

ESCAPE ROOMS FROM A COLLABORATIVE AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

ESCAPE ROOMS CON PERSPECTIVA INTERDISCIPLINARIA Y DE COLABORACIÓN

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Abstract

Foreign language teaching should always be interwoven with new technologies and new advances that are proposed in the education world and they should include some of the current challenges that are not always obvious in classes. The three challenges that this paper aims to explore are the emotional aspect, the limited connexion among foreign language teaching and the rest of subjects and competitiveness among students. As a proposal to aim these objectives, we will propose for high school students “escape rooms” as they have been considered a powerful tool in education. However, the new element that we would like to incorporate in this educational experience is the creation of an “escape room” along with teachers from other subjects. The results showed students eager to participate and really focused on the fulfilment of each activity. They were able to revise different subjects while using English as the main language.

Key Words: escape rooms, second foreign language, emotional aspect, relationship among subjects, competitiveness.

Resumen

La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras debería estar siempre unida a las nuevas tecnologías y nuevos avances que se proponen en el mundo de la educación y deberían incluir algunos retos actuales que no siempre están presentes en las clases. Los tres retos que este artículo explora son el aspecto emocional, la escasa conexión de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras con otras asignaturas y la competitividad entre alumnos. Como propuesta para conseguir estos objetivos, proponemos para alumnos de instituto las “escape rooms” consideradas como herramienta poderosa en educación, incorporando como nuevo elemento su elaboración junto con los profesores que imparten otras materias. Los resultados mostraron estudiantes deseosos de participar y muy concentrados en cada actividad. Pudieron revisar distintas asignaturas al mismo tiempo que utilizaban como lengua principal el inglés.

Palabras clave: escape rooms, segunda lengua extranjera, aspecto emocional, relación entre distintas materias, competitividad.

1. INTRODUCTION

The new changes in the society are critical for understanding the emerging trends in education. With the proliferation of information and communication technologies, we are facing multiple challenges when

it comes to educators so we must be able to try new and effective modern teaching experiences and to make the necessary changes to stay up-to-date.

As Castells (2018) affirmed, the education system grapples with an outdated teaching method that should offer students the possibility to deal with new education environments as nowadays they must face at different and challenging situations due to the society in which they are living. Teachers and professors, we want to “escape” from the outdated teaching methods and take this all a step further. To cope with this new emerging reality, new trends in education are to be experienced and evaluated.

In this article, we would like to present some difficulties that educators find in their daily routine and although there are many approaches and there is no fixed formula or single absolute method, we would like to propose “escape rooms” in order to face the following obstacles.

1.1. Difficulties and proposal

Despite the substantial progress observed in education (Flecha García 2011), several difficulties remain a challenge for teachers and professors.

When reflecting on the difficulties in teaching a foreign language, it appears important to draw a clear distinction between embodied and not embodied languages. Conforming to Pavlenko (2007), in the embodied languages, an emotional content appears whereas in the not embodied languages this emotional content is not so eminent (e.g. in the classroom). The new language taught in class has never been considered as the most emotional language as a priori, the emotional aspect was not as prevalent as in other circumstances. We strongly believe that the emotional aspect should always be present and motivations, as several authors claimed, are part of it. Bearing in mind all these authors that will be explained in the coming section and being our firm belief that the emotional aspect should never be sidelined, new strategies including motivation and emotional content are to be incorporated in the field of education. These new elements to be taken into account would allow a better acquisition of the second language.

Many schools and universities offer independent subjects or study courses (Rosell Puig, Más García & Domínguez Hernández 2002). Accordingly, another significant feature to be raised is the need of duties that involve working in teams and incorporating and mixing approaches from distinct subjects in a unique project work. This is yet another directive which lays bare the incomprehension formulated by students about the weak linkage among subjects.

The last characteristic included in our reflection covers competitiveness. Shindler (2009:3) quoted “The power of its effect makes its use very tempting. Little else gets a group of young people more energized than competition”. However, although competition should always be motivating, it sometimes turns into something destructive. That is the reason why competitiveness cannot either be forgotten. Our idea is not to avoid it because it will surround students all their lives. As teachers, it is duty bound to consider competitiveness from another angle.

