

## Teaching english through guided meditation

*Ensinar inglês através da meditação guiada*

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**Abstract:** In our never-ending search for the most efficient and eloquent ways of teaching English as a foreign language, we have identified “Guided meditation” as an interesting and challenging alternative approach and strategy. This paper discusses the notions of “linguistics”, “applied linguistics” and “psycholinguistics” and it tackles several teaching methods connected to guided meditation, such as “Suggestopedia” and the “Natural Approach”. It further deals with the main differences between “mindfulness”, “guided meditation” and “transcendentalism”, and then it aims at showing and explaining ways of using guided meditation practice for boosting teaching and learning English as a foreign language, mainly based on Tatiana Slama-Cazacu’s dynamic-contextual methodology (1999). The paper also designs an experiment that is going to be implemented in the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022, based on the hypothesis that the students engaged in guided meditation strategies can generate new ideas (be creative), cooperate with their colleagues, learn, reflect and think critically, improving thus their communication abilities in English. For this purpose, the research framework of the paper presents the subjects, the main research methods, the data collection instruments and the stages of the experiment (administering an initial and an achievement test, a pre-survey and a post-survey, conceiving activities, collecting work samples and the teacher’s observation notes).

**Keywords:** Guided meditation; English for Specific Purposes; teaching; mindfulness; psycholinguistics.

**Resumo:** Em nossa busca incessante pelas formas mais eficientes e eloquentes de ensinar inglês como língua estrangeira, identificamos a “meditação guiada” como uma abordagem e estratégia alternativa interessante e desafiadora. Este artigo discute as noções de “linguística”, “linguística aplicada” e “psicolinguística” e aborda diversos métodos de ensino ligados à meditação guiada, como a “Sugestopedia” e a “Abordagem Natural”. Aborda ainda as principais diferenças entre “mindfulness”, “meditação guiada” e “transcendentalismo” e, em seguida, visa mostrar e explicar formas de utilização da prática da meditação guiada para potencializar o ensino e aprendizagem de inglês como língua estrangeira, principalmente com base na Metodologia dinâmica-contextual de Tatiana Slama-Cazacu (1999). O trabalho também projeta um experimento que será implementado no primeiro semestre do ano de 2021-2022, com base na hipótese de que os alunos envolvidos em estratégias de meditação guiada podem gerar novas ideias (ser criativos), cooperar com seus colegas, aprender, refletir e pensar criticamente, melhorando assim suas habilidades de comunicação em inglês. Para isso, a estrutura de pesquisa do artigo apresenta os sujeitos, os principais métodos de pesquisa, os instrumentos de coleta de dados e as etapas do experimento (administração de um teste inicial e de desempenho, uma pré-pesquisa e uma pós-pesquisa, conceber atividades, recolha de amostras de trabalho e notas de observação do professor).

**Palavras-chave:** Meditação guiada; Inglês para Fins Específicos; ensino; atenção plena; psicolinguística.

## Introduction

In our capacity of teachers, we know that students learning a foreign language are usually apprehensive to produce spoken language and anxious about using it. In our persistent quest for finding the most efficient and appropriate way of teaching English as a foreign language, we have identified “Guided meditation” as an interesting and challenging alternative approach and strategy.

First of all, we have taken into account the fact that applied linguistics was first associated with language teaching and learning, and that applied psycholinguistics has also shown interest in this field. Consequently, our paper discusses the main differences between “mindfulness”, “guided meditation” and “transcendentalism”, and then it aims at showing and explaining ways of using the guided meditation practice for boosting teaching and learning English as a foreign language, i.e. the theoretical background, how and what a teacher should prepare for such an experiment. This is an obvious example of teaching and learning a foreign language through linguistics and psycholinguistics, connecting vocabulary, grammatical structures and rules with awareness, perception, creativity, context-dependent memory, positive affects and effects, a comfortable, inspiring learning environment.

The experiment will rely on Tatiana Slama-Cazacu's dynamic-contextual methodology (1999). This kind of practice should be prepared in advance, by organizing the experiment: selecting a control group and an experimental group, administering an initial and an achievement test, a pre-survey and a post-survey, conceiving activities, collecting work samples and the teacher's observation notes. The hypothesis of such an experiment could be: the students engaged in guided meditation strategies can generate new ideas (be creative), cooperate with their colleagues, learn, reflect and think critically, improving their communication abilities in English.

## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1 The notions of “linguistics”, “Applied linguistics” and “psycholinguistics”

Linguistics (L) has focused on (among other things) second language acquisition (see Cook, 2001, p. 490-511), especially on the sequence/ “order in which people acquire an L2” [...], “the similarities between L2 learning and L1 acquisition” [...], whether “L2 learners attain the same level of language as native speakers” [...], the importance of “transfer from the first to the second language” [...], learners' “access to Universal Grammar” [...], strategies that L2 learners use, whether “two languages can be processed as one”. Vivian Cook (2001, p. 510) states that the techniques mentioned by her “involve an overt or covert comparison of L2 learners with native speakers. The native speaker indeed provides a quick measure of comparison.”

On the other hand, Applied Linguistics (AL) also tackles issues concerning language learning and teaching (see, for example, Chapter 4, entitled “Applied linguistics and language learning/teaching”, in Alan Davies (2007, p. 63-91). The author claims that

The applied linguist is deliberately eclectic, drawing on any source of knowledge that may illuminate the language problem. Proceeding eclectically is legitimate because for the applied linguist language problems involve more than language. They involve (some or all of) these factors: the educational (including the psychometric or measurement), the social (and its interface with the linguistic, the sociolinguistic), the psychological (and its interface, the psycholinguistic), the anthropological (for insights on cultural matters), the political, the religious, the economic, the business, the planning and policy aspect and, of course, the linguistic, including the phonetic. (Davies, 2007, p. 68).

Therefore, Alan Davies refers to the “optimum age” and the main educational, social, sociolinguistic, psychological and psycholinguistic, anthropological and cultural, political, religious, economic and other types of “factors relevant to the optimum-age problem”, “the stages of second-language learning”, “language testing”, “the markers of successful language learning”,

“the teaching of language for specific purposes (LSP)”, “curriculum design”, etc.

David Birdsong argues that

In second language acquisition (L2A) research, ultimate attainment refers to the outcome or end point of acquisition, and is used interchangeably with the terms final state, end state, and asymptote. ‘Ultimate’ is not to be thought of as synonymous with ‘native-like’, although native-likeness is one of the observed outcomes of L2A. (Birdsong, 2004, p. 82)

In the volume, *The Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, edited by A. Davies and C. Elder (2004), William Littlewood (2004, p. 501-524) prefers to discuss issues concerning “second language learning”, emphasizing factors related to “the success of learning” and “the effectiveness of teaching”; linguistic, discourse, pragmatic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence; transfer, generalization, simplification, imitation; sequences of development; classroom instruction; learning strategies; “theories of second language learning”, “context-oriented theories”.

Rod Ellis (2004, p. 525-551), in his “research into individual difference”, summarizes the “frequently used instruments” for analyzing the “individual difference factors in SLA”. Some of them are: the “Modern Language Aptitude Test” (for testing language aptitude), “Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire” (learning style), “Attitude Motivation Index” (motivation), “Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale” (anxiety), “The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning” (Ellis, 2004, p. 528). In his opinion, the main such factors having a huge impact on second language learning are: intelligence, language aptitude, memory; learning style, motivation, anxiety, personality, willingness to communicate; learner beliefs; learning strategies.

Psycholinguistic research has also been trying to answer questions relating to teaching and learning, for example the aspects discussed in the volumes published under the auspices of ISAPL (The International Society for Applied Psycholinguistics). The books entitled “Applied Psycholinguistics. Positive effects and ethical perspectives” (vol. I-II), edited by Giuseppe Mininni and Amelia Manuti (2012) include several selected papers presented at the IXth ISAPL

Congress; in volume I, “Authentic scientific texts: A persuasive tool in English for Science and Technology” (Brown, Filazzola & Sportelli, 2012, p. 246-253); “The Power of Pictorial Persuasion in English for Science and Technology” (Sportelli, 2012, p. 301-319); “The semantic motivation of idioms in written advertising: A case study from English as a Foreign Language” (Catricala & Guidi, p. 2012, 257-269); “Reading comprehension performance according to age and education level” (Gabriel, Scherer, Flores, 2012, p. 323-333); in volume II: “Le discours scientifique en langue de spécialité” (Bagnardi, 2012, p. 343-349); The Strategic Use of Nonverbal Communication in Persuasive Foreign Language Interaction (Gregsén, 2012, p. 350-357); “Personalization as a Means of Increasing the Effectiveness of Early Foreign Language Learning” (Lojová, 2012, p. 366-372); “Foreign Language Learning: The Affective Domain in Teacher-Learners” (Ziegler & Pavy, 2012, p. 394-402).

