operate in the domain of bilingual education can be trained on, and experimented with in the language classroom.

Research reviews of relaxation training indicates that people learn more efficiently when relaxed; for example, Setterland (1983) in a research on the effects of relaxation training on 300 students after a strenuous activity. Results gave a clear picture of recovery from strenuous activities. About 90% of the students found that relaxation was pleasant and positive.

Another research (Carter, 1984) described the effects of

relaxation training in improving handwriting. Carter could prove that relaxation training proved to be successful in increasing psychomotor achievement and cognitive abilities of the emotionally disturbed and learning disabled children as opposed to the control group. Another study (Hansler, 1985) showed that relaxation training through suggestive techniques can enhance thinking and cognition in matters related to general learning and academic progress.

Through such techniques implied in Suggestopedia, language learners should be encouraged to become more conscious of their own mental processes as they study the language using their problem-solving skills they acquire across the curriculum. Simply put, they should be directed to analyze what they know, what they need to know, in effect to monitor their own thinking and be able to control the thinking process. For example, learners should acquire the skills of planning their academic performance ahead before they get involved in the learning process by calculating the time and effort to be spent on the learning process (Hansler, 1985). Also, suggestive relaxation can lead to guided discussion and independent writing, particularly through use of a divided reader's journal in which students paraphrase and quote contrasting parts of literature texts. Eventually, this can lead students to better performance and reasoning (Moon, 1986).

Again, the essence of Suggestopedia is to expand the memory capabilities. The method has been evaluated by researchers worldwide through classrooms studies which have provided significant support for the major component features of the effectiveness of this method (Schuster & Gritton, 1985). For instance, prior research revealed improvements in the academic performance of learners of German in Massachusetts who used this method; e.g., Dhority (1984) conducted several courses utilising some creative techniques implied by Suggestopedia. Results indicated that not only did the selected students need less than 1/3 the class time required for the control group, but they had significantly higher scores as well (Schuster, 1976).

In this line, too, Johnson (1982) evaluated the effects of using collective relaxation techniques on the spelling performance of young learners. She used the experiment on separate experimental and control groups and could prove that low functioning students improved significantly with suggestopedia procedures. The overall results indicated favourable effect on both poor and good spellers.

Research also proved that the success of suggestopedia, like any other teaching method, is largely dependent on the complete interaction between the teacher, the students and the context of their meeting. When conditions are favourable, the elements that are characteristic of Suggestopedia, such as music, relaxation, identity change and suggestion, appear to have a positive effect on language self-concept, attitude, attention rate, and achievement; the combination of all these conditions is the most effective, and the overall effect in Suggestopedia is cumulative (Schuster 1985).

#### IV. BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF SUGGESTOPEDIA

Suggestopedia as a teaching approach has benefits and drawbacks; some of these merits and demerits have been supported by research evidence while others are voiced opinions in need to empirical support. Research evidence and anecdotal claims of the advantages and disadvantages of Suggestopedia provide the pros and cons of the method, which will be reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Studies of Suggestopedia techniques report favourable results in the teaching of foreign languages (Dhority, 1984). Suggestopedia in language education settings is based on the assumption that language learning is as natural as breathing, and it is possible to be either inhibited by threat, anxiety and stress or counter-influenced by peace of mind, challenge, tedium, self-confidence and satisfaction (Holt, 1983).

As for its benefits, suggestopedia helps develop the whole personality of the individual in a pleasant learning environment. In other words, suggestopedia has a great impact on the amount of words that an individual student can retain in a relatively short period of time (Nieves, 2012). Suggestopedia procedures enable the use of mental reserves in organizing a coherent system whereby to induce language learning through suggestive reception of linguistic and communicative signals in a comfortable and easy-going environment because these signals can best be received at the sub-conscious level (Lozanov, 1978).

In addition, suggestion can help activate intellectual and cognitive processes by deactivating negative suggestions in a process called de-suggestion (Lozanov, 1971). This process involves a dialectical process of desuggestion/suggestion. Another point is that suggestion can lead to creating a suave and nice state of authority for the teacher, but a type of authority which is to the advantage of the learner in that it creates a state of motivation for learning (Lozanov, 1978).

Furthermore, given that the basic and immediate goal of suggestopedic language teaching is to initiate the development of communicative competence, Suggestopedia can help language learners to communicate as the teacher does not inhibit the language learning process by the conventional restrictions of the Grammar-Translation method (Richards & Rodgers, 2009). This unrestricted, rule-free production of language in meaningful contexts permits the learner to react and express herself without analysing the linguistic elements involved in the act of communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2009).