Nowadays, we are facing with more interactive and collaborative technological environments (Amberg, Reinhardt, Haushahn & Hofmann 2009). Bearing that in mind and believing that escape rooms are a promising topic of interest in foreign language learning, students will play an escape room with the objective of revising different subjects.

Among the broad array of proceedings that can be carried out in classes in order to solve the above-mentioned challenges, escape rooms seem to be a valuable tool. Escape rooms are games which are usually played in a locked room or a building and players must solve heterogeneous assignments (physical or mental) in order to escape. Participants must work together and try their best as tasks will demand various abilities. Escape rooms are believed to begin in Japan in 2007 although the origins of this game have not been well certified. What it is being continuously documented is the impact and scope that they have in the educational world (Stone 2016; Ontario Escape Room Unconference; Nicholson 2018). Therefore, it is our firm belief that escape rooms or escape games will enhance students understanding of the knowledge at the same time that they include a deep emotional content. Nevertheless, our new perspective will combine various subjects throughout the whole escape room what will help students work on their sense of empathy and lower their level of competitiveness.

The project presented here consists on an educational experience in Secondary Education that aims at continuous improvement in Teaching Methodology. It could also be carried out in a Higher Education or University context. All in all, this activity will entail a wide range of factors needed not only for learning a foreign language but also for fostering students' outstanding assets such as collaboration, problem solving and critical thinking. Accordingly, the following objectives were foreseen for the current experience as follows.

1.2. Objectives

The main objectives for this educational proposal are related to the difficulties already explained.

- To incorporate the emotional content in an English class.
- To enable the interest of different subjects to be married in the same class.
- To lower the competitiveness level among students.
- To use the second language as the language in order to communicate and to strengthen new vocabulary from other subjects in this foreign language.

The question at issue is the English learning together with other subjects' knowledge. Each teacher will decide the level that needs to be achieved depending on students. For this experience and taking into account the level of high school students who will be playing this escape room, the level will be B2. As reported by the Cambridge English scale, in this level, students must be able to hold the conversational partner's attention and to communicate straightforward ideas (Cambridge English Language Assessment 2015).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As previously stated as difficulties, never let it be forgotten motivation in the second language teaching. This is evidenced by the large number of authors that investigated this topic.

In 1985, Krashen used the expression “affective filter” in his famous *Monitor Model*. For him, the more a student is self-confident, the more he will be eager to produce and create new things. Years later, Pavlenko (2002) in *Bilingualism and Emotions* saw the attitude, motivation and other emotive factors towards the second language as crucial. Paradis is another author to be mentioned as he stated: “Motivation also encourages practice” (2004:223). According to that, students will be eager to practice new content in a new language if they are more motivated. The same author declared in 2007 that a positive emotional attitude will enable a better acquisition of the second language. We could continue with other authors that also dealt with this issue. However, we will name Fen & Kiat who reported, “motivation is known as a stimulant for achieving a specific target” (2015:24). In the same line, the research made by Pourfeiz (2016) showed that a student positive attitude toward learning a second language is central for language achievement.

Taking into account all these authors and regarding this feature, that is motivation and the emotional aspect, we believe that games will always incorporate the emotional aspect that must be included in class. In this experience, escape rooms will be considered as games as they comprise all the requirements established by Klopfer, Osterweil & Salen when reflecting on gaming: “constitutes the sum total of activities, literacies, knowledge, and practices activated in and around any instance of a game” (2009:7). Moreover, following Nicholson (2015:30), “Escape rooms create a moment of passion around specific topics that then can be used as the spark to then ignite interest in something for a player to learn more about later”.

Moving on to the next item, that is, the limited connection among foreign language teaching and the rest of subjects, we should mention that we are not referring to CLIL here. We are referring to a traditional educative system that has been mainly composed by independent subjects without any interdisciplinary connection (Rosell Puig, Más García & Domínguez Hernández 2002). With this educational proposal, we are not trying to change subjects in order for them to interlock with one another. The objective is to make students know that what they can learn in one subject can be useful for another one. Conforming to Sicherl-Kafola & Denacb (2010), this approach will foster the emotional and motivational development of the student as the same time that the quality of the acquired knowledge will be emphasized.