In her book, “Psycholinguistics - A Science of Communication” (1999), the renowned Romanian psycholinguist Tatiana Slama-Cazacu discusses mainly issues related to oral (verbal and nonverbal) and written communication, “development of language behavior”, the dynamics of the relation between thinking and language behavior, between communication and education, communication and work, “distortions of communication in social life”, “experimental research in psycholinguistics”, “contrastive (psycho)linguistics: the study of errors produced in learning a foreign language (Acquisition corpora, aberrant corpora and hierarchical systems of errors)”. As far as the teaching/learning process is concerned, the author stresses the following ideas (Slama-Cazacu, 1999, p. 396-407): the importance of student-centered teaching, of verbal, nonverbal and paralinguistic communication, the role of the context and other elements such as students’ age, their linguistic aptitudes, memory, teaching methods and aids, teacher’s roles.

## 1.2 Teaching methods

In the student-centered methodology, the teacher's major task is to "help learning to happen"; thus, s/he must involve learners in the teaching and learning process "by enabling them to work at their own speed, by not giving long explanations, by encouraging them to participate, talk, interact, do things, etc." (Scrivener, 2005, p. 18-19). Moreover, on the one hand, learners should play active roles in the learning process while, on the other hand, teachers should encourage and support them to scrutinize, analyze, experiment, make the learning process more interesting.

Modern methods have shifted the focus from grammatical competence to communicative competence. Modern methodology principles are centered on the learner-centered interaction, linked to the learners' involvement in all the activities carried out in the foreign language lesson. Thus, the teacher's role has transformed: s/he no longer causes the learning process, but helps it to happen, by choosing appropriate activities, guiding the learners in the language classroom and encouraging them to practise the foreign language. The features shared by modern methodology include the performance of activities that involve learners actively and that imitate real-life situations or contexts. The methods' effectiveness is enhanced by respecting an appropriate order of the activities and by ensuring a balance between the different language aspects that are being taught.

In our opinion, some of the modern/alternative methods of teaching English which are to a certain extent connected to guided meditation are: "Suggestopedia" and the "Natural Approach".

**Suggestopedia**, also known as "Desuggestopedia", which was initially conceived and professed by the Bulgarian educator Georgi Lozanov in the 1970s, consists of a series of learning recommendations based on Suggestology and described by Lozanov (1978) as a "science (...) concerned with the systematic study of the non-rational and/or non-conscious influences" which can be harnessed and redirected in order to optimize the

learning process (Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 100). According to these authors, the most noticeable features of Suggestopedia are represented by the classroom decoration, arrangement and furniture, by the fact that it heavily relies on music in order to create an appropriate atmosphere, and the teacher's authoritative behavior.

The mystical air that envelops Suggestopedia is partially entailed by the fact that it has few direct connections with the well-established learning or education theories from the West; in addition to that, its mysticism is also triggered by the use of esoteric and even impenetrable terminology and neologisms, unkindly characterized by a critic as a "package of pseudo-scientific gobbledygook" (Scovel, 1979, p. 258).

Lozanov (1978, p. 27) himself made some extravagant claims regarding this approach; for instance, he stated that "memorization in learning through Suggestopedia would be accelerated by up to 25 times over that in conventional learning methods".

Those who professed this method, made several detailed descriptions of the conditions and context under which Suggestopedia experiments should be run. Suggestopedia triggered both uncontrollable enthusiasm and open criticism as far as foreign language teaching is concerned. It is noteworthy that this approach was famous for a certain period; then, it slowly lost its popularity, although some Suggestopedic elements are still used in today's foreign language classrooms. Being underlain by the power of suggestion in the learning process, it emphasized the fact that positive suggestion enhances the students' receptiveness and stimulates their ability to learn faster. In this regard, Lozanov stated that an optimum learning state is created when the learner is relaxed but focused. For this purpose (i.e. to induce a relaxed state and to provide positive suggestions), Suggestopedia appeals to music and makes the learning environment more comfortable and relaxing. Moreover, it aims at creating a teacher-student relationship that is similar to the one between a parent and his/her child.

As they get older, individuals accept social rules and adjust their personalities in order to observe them, which inhibits their learning (because they have to obey these external norms and limits). Therefore, people set aside the abilities that they used during their childhood and keep them as functional reserves. From Lozanov's perspective, by using suggestion, people are able to re-integrate, to reinsert these reserves into their active personality, enhancing thus greatly their learning abilities, their capacity to recall and to consolidate what they learn.