From the beginning the student learns to focus on the contents of the message rather than on its form. When the student finds herself capable of speaking in a particular situation, capable of using active language, his confidence in himself and in the method increases and this, in turn, increases his capacity to learn (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Furthermore, language suggestopedic classroom sessions can produce positive and strong suggestion in the learners. In these sessions, language learning material 'will be assimilated, automated, and creatively processed without strain and fatigue'

(Lozanov 1978, p. 268).

In short, Suggestopedia helps enhance the oral proficiency of EFL learners and can effectively lower the level of classroom anxiety. The use of music inherent to this method can lead to creating a relaxing, pleasant and stimulating classroom set-up. Furthermore, it helps motivate EFL learners by inducing positive attitudes and increasing motivation among the learners.

On the other hand, suggestopedia has some shortcomings. These disadvantages are reflections of the very advantages it assumed. For example, some people cannot learn in noisy places, when music for them is considered noise. In addition, language learning by suggestopedia in large classes cannot be effective, given the large numbers of students and the setting of classroom in developing or underdeveloped countries. Suggestopedia has other restrictions related to the curriculum, students' motivation, financial limitation, number of students, etc. It seems clear that if the method is to be used for the benefit of a larger number of language teachers and learners, it has to be adapted to the regular classroom in the typical school. To employ the Lozanov method as designed, would be ideal, but too few schools or educational systems can afford the expenses involved in its implementation.

Environment limitation, the use of hypnosis, and infantilisation learning are the main disadvantages of suggestopedia (Apriana and Islamiyah, 2011). This method may not suit all types of learners or the different cultures of EFL learners. In Third World countries, classrooms are overcrowded, and the classroom set-up may not be appropriate for using music and other tasks and techniques used in Suggestopedia; according to Adamson (1997), this method suits a classroom of 12 students at maximum.

Moreover, some people maintain that suggestopedia is grounded in the use of hypnosis, mistaken for laziness and sleepiness. Lozanov strongly denied that Suggestopedia employs hypnotic techniques. In addition, a Suggestopedic language class should be conditioned in a fashion that suits different styles of learners so that they can learn more effectively when their anxiety levels are lowered.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

Suggestopedia is a humanistic teaching/learning method that views learners from a global, holistic perspective. In this method, the individual is viewed not only as one who learns a foreign language, but also as a whole seen in his/her globality. This method, therefore, particularly emphasizes the affective aspects of the learner and the learning situation in an effort to lower or totally eradicate any emotions of tension, anxiety, fear, frustration, inhibition, boredom, and other psychological factors that may affect language learning negatively.

Once these negative emotions and attitudes are eschewed or controlled, self-confidence and self-esteem develop and give rise to the learner's intellectual potential. Then, the learner's level of achievement is motivated due to the activation of the brain learning reserves latent in the process of brain

lateralization. Enhanced learning is achieved through the combination of certain elements, which, in combination, can give rise to a pleasant classroom atmosphere where the learner can feel calm, relaxed, and confident, and therefore, motivated to active, interactive foreign/ second language learning.

Although traditional instruction in teaching foreign language continues to be beneficial, adding suggestopedic techniques to learning can initiate higher success and greater productivity in the language learning process. These suggestopedic techniques in fact emphasize the mental and physical relaxation, making learning a joyful experience. George Lozanov was the first to put all these elements together in an integrated and highly effective procedure. However, suggestopedia has spread to some parts of the world, such as Bulgaria and Canada, but failed to prevail elsewhere with the same degree of efficiency and success, especially in developing countries.

Therefore, this method has undergone several modifications, simplifications, and adaptations to make it usable for a broad spectrum of learners and teachers in developed as well as developing countries. Although this method is applicable for teaching a variety of courses and subjects, it has largely been applied to foreign language classroom. The paper clearly showed the strengths and weaknesses of suggestopedia. Further research in this area can include suggestopedia and the age of learner, the role of technology in applying suggestopedia, and suggestopedic techniques in teaching disables.

One may believe that Suggestopedia cannot, in its own right, provide teachers with the panacea to their language learning problems. Simply put, EFL teachers cannot use all the techniques of Suggestopedia with all types of learners and classroom set-ups when appropriate. For example, if EFL learners are adult or young are introvert or nervous in a communicative situation, a Suggestopedic language instructor can use music, rearrange the classroom set-up for the students to feel comfortable, use dim light, and induce quietude in the classroom to lower the anxiety associated with learning.

Eventually, this method stresses the fact that the classroom environment is significant for learners, and the learning context should, consequently, be adequately safe and amply secure for the learners to help them learn in a suggestive way. All these merits render this method interesting and appropriate for developing proficiency in a foreign language.

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