Regarding competitiveness, we should mention that students will also see the game as a way to reflect and discuss about a particular subject or area and as the space devoted to a greater understanding of the knowledge. Students will see their partners as a help rather than as a competitor since they will be working peer to peer. That will lead them enhance empathy, what is crucial for today’s students. According to Jones, Weissbourd, Bouffard, Kahn, & Ross (2014), empathy provides benefits such as higher academic achievement, better communication skills and also more classroom engagement. In line with that, Santos, Chartier, Whalen, Chateau, & Boyd (2011) considered empathy as the best antidote

to racism and bullying. When working together, students will be able to make the shift from “me” to “we”.

This kind of learning involves students working with others and providing each other with assistance to cope with a specific situation. Students will acquire an active voice as they have to comment their points of view. In addition, they will shape their ideas by listening to others’ opinion and receiving feedback and all this will ensure a consensus. These tasks are usually emotionally demanding. Nevertheless, they will hold the key to future growth. In the same line Shindler (2009:2) stated that “group members will change the way they regard one another. The competitive condition encourages them to view their fellows less as peers or members of a learning community and more as instruments to be used to reach the goal”.

Furthermore, students will take dissimilar roles, from leader to follower, novice to expert (Gee 2003). In some assignments, they will be experts and they will have to solve the exercise. However, in others, they will be the novice and other students will lead the exercise. In that way, nobody could get excluded or ignored. This will force them to try on different identities that will guide them to forge and perfect their own identity. Shindler (2009:2) wrote “some combination of personality dominance and individual level of competence will define the values of the process, inevitably marginalizing weaker and less skilled team members.” As reported by Schwartz (1999), it has been considered not only as an effective way of teaching but also learning. An effective teamwork will permit communication within groups and strengthen individual identities. Each individual identity will help to foster communal identities too. In an age fraught with feelings of disconnectedness, this experience will boost students’ engagement and will connect them to their peers as they will be free to express their opinions, to seek practical solutions for their needs and to engage in debate. Students will have to work on their ability to accept and tolerate others’ opinion and to solve differences in order to reach an agreement. Not only should students learn strategies and competences but they also should make effective use of them. This feature will entwine with the other aspect of our proposal, games and escape rooms so we will briefly expose some ideas about these concepts.

Conforming to Leigh Smith & MacGregor (1992), the collaborative learning garnered more interest in the 1990s so it should not be assessed as recent. Nonetheless, what it is spreading right now is the new ways to develop and adapt the collaborative learning to new contexts; it is a nascent idea. Bearing in mind the difficulties that hamper teachers, collaborative learning should be placed. In agreement with Leigh Smith & MacGregor (1992:2), “in most collaborative learning situations students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product”. In the same line, Dean, Hubbell, Pitler & Stone (2012) estimated that cooperative learning would enhance empathy skills since listening to others is a must in this kind of learning.

For its part and although there were diverse opinions with conflicting findings (Plass, Homer & Kinzer 2014), games have had their heyday in the last years as they were assessed as an engine that produces and creates something new. Escape rooms will be considered in this article as a game. The common concerns related to games center around an assumption that games normally have a win state. That means that internalizing and revising concepts could become unimportant for students as their main

priority would be winning. We could get a complete but sloppy work. Nonetheless, in the escape rooms, the victory consists on knowing how to obtain the next hint or to escape the room and for that reason; the work must be done correctly as it could be the answer to the following clue. The fact of including escape rooms as a game has a consolidated and firm basis on what Klopfer, Osterweil & Salen (2009) claimed. They believed that in games, students will exercise freedom along five distinct axes, that is, freedom to fail, freedom to experiment, freedom to fashion identities; freedom of effort and freedom of interpretation. Furthermore, games have been judged to be more effective than boring lectures and with a lot of potential in the educational world (Plass, Homer & Kinzer 2014).

Escape rooms have taken off recently and they were fueled by companies focused on leisure and free time activities. Nevertheless, its incorporation in the field of education has enabled educators and professors to keep students engaged and motivated (Cambridge University Press 2017). Escape rooms have been included in education and they are enjoying a considerable growth (Stone 2016; Ontario Escape Room Unconference; Nicholson 2018). However, our new perspective for this article is the fact of including different subjects as an asset to work toward a common good.