According to its founder, the only great linguistic issues encountered in the foreign language classroom are represented by the memorization of the lexical items and language structures and by their consolidation and integration into the learners' personalities. Thus, Suggestopedia mainly aims at enhancing the efficiency of these two processes, by the extensive use of the non-verbal forms of the Learning Hypothesis. Those who supported Suggestopedia and its procedures stated that this methodology would accelerate the learning process.

According to this method, the learners' creativity is stimulated by almost all art categories (i.e. music, visual arts, stage art); for instance, classical music is used as background in concert sessions; colorful grammar posters and art posters are hung in the classroom; students are sometimes given group drawing tasks; students and teachers move in the classroom like actors on the stage; they use puppets; they read texts like the poets at their recital. In Suggestopedia, the sessions' success depends to a great extent on the teacher's attitude and behavior in the classroom because s/he must create good human relationships and encourage learners to support and praise each other.

On the other hand, some methodologists, like Tim Bowen (2002), insist that the suggestopedic claims of success lack appropriate evidence. Moreover, many people consider that classical music is not stimulating, dialogues are too long and ridiculous when read with exaggerated intonation and a coherent language theory is completely missing. Furthermore, according to some teachers, the learners' native language should

not be used so much in the classroom. Other drawbacks are represented by the lack of tests and by the fact that errors are not corrected on the spot. Other critics of this approach state that attention is not paid to all four skills evenly (the listening and speaking skills are emphasized more to the detriment of reading and writing), which does not correspond to the requirements of the educational system in schools.

However, the use of several suggestopedic methods and activities can accelerate the learners' progress to a great extent. Several elements of this approach can be inserted into more eclectic approaches to foreign language learning and teaching. For example, the music played in the background or accompanying certain activities can motivate and relax learners; elements such as class arrangement and lighting can also stimulate the learners' performance. Dialogues (and acting them) are also very useful when it comes to foreign language learning.

Other suggestopedic activities and methods that enhance the learners' performance are: the learners are encouraged (or even required) to take on names, jobs and personalities typical of the taught foreign language; learners play different games, narrate stories, use grammar and art posters. Specialized research has revealed the positive and motivating effects triggered by the creation of conditions that keep learners alert and receptive during foreign language classes.

It is also noteworthy that Suggestopedia can be applied with a wide mixture of learners of different levels, grades or courses (such as beginners, intermediate, advanced). Suggestopedia has undoubtedly raised several captivating questions and issues; moreover, several suggestopedic techniques can be successfully applied in the foreign language classroom in order to achieve good results in terms of learning and memory enhancement.

In his turn, Krashen (1982; 1985) postulated several hypotheses on language acquisition, which are related to the Natural Approach, developed together with Tracy Terrell (1983):

- a. The Acquisition-Learning hypothesis

Language ability can be developed through acquisition and learning. The former is a process typical to the development of native language; it deals with knowledge acceptance by the subconscious, based on the idea that the use of communication contributes to information storing into the brain. The latter is typical of formal language instruction and involves the conscious acceptance of the information acquired about a certain language (for instance, in terms of grammar or form).

b. The Monitor hypothesis

From Krashen's perspective, this hypothesis is connected to the use of acquisition and learning (i.e. the former initiates an utterance and the latter assesses it in order to correct the mistakes).

c. The Natural Order hypothesis

In Krashen's opinion, language parts are acquired in a predictable order (i.e. some grammatical elements and structures are learnt earlier, while others are learnt later) and independently of purposeful teaching; thus, the pattern of a grammatical teaching sequence cannot be modified. Consequently, relatively easy language concepts should be introduced first in the learning process and more difficult ones should be inserted successively.

d. *The Input hypothesis*

This hypothesis involves the idea of comprehensible input, i.e. the language acquisition process is triggered when students receive messages that they can understand. Krashen and Terrell (1983, p. 32) state that students should be allowed to record constant progress with their language acquisition by keeping the comprehensible input one step beyond their current language ability, i.e. "i + 1".

e. The Affective filter hypothesis

This hypothesis stipulates that the learner's emotional state is like an adjustable filter that influences the input necessary to acquisition. Krashen believes that there are three types of affective variables that play an important part in second language acquisition: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Learners with a low affective filter seek and receive more input, are more confident and receptive to the received input.

