

Tikrit University

Collage of Education for Humanities

English Department



Techniques & principles in language teaching

Third Year

Desuggestopedia

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Desuggestopedia:

Introduction

Desuggestopedia is a language teaching method developed by Bulgarian psychologist and educator **Georgi Lozanov** in the 1970s. The method gained attention due to its unconventional approach to language learning, which is based on the idea that learners can achieve far more than traditionally believed by **eliminating psychological barriers** and tapping into the **subconscious mind**. The name "Desuggestopedia" itself reflects this idea—it aims to **"desuggest" the limitations** learners impose on themselves and unlock their potential.

This method integrates elements of **psychology, music, art, relaxation, and suggestion** into the teaching process. It is best known for its use of **baroque music, comfortably arranged classrooms, and positive suggestion techniques** to promote a relaxed and confident state in learners. Though originally developed for teaching foreign languages, Desuggestopedia has also been applied in other educational contexts.

Theoretical Background

The foundational theory behind Desuggestopedia lies in **suggestology**, a branch of psychology founded by Lozanov. Suggestology studies how suggestion can influence learning, behavior, and memory. Lozanov believed that the human brain can process and retain much more information than traditionally assumed, but **social conditioning, fear, and doubt limit learning capacity**.

According to Lozanov, the **"critical logical filter"** in the conscious mind often prevents people from accepting or retaining large amounts of new information. However, in a relaxed state—where the

logical filter is reduced—learners are more receptive and can absorb information more effectively. This is where **suggestion** plays a central role: by creating an environment of **trust, relaxation, and positive reinforcement**, teachers can bypass the filter and help students achieve **accelerated learning**.

Key psychological principles in Desuggestopedia include:

- **Positive suggestion:** Encouraging messages and feedback that increase self-confidence.
- **Peripheral learning:** Learning through environmental cues and stimuli, like posters and decorations.
- **Paraconscious learning:** Using the subconscious to absorb content without direct attention.

Main Characteristics of Desuggestopedia

1. Relaxed Environment

Desuggestopedia emphasizes a **stress-free** and **comfortable** environment. Classrooms are often arranged with soft lighting, comfortable seating, and decorative elements like paintings and posters. This physical setting helps reduce anxiety and increase openness to learning.

2. Role of Music

One of the most distinctive features of Desuggestopedia is the use of **baroque music** (e.g., Bach, Handel, Vivaldi) with a tempo of about **60 beats per minute**. Music is used during the “**concert sessions**”, in which learners listen to the reading of the target language while relaxing. Music enhances memory retention and helps create a calming atmosphere.

3. Use of Drama and Role Play

Desuggestopedia incorporates **role play and dramatization** to create engaging and emotionally resonant learning experiences. Learners may take on fictional identities or act out scenes using the target language. This method reduces self-consciousness and promotes spontaneous use of language.

4. Peripheral Learning

Posters, charts, and images with vocabulary and grammar structures are placed around the room. Learners unconsciously absorb this information without direct instruction, similar to how children pick up language from their surroundings.

5. Authority and Teacher's Role

The teacher plays a **central and authoritative role** in the classroom. They are responsible for creating a trusting atmosphere, managing the sessions, and delivering content through suggestion and performance. Despite this authority, the teacher acts more like a **facilitator and motivator**, rather than a traditional instructor.

6. Positive Reinforcement

Students are constantly encouraged and reassured. Mistakes are not punished or overly corrected; instead, the focus is on communication and fluency, building confidence and reducing the fear of failure.

Phases of a Desuggestopedia Lesson

A typical Desuggestopedia lesson is divided into **three main phases**:

1. Deciphering Phase

The teacher introduces new material—often a **dialogue or text**—with translations and explanations. Vocabulary, grammar, and cultural

context are briefly discussed, but without overwhelming detail. The aim is to **familiarize** the learners with the content.

2. Concert Session

This phase consists of two parts:

- **Active Concert:** The teacher reads the text aloud in the target language, synchronized with **baroque music**. Learners follow along silently, listening attentively while the text is displayed in front of them.
- **Passive Concert:** Learners relax in their chairs, close their eyes, and listen to a second reading of the text. Music continues to play in the background, reinforcing learning through a **deeply relaxed state**.

3. Activation Phase

Learners actively engage with the material through **discussion, role play, games, and dramatization**. The goal is to use the new language in creative and meaningful contexts, reinforcing what was absorbed in the earlier phases.

Advantages of Desuggestopedia

- **Reduced Anxiety:** The relaxed atmosphere and positive reinforcement make learners feel safe and less afraid of making mistakes.
- **Increased Retention:** Music and suggestion help learners remember content more effectively.
- **Enhanced Motivation:** The creative and engaging activities maintain learner interest and motivation.
- **Accelerated Learning:** Learners often report faster acquisition of vocabulary and structures.

- **Whole-Person Learning:** The method addresses emotional, physical, and intellectual aspects of learning.
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Criticisms and Limitations

Despite its innovative approach, Desuggestopedia has faced criticism from some educators and linguists:

- **Lack of empirical evidence:** Many claims made by Lozanov were difficult to prove scientifically, and some studies yielded inconclusive results.
 - **Overemphasis on suggestion:** Critics argue that suggestion alone cannot account for effective language acquisition.
 - **Cultural constraints:** The use of music, relaxation, and dramatization may not be suitable or accepted in all educational cultures.
 - **High preparation:** The method requires significant preparation, training, and materials from the teacher.
 - **Not suitable for all learners:** Some learners may feel uncomfortable with the theatrical or relaxed aspects of the method.
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Applications Beyond Language Teaching

Although Desuggestopedia was originally designed for language learning, its core principles have been adapted for **other subjects** and **educational programs**, particularly in **primary education** and **music instruction**. Lozanov's broader concept of "suggestology" also influenced areas such as psychotherapy, memory training, and corporate training.

Conclusion

Desuggestopedia remains one of the most **unique and holistic** methods in the history of language teaching. While it may not be suitable for all contexts, it has made a lasting contribution to the field by emphasizing the importance of **learner psychology, relaxation, and emotional engagement**. Whether used in its full form or adapted into more conventional teaching approaches, Desuggestopedia serves as a reminder that **learning is not just a cognitive activity—it is also emotional, psychological, and deeply human**.