3. METHODS

Escape rooms have already been used in education. However, as previously mentioned, the new proposal of this article is to gather tasks that involve knowledge from several subjects. In order to do that, teachers should meet and reach a consensus about the exercises to be accomplished and the scope of the escape room itself. The objective is to assimilate content in a modern and different way so that knowledge is better comprehended. This escape room will lead students to the previous knowledge already acquired in lessons. That will follow one of the principles of the scaffolding strategies, that is, tapping into prior content area and connect it to the future (Alber 2014). Therefore, this escape room will be used as a way to revise for a possible exam. Escape rooms have been also considered as valuable tools to revise content (Dorado Escribano 2019).

This kind of escape room might be played by any students as the level and difficulty will be established by educators and they know their students and their level. In this experience, the escape room will be played by high school students who belong to heterogeneous branches (Science and Letters) so a large variety in every group will be shown.

Indicative outline:

1st step: Teachers meet in order to reach a consensus about the scope and the different activities that students will have to carry out in order to escape from the class.

On the one hand, educators will have to decide the number of assignments depending on the length of their escape room. On the other, they have to bear in mind materials and places for these tasks. Some of the ideas for the elaboration of this escape room include puzzle, locks (directional, alpha, digit, etc.), decrypt messages, hidden objects, searching for items in odd places, searching for objects in images, lights, pattern identification, black light pens, riddles, ciphers without a key, secret codes, sounds, mirrors, abstract logic, lockable containers or zippered pouches, research using information

sources, mazes, physical agility, UV flashlights, shape manipulation, magnets, piece together parts, smell or taste, etc. Some of these ideas have been extracted from Nicholson (2015).

The employed methodology will consist on a collaborative learning project that will take into account the scaffolding strategies needed in a classroom. For this reason, the activities in the game will be similar to those carried out in class with teachers (Alber 2014). It is significant that educators know the level of their students in every subject. Accordingly, the tasks should be challenging but feasible. If assignments are too difficult, it could be counterproductive and students must be frustrated.

In this step and for the implementation of this methodology, a first teachers meeting will be held in order to establish the main topic of the educational experience through a brainstorming of ideas. A further meeting will set the content that is going to be revised and activities with a more detailed description.

As reported by Nicholson (2016), escape rooms can follow a theme around which all tasks are organized. The main topic of this escape room is an island. It is the final year for students in the high school and they go in a field trip to this island. The objective is to escape from it through the fulfillment of several exercises. They do not know in which island they are and they must guess it from the activities that they have to carry out.

Throughout the escape room, students will have to deal with the following assignments:

- Industrial Technology: Students will have to complete a crossword in less than 5 minutes. In the crossword, they will find various definitions of the materials studied in this subject. Ex. Polymer that absorbs energy when it is folded. The letters that are not used in the crossword will have a message in order to find the next clue. The message will specify that they have to find the words of the definitions around the classroom. When they find the cards with the words, they will find a QR code that will lead them to the other tasks.
- Math, Biology and Drawing: Students will have to resolve an operational puzzle. Students will have to join operations with their answers in order to make the puzzle. Once the puzzle is done, they will realize that behind the puzzle, there are two different pictures. One picture is a plant that they have studied; the other picture is a cell. The image of the plant is the hint in order to know in which island they are. They can use computers to look for information and the password to log in is the diameter of the cell.
- Computer Technology: Students will have to translate some binary codes to English language related to computer parts and then point these parts out on a printed paper.
- Economy and Philosophy: Teachers will create an audio with the voice of a man speaking against the slavery. It will be a philosophical framework in which terms such as risk premium, unemployment rate or inflation will be heard. Students should write down all the words related to economy and if they are correct, they will get a decrypt message with the name of the man speaking: Victor Schoelcher, an influential French politician known by the struggle against slavery in the Guadeloupe Island. That would be another hint in order to guess the island in which they are.

- French and History: Teachers will create a kahoot in French with questions related to the topics that the students are studying in class, in this case, empires, wars, republics, etc. Some questions will also refer to the island they must guess. The island is a French island (the Guadeloupe Island) with a lot of history; that is the reason why this task combines French and History as they have studied this island in both subjects.

2nd step: The first thing not to be forgotten in this step is the number of students that will be playing the escape room.