No matter what methodology would we like to use, knowing our students' skills/intelligence is essential. Therefore, Gardner's theory (2006) is of paramount importance. Thus, he states that we all possess a combination of intelligences to some extent, and we have different MI-profiles:

- Musical intelligence (ability to hear particular sounds, feel melody and produce music);
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (ability to use the body, express emotions, play a sport game and create new products);
- Logical-mathematical intelligence (ability to use reason, problem solving, deduction, observation and cause and effect);
- Linguistic intelligence (the ability to use words elaborately and effectively);
- Spatial intelligence (the ability to see visual ideas, navigate, mentally picture and envision);
- Interpersonal intelligence (the ability to sensitively answer, understand others, have insight into another person and contrast in their moods, motivations and intentions);
- Intrapersonal intelligence (the ability to know the internal aspects, guide one's own behaviour, access and understand oneself and express preferences);
- Naturalist intelligence (the ability to recognize members of a species, classify plants and distinguish animal sounds);
- Existential intelligence (a promising candidate).

### 1.3 Guided meditation

Different websites (see in References: onestopenglish, eslibrary, english-teaching-forum) explain the difference between "transcendental" and "mindfulness meditation". "Transcendental Meditation" is derived from the Vedic tradition, while "Mindfulness" is based on the Buddhist tradition; both are learnt and practised in a distinct way and have different effects on one's brain. Simple, natural and effortless, "Transcendental Meditation" does not involve contemplation or concentration, but the use of a

mantra, which allows the mind to set at rest in a natural way and to surpass thought.

As far as “Mindfulness meditation” is concerned, it trains the mind to be in the present moment and requires passive attention to elements such as breathing, sensations, and thoughts during the meditation process. Thus, “mindfulness meditation” aims at having one’s thoughts focused on the present moment, with a higher level of accuracy and focus, while Transcendental Meditation aims at transcending thought itself and undergoing “pure awareness” (i.e. the person is aware but without an object of thought).

Cardoso et al. (2008) argue that meditation is based on certain parameters, and thus meditation practice needs: to be self-induced; to have a “focus” or “anchor”; to involve logic relaxation; to have a specific technique that is clearly defined; to have muscle relaxation somewhere during the process.

In “guided meditation”, there is no focus on a mantra like in transcendental meditation, and less attention is directed to the present moment, as is the case with mindfulness. “Guided meditation” (sometimes called guided imagery, creative visualization, mental rehearsal, guided self-hypnosis or even scripted fantasy) takes the meditator to an imaginary place, and the purpose is to train the mind to focus on the imaginative journey and avoid distractions and worries.

Twemlow et al. (1981, p. 10) remarked that guided imagery was a procedure in which fantasy and imagery material was evoked in the client and guided by the therapist during the therapeutic sessions. Guided imagery was first used as an effective “psychotherapeutic tool”. In his early work, Freud (Breuer & Freud, 1895) encouraged his patients to report their imagery aloud and would press his hand on their heads to encourage the process. Later, Jung (2017 [1933]) had more influence in developing an awareness of the imagery power of for understanding unconscious processes. Working with imagery contributed to the fusion of conscious and unconscious and Jung called this fusion the “transcendent function”. Twemlow et al. (1981, p. 259) mentioned that guided imagery was originally developed in the 1950s and

1960s by two independent European pioneers, Robert Desoille, a French psychotherapist who developed his technique within a more Pavlovian framework and Hanscarl Leuner, a German psycho-analytically oriented psychiatrist. Desoille (1966) developed the use of guided fantasy as a complete psychotherapeutic system, consisting of a series of fantasy trips, which he claimed were curative.

The first reported application of guided imagery in the treatment of children and adolescents was documented by Leuner in the 1950’s. While working in the field of child psychiatry, Leuner (1969) described guided imagery’s literary beginning and his initial ideas gave his clients a series of ten standard imagery themes, which represented different aspects of the client’s inner life. He claimed that his first three themes - the meadow, climbing a mountain and following a stream, either up to its source or down to the ocean - were used to help the client becoming more familiar with journeys in the imagination. He used other themes, such as the fierce beast, the dark forest and the swamp, but these themes were more difficult for the client to cope with emotionally.

