

An analysis of SALT in practice

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This paper analyses the use of SALT/Suggestopedia for the teaching of beginners' German to students at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. Two experimental groups and a control group are involved to determine, amongst others, whether SALT is viable in South African conditions and whether it really accelerates the learning of a foreign language. This study is approached pragmatically and on a relatively small scale to ensure a sound basis. A number of challenges have been encountered of which the most important are the rigid system at a university (for example the timetable) and the difficulty of producing convincing, quantitative results. Qualitatively the students show an early competence and spontaneity not experienced before, in comparison with the control group. The most promising aspect is the fact that the lecturers of the experimental groups are convinced that Suggestopedia offers and satisfies the students as well as the lecturers much more than any other conventional method used by them.

In hierdie artikel word die gebruik van SALT/Suggestopedagogiek vir die aanleer van Duits op beginnersvlak geanaliseer, soos geïmplementeer aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch. Twee eksperimentele groepe sowel as 'n kontrolegroep is betrek om onder meer te bepaal of SALT lewensvatbaar is in Suid-Afrikaanse omstandighede en of dit werklik die aanleer van 'n vreemde taal versnel. Hierdie studie is pragmaties aangepak en op 'n relatiewe klein skaal om 'n gesonde basis te verseker. 'n Aantal struikelblokke moes oorkom word, soos die onbuigbare sisteem aan 'n Universiteit (die rooster) en die probleem om oortuigende kwantitatiewe resultate te lewer. Kwalitatief gesproke, vertoon die studente 'n vroeë bekwaamheid en 'n spontaneïteit wat nog nooit tevore ondervind is nie. Die belowendste aspek is egter dat die lektore van die eksperimentele groep oortuig is dat Suggestopedagogiek meer te bied het, en lektore sowel as studente meer bevredig as enige ander konvensionele metode.

An analysis of SALT in practice

In this article the focus will be on the practical application of SALT in the German Department at the University of Stellenbosch with special reference to inhibiting factors and challenges.

At Stellenbosch SALT is being applied in typical South African university conditions. The research is being done in a "realistic" situation, devoid of any special laboratory conditions or frequently described Suggestopedic/SALT courses offered during long, uninterrupted sessions.

The German project

There are three groups of students involved (two

experimental and one control) learning beginners' German. The research is conducted with the following objectives:

- to determine as far as possible whether and to what extent SALT is applicable to and viable in South African conditions
- to compare the groups in relation to, amongst others, their progress, attitude towards German, and their motivation
- to evaluate the whole exercise quantitatively as well as qualitatively through, *inter alia*, biographical and attitudinal questionnaires, psychometric tests and objective language proficiency testing (the format of which has been decided on after consultation with language testing specialists)

- to determine the inhibiting factors and possibilities for further applications in view of communicative needs in Southern Africa.

Approach

The implementation of SALT/Suggestopedia could be attempted in an ideological way: The method could be accepted as an ideal solution for major educational problems. One could thus be tempted to implement the system speedily on a very large scale. But, from the study of the literature, from observations and from our own limited experience we believe that the approach should be careful and pragmatic, as in a pilot project. When implementing SALT/Suggestopedia on a small scale we can learn, adapt, analyse and improve more easily as we gain experience.

Co-ordinated scientific support and justification must always be sought from other disciplines and groups. This will also pave the way for credibility of the programme and for wider acceptance in academic and educational circles.

Inhibiting factors and challenges encountered thusfar

The following are being encountered:

- to be as pragmatic and innovative as possible in our fairly rigid and inflexible educational and anti-suggestopedic situation (e.g. adapting the SALT sequence to fit the rigid timetable of six forty minute lectures per week)
- considerable student fluctuation at the beginning of the year because of uncertainty about courses
- delays in psychometric testing as a result of interruptions and fluctuation at the beginning of the year. Because of these delays the students displayed definite reluctance to co-operate and only 51% of them completed all three psychometric tests
- a fixed timetable with forty minute lectures
- compulsory test series in the second term. The students are not only concerned about the testing in the SALT classes, but they are tempted to “skip” classes (even SALT classes) to study for tests in other subjects
- finding and equipping suitable venues for the SALT classes. It took some effort to convince the university authorities that the demands of the

SALT team were not absurd, e.g. painting doors and doorframes yellow when they have got stores filled with white paint for that purpose

- producing scientifically defensible statements based on quantitative results. With only one year, a limited experiment and many adverse factors and variables it would be impossible to convince all sceptics. The following quotation typifies these sceptics: “Most of our so-called reason consists of finding reasons to go on believing as we already do.” (J.H. Robinson)
- creating suitable texts for specific target groups
- co-ordinating research, support from academics from other disciplines, and teamwork. This is essential if this task is to be of more educational significance than academic or commercial interest
- the training of teachers. This is a complex and challenging task demanding high quality people as well as high quality training programmes. An insufficiently trained doctor using unfamiliar and complex techniques can cause a patient’s death; similarly an ill-prepared SALT teacher can cause disaster: e.g. unrealistic expectations of accelerated progress and high-level proficiency and this will lead to failure, distrust and obviously the rejection of SALT. The training of SALT teachers should also be backed up by co-ordinated and concentrated academic and psychological support as an ongoing process—especially by experts in the fields of e.g. educational psychology, applied linguistics, neurology and psychotherapy.

Encouraging indications

In spite of the inhibiting factors mentioned, the challenges are being met. The students in the group being taught according to the SALT method are extremely positive about their work. They enjoy their classes, speak German with enthusiasm and without inhibitions. The lecturers create a very special and suggestive atmosphere conducive to learning and seem to enjoy the classes just as much as the students (in spite of all their hard work). The lecturers also find that their students already display a superior passive as well as active knowledge of the language in comparison to the control group and students of previous years.

We hope to keep readers informed about the outcome of this particular project.