Educators will create the groups by dividing students according to subjects. Hence, in each group, there will be a student who studies a different optional subject bringing a distinct perspective that will be shared with the rest and it is through this conversation that they will learn (Golub 1988). This will help the project to have diversity of students, another specificity of collaborative learning. Within this aspect, the cooperative learning will appear as this kind of learning is based on the social interdependence. Every group will have to work together in order to maximize the learning of all members of the group (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec 1999). In the same line, Leigh Smith & MacGregor (1992) reported some essential elements that should never be shelved in the cooperative learning. One of them is the positive interdependence that will be strengthened as every student contributes to the collaborative project.

This educational experience has taken place in a high school class which consists of thirty-three 16-year-old students. There will be six groups with five or six students. Teachers made the division bearing in mind that each group should be formed by different students studying heterogeneous optional subjects.

3rd step: Explanation to students.

Educators will explain the scope of this educational proposal. They will clarify rules and guidelines that students must follow throughout the escape room. They will also justify the need of assessment through rubrics for this activity. We will describe them further down.

For this explanation, the English teacher was the person in charge and she clarified it in one of her lessons. The description was in English as it should be the language used throughout the whole project.

4th step: Development of the escape room.

All exercises and assignments must be prepared and placed in advanced. The teachers involved in the creation of the escape room should be present in order to verify that the development of the activity is the right way forward.

For the implementation of this educational experience, a period of two consecutive hours will be needed. In the students' schedule, on Tuesday, they have French followed by History so teachers decided to carry out this educational proposal on Tuesday. Some other educators were released at that time in order to assist the French and History teachers.

Students might get stuck on an activity. For this reason, every group will have a “help card” that they can use once during the game. If a group is not able to solve a task, they might ask for assistance to any other groups. If the students in other groups know the answer, they will explain the exercise in order to let them know how they should have carried it out and one and all should reflect on results. This will decrease the competitiveness as they will need other students in order to achieve the final goal. They will realize how important the help of others is.

Teachers prepared all tasks in the languages classroom and they decorated it trying to create the atmosphere (Nicholson 2016) of an island: posters, sound, sand, etc. They tried to recreate an island scene. There were different groups and each teacher was in charge of one of them. All groups had the same exercises but the order was not the same. That prevented them not to be in the same assignment at the same time.

The escape room started at 09h10 and lasted until 11h on Tuesday. Students arrived to the languages room and were observing the scenery at the same time that they were listening to some sounds (sound of the sea, exotic birds, native languages, etc.). When all the students were in the classroom, a video was played as an introduction of the escape room (Nicholson 2016). In the video, it was explained the theme and the “problem” that they had to solve, that is, to guess the island where they were and to escape.

5th step: Evaluation of the escape room through rubrics.

It seems appropriate to mention that the ability to make judgments has recently become a major issue. It refers to the ability to analyze and evaluate information and make a reasoned decision which will empower students’ critical thinking. By groups, students will have to assess two dissimilar aspects. On the one hand, students will have to value the escape room itself. They have to learn to make constructive comments that could help educators to improve the work. On the other, they will have to evaluate themselves as a group. Students must be aware that what a person in a group does might affect the rest of partners.

This will follow another scaffolding strategy – give time to talk (Alber 2014) and in order to do that, some rubrics will be provided by teachers. Now, it seems worthwhile to clarify briefly the elements that should be assessed. We will start with those related to the escape room itself and subsequently, we will move to the aspects regarding the appraisal of students’ job in the escape room.

Assessment of the escape room itself:

- Scope: Were students unable to understand the scope or was the scope adequately, competently or skillfully defined?
- Organization: Organization could be valued as ineffective, effective with errors or effective. Organization should be logical, clear, well prepared and rehearsed.
- Thought and creative thinking: Students will estimate if the escape room showed creativity or there was a lack of it. That could include sensory stimulation.
- Media: The effective use of new technologies will be assessed, that is, visual aids and multimedia (images, computers, mobile phones, videos). These new technologies should

support the presentation by adding interest and impact and should assist students in understanding the scope of the escape room.

- Amusement/Enjoyment: Was the escape room able to captivate students or did it make them bored?