According to Naparstek (1994, p. 45), famous for inserting guided meditation to dominant health systems, guided meditation is ‘a gentle but powerful technique’ that involves all the senses, not just the visual sense and it is experienced throughout the body, not just mentally. It is noteworthy that guided imagery differs from visualization because it uses all of the senses, not just visual cues (hearing, taste, smell, touch, balance, hot, cold, pain, as well as sight). This imagery technique, i.e. visualization, is considered more independent and more spontaneous because it needs less direction and scripting performed by the teacher. Students may be asked to take into consideration a problem, to relax, and to explore their imagination for possible solutions to that problem. Guided imagery is a form of meditation, and can be employed interchangeably with the term guided meditation. Naparstek (1994, p. 45) also noticed that imagery is “a little easier to work with, more absorbing and appealing than the more stringent mindfulness meditation, which requires more discipline and practice

with most people". Maddox et al. (1989, p. 101) also stated that guided imagery is the "controlled use of imaginal scenes or scripts to direct students' imaginings". The script involves an emphasis on imagining and can entail various activities, such as: mental rehearsal of an event, for example, a job interview; creative projection such as imagining one's first day on the job; recall of past work experiences; elaboration of "what if" scenarios (e.g. how will the employment change due to technological discoveries?)

Guided imagery works due to three very simple mind-body principles noted by Naparstek (1994), which are situated at the core of integrative medicine and holistic health: the mind-body connection, the altered state and the locus of control. The first principle is that of the mind-body connection. Researchers showed that the body can perceive the images conceived in our brain almost as real as external events because the mind does not quite get the difference. For example, if we read about a delicious cocktail or about a refreshing lemonade, we usually get thirsty. The second principle is that of the altered state when we are capable of more rapid and deep healing, evolution or creative learning because our brainwave activity and our biochemistry modify. We can do things we would not be able to do in an ordinary, waking state, for example, to replace our fear for a surgery with the sensation of security and optimism. The third principle is that of the locus of control, a medical term stated as a sensation of command and control over our own experience. If we have this sense associated with higher optimism, self-esteem and ability to tolerate stress, it can help us feel better and obtain better results.

Guided imagery is also a powerful tool for helping those healthy persons seeking personal growth and a higher level of creativity. In her book, Merritt (1996, p. 23-24), described guided imagery as a method of self-exploration in which a person, in a relaxed state, listens to a guide while some classical music is played, allowing images and feelings to come to awareness, the music being an active agent, which may evoke feelings, visual images or memories. After the music has ended, the listener shares insights with

the guide about the images and their connection to current life issues. The guided imagery experience may then be followed by drawing, creative writing or other artistic media.

Moreover, Gifford et al. (2014) claimed that guided meditation practice is used in business, in leadership education, having the role to guide learners to a safe inner space of reflection and self-awareness. The intended result is that the learners are more aware of their own authentic well-being and this well-being affects peers and the organization as a whole. Over the years, the authors have created experiential exercises using guided meditation for organizational behavior, giving them the opportunity to better visualize their past, present or future and gain better understanding of what they want to learn and ask regarding a variety of leadership challenges. Other experiential activities using guided meditation developed by the authors in leadership courses include exercises to help improve one's emotional intelligence or communication by helping the learners becoming more self-aware.

Thus, adopting guided meditation as a leadership education practice allows trainers to create a safe space for learners to practise reflection and introspection, improving self-awareness and wellbeing that leads to more effective leaders with greater focus, better mental sharpness, healthier lifestyles and increased emotional intelligence.

## **2. Methodological framework**

### **2.1 Hypothesis and objectives**

In order to test the efficiency of guided mediation as an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching tool, we have envisaged an experiment that we are going to implement in the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022. Thus, our research hypothesis will be the following: when used in the ESP classroom, guided meditation techniques will stimulate the students' speaking skills, highly contributing to the development of a rich vocabulary, writing skills and creativity.

Having in view the above stated hypothesis, the major objective of our research is to investigate the efficacy of guided meditation as a teaching technique,

by identifying positive improvements in students' ESP speaking and writing skills, in their ESP vocabulary related to job interviews, and in their creativity.

## 2.2 Research subjects and methods

The subjects of this experiment are going to be the students enrolled in the second year of study, at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, majoring in International Business, full-time studies. These students will be divided into two groups, i.e., a control group and an experimental (focus) one.

The main research methods employed for the purpose of our research will be the experiment, the observation and the questionnaire.

As far as data collection instruments are concerned, we are going to rely on Tatiana Slama-Cazacu's dynamic-contextual methodology (1999, p. 232-240) and its principles. Therefore, the main methods and proceedings will consist of an observational study (to observe and assess the students' activity and attendance), an experiment (to assess the students' reaction to different teaching techniques) and a questionnaire.

## 2.3 Experiment design

The first stage of the experiment will involve an initial test, taken by both groups, aimed at assessing all students' ESP skills. Moreover, we will process the students' data and the results of the initial test, draw the profile of the two groups, in terms of age, gender and ESP level and compare them. It is noteworthy that reliable and valid research results require heterogeneous control and experimental groups, in terms of number of subjects, gender, age and ESP level. Therefore, we will make sure that the distribution of subjects in the two groups is balanced, in accordance with the above-mentioned criteria.

Afterwards, we will proceed to the teaching stage, which will take two weeks. Both groups will be taught the same ESP content (i.e. "Job Interviews"), by using the same teaching and learning materials; however, we will use two distinct sets of teaching

methods and techniques: for the control group, we will use traditional teaching techniques while for the experimental group we will employ guided meditation techniques.

After the teaching stage ends, the students will take the same final test, aimed at assessing their progress. At the end of our experiment, we will ask the students from the experimental group to fill in a questionnaire that assesses their attitude, opinion and motivation when guided meditation was employed in ESP teaching and learning.

As already mentioned, for the control group, we will use a teacher-centered approach, based on translations, on visual (flashcards, pictures, miming, gestures) and verbal techniques (illustrative situations, synonyms, definitions, etc.) and on presentation-practice-production, with explanations and examples. The seminars will begin with a pre-speaking activity, where students will be required to analyze some pictures and guess the topic of the lesson; then, they will have to solve a matching exercise or a fill-in-the-gaps task. Afterwards, students will be asked to read some texts about job interviews, to identify the unknown words, to translate some fragments from the texts and to answer some questions that verify their understanding of the texts.

For the experimental group, we have envisaged several guided meditation-based activities that will involve teaching ESP vocabulary within specific contexts. It should be noted that the guided meditation activities must take into account the students' individual and collective needs. Before these activities, students should become acquainted with the concept of guided meditation. For this purpose, we might ask questions such as: "What happens to our body when we take a deep breath?"; "How do you feel after several deep breaths?"; "How can you relax your bodies and minds right now?" Furthermore, we also intend to show our students some pictures and a video with persons that meditate and to present them the benefits of meditation in relation to the learning process (i.e. meditation clears and opens the students' minds, prepares them for learning, increases their ability to focus) (see Jenkins, 2015, p. 36).

Hall et al. (1990) argued that some students might be reluctant to the idea of guided meditation and their fear of doing something different might materialize in reactions such as laughing, mocking the activity, restlessness, talking loudly, their asking to return to a more traditional lesson. The above-mentioned authors suggested that teachers could counteract such behavior patterns by showing acceptance of the students' feelings and by encouraging them to try something new and daring. Moreover, we will also tell our students that they should not pay attention to what their classmates will be doing, as their main task is to stay focused on the guided meditation process.

It should be mentioned that the meditation process will be accompanied by audio guidance, usually provided by the teacher. We will keep in mind that the success of such activities depends on several conditions, such as: short duration (five to ten minutes), clear speech, simple vocabulary, slow and relaxed voice, pauses (during these activities students must relax, close their eyes and focus inward, trying to visualize and feel the scene described by the teacher).

The guided meditation process consists of four main stages: setting the scene, relaxing the students' body, guided imagery and grounding exercise. Moreover, after this process, the teacher will involve students in a productive activity or even in a teaching activity.

In order to set the scene, we intend to draw the curtains, play a calming sound in the background and ask our students to sit in a comfortable position. The next stage (body relaxation) involves the students' awareness of their body and tension release by stretching body parts. For this purpose, we intend to apply the suggestions provided by Hall et al.:

Just be aware of how you are sitting in the chair right now. You may notice that there are parts of your body that are feeling tense. Just check now to see if there are any areas of tension. I am going to give you a few suggestions about how to relax a little more and I would like you to try to follow my instructions. Begin by clenching your fists really tightly. Now let them go. Next I want you curl your toes under really tightly. Now let them go and relax. Hunch your shoulders up to your ears. When you let them go, relax the shoulders and the neck. Be aware of how you are feeling in your

body right now. (Hall, E., Hall, C. & Leech, 1990, p. 39)

Relaxation can also be achieved by several breathing techniques. Having in view the profile of our students, we consider that the instructions proposed by Hall et al. are the most appropriate in this regard:

Be aware of your breathing. Is it fast or slow? Easy or forced? Shallow or deep? Try to let the breath deepen. Breathe deeply down into your chest. As you relax, let the air go out. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation as it flows all over your body. (Hall, E., Hall, C. & Leech, 1990, p. 39-40)

After this second stage, we will employ visualization / imagery techniques – the core of the guided meditation process – that will help students to rehearse mentally the ESP vocabulary related to job interviews within a given context. In order to appeal to the students' imagination, to generate imagery and to ensure the success of such activities, we will invoke as many senses as possible.

Guided imagery will contribute to the enhancement of the students' concentrated observation and will encourage their imagination. This cognitive and affective tool is quite challenging, since it requires flexibility and creativity, as the teacher must be able to adapt the scripts in accordance with the educational targets. Such an instance is:

"You are at a job interview now. You are sitting on a sofa, in a lobby, waiting for the interviewer to call you. What are you wearing? What do you see around you? Are there any sounds? The secretary is making some coffee. Can you see her? She is coming towards you with a cup of coffee. Can you feel the warm cup in your hands? Can you smell the coffee? You are taking a sip from the cup. How does it taste like? What is the secretary doing next? Is someone else in the room? Ring! The secretary's phone rings. It is the manager. He tells the secretary to invite you to his office. He is waiting for you. You stand up and follow her. You enter the manager's office. How is this office? What does the manager look like? Is he alone? What kinds of papers are there on his desk? The manager shakes your hand and invites you to sit down. He is looking at your CV

and smiling. What does he ask you? What do you answer? The interview is over. You stand up and shake hands again with the manager. You leave his office smiling. Now, let's easily come back to our classroom..."

The guided meditation process will end with a grounding exercise. For this purpose, we will ask our students the following: "Now, wiggle your fingers and toes. Stretch out as far as you can and open your eyes slowly. Now, reflect in silence for a few moments at your feelings and experience". Thus, we will ensure that the transition between the two different states of consciousness is not too abrupt. Afterwards, we will ask our students to write five key words related to their experience and then they will have to form pairs and discuss their fantasies and compare them. In order to help students in this regard and stimulate speaking, we will also show them the questions asked during the visualization / imagery stage: "What are you wearing? What do you see around you? Are there any sounds? Can you see her (i.e. the secretary)? Can you feel the warm cup in your hands? Can you smell the coffee? What does it taste like? What is the secretary doing next? Is someone else in the room? How is the manager's office? What does the manager look like? Is he alone? What kinds of papers are there on his desk? What does he ask you? What do you answer?"

A conversation between two friends about a job advertisement or about their own jobs, making a phone call in order to ask for more details about a certain job or in order to invite someone to a job interview are also instances of situations that students can mentally rehearse in advance and enhance their speaking skills.

After the meditation process, we will use a checklist consisting of five Yes/No questions, aimed at verifying the relaxation level of each student: "Was the student silent?"; "Was s/he relatively still?"; "Did s/he keep his/her eyes closed during the guided meditation exercise?"; "Was his/her body relaxed during the guided meditation exercise?"; "Did s/he come out of the guided meditation exercise slowly?"

Next, we will provide opportunities for the students to perform activities in acquiring vocabulary

items. We will also envisage a writing activity, in which the students have to write a short paragraph about their experience with the scripted fantasy. Afterwards, we will ask them to work in pairs and write their own scripts based on a given topic (e.g. "You got the job and the manager called you to discuss the last details about your employment... Continue the script").

At the end of the teaching stage, the students from the experimental group will receive a questionnaire aimed at assessing their attitude and feelings towards the guided meditation technique. The questionnaire will consist of the following questions: "Did you like the meditation technique? You must feel motivated before answering"; "How did you feel after the meditation process?"; "Do you consider that meditation contributed to the improvement of your ESP learning? You must feel motivated before answering"; "Are there any challenging aspects that you faced during the meditation process?" Afterwards, both the control and the experimental groups will take a final test that will assess the knowledge acquired during the teaching stage.

We are aware of the fact that this case study will be limited by the small sample size. Moreover, our results may also be affected by the limited data collection period. We might also find it difficult to find out whether or not the answers given by the students will be sincere. Consequently, this experiment is going to be a challenge both for the teacher and the students.

### 3. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to analyze an appealing, but at the same time challenging and intriguing approach to teaching English as a foreign language, namely, guided meditation. The objective of the research has been to discuss how this technique could create a stress-free atmosphere in the classroom and lead to significant improvement in students' learning and creativity. It has been trying to show ways for creating a relaxed environment in which our students can study and communicate in English, how they can become creative and develop their mind.

The literature review presented in this paper shows and supports the use of guided meditation as an

important tool in stimulating relaxation, creativity and concentration in the classroom. By relaxation and guided imagery, the students concentrate, willingly participate in different types of activities and develop an open mind.

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