Assessment of the group's job:

- Participation: Are students unengaged with tasks, mostly engaged or eager to work and find a solution? Participation will be evaluated by their listening skills, that is, whether or not the student listens to others and contributes to the dialogue or, on the contrary, if the student needs encouragement or reminder as he does not initiate contribution. Attitude (positive for learning) will also be assessed.
- Communication: The aim is to consider if the group made an effective use of the speaking skills, that is, clarity, volume, pace, etc. The fact of being slow, stumbling, hesitant or smooth and effortless will be appraised. Students are also valued depending on the correct use of the language learnt in class (appropriate terminology); if they do it in a clear way, in the correct context and whether or not their vocabulary is rich and precise. Comments will be also borne in mind (insightful, constructive, etc.)
- Use of English (grammar, pronunciation etc.): They will be judged taking into account if they are difficult to understand, slightly unclear or clear at all times. They will be also appraised by the persistent errors, few errors or an outstanding use of English that they might have.
- Time Management: Do students adhere to the allocated time limit? Waste of time or excellent use of time will be assessed.
- Amusement/Enjoyment: Were they able to amuse throughout the escape room? Aspects such as entertainment, fondness and liking would be evaluated.

Regarding the assessment values, different types could be chosen. This will guide teachers to explain students' expectations. Words can be used, that is, normally adjectives such as excellent, good, etc. Another type is numbers, that is, numerical values that calculate the level of performance. All in all, students will be asked to show their knowledge in diverse subjects and also essential requirements such as collaboration, the capacity to solve complex challenges or the ability to make judgments. For other kinds of escape room, in which students will be asked to create their own escape room (Dorado Escribano 2019), not only the previous mentioned requirements will be necessary but others such as mature, productivity, analytical thinking, originality or systems-thinking.

For this educational experience, the following words were chosen: 1. *NA*. 2. *Developing*. 3. *Proficiency*. 4. *Distinguished*. Concerning the evaluation of the escape room itself, four aspects were estimated as *Distinguished* by more than 80% of students: scope (96%), media and amusement/enjoyment (84%) and thought/creative thinking (81%). The organization obtained 69% of the students who valued as *Distinguished* and 30% who believed it to be *Proficiency*. In relation to the appraisal of the group's job, results revealed almost all the characteristics to be *Distinguished* by more than 80% of students, that is, participation and time management (100%), amusement/enjoyment (90%) and communication (87%). The only feature that obtained lower results was the use of English with

75% of the students who appraised it to be *Distinguished*. The rest of students in both assessments selected the option *Proficiency* and none of the students chose *NA* or *Developing*.

6th step: Educators meeting

Teachers will have a meeting in order to assess the strengths and limitations of this educational experience. They will use the rubrics completed by students in order to have their point of view. Following these rubrics, we will first refer to the assessment of the escape room itself and subsequently the evaluation of the groups' job will be provided.

Students highlighted a lot of strengths in the assessment of the escape room itself. The scope was skillfully defined, that is, they were given a profound explanation about the program and what was expected from them. They maintained that the creativity was shown throughout the whole project. They appreciated the sensory stimulation while the fulfillment of the activity (sound of the sea, exotic birds, native languages, etc.). Media was also highly assessed. Images and sounds were also appearing while the performance of the different tasks so it was positively valued. They also enjoyed the fact of using their mobiles phones in order to scan the QR code. Finally, students enjoyed the activity and did not get bored. Regarding limitations, the aspect to be improved was the organization. Students considered that it was well prepared and it was effective although sometimes some groups were in the same assignment. Teachers reflected a lot about this issue in order to improve it for next time. The problem that we encounter is that we never know how much time each group will be in a specific exercise. Some groups were really quick and others needed more time. Before implementing the experience, we thought about giving a maximum execution time but the proposal was rejected as we thought that the escape room should not be so rigid.

Moving on to the next item, the assessment of the group's job, it should be pointed out that there were more strengths than limitations. Concerning the main strengths, participation was highly valued. Students were eager to work, contribute and find a solution for each problem. With regard to time management, students adhered to the allocated time. To conclude, they amused working as a group. Constraints include communication and use of English. Students were able to communicate with the appropriate terminology and they were clear at almost all times. However, the excitement of new hints and the desire to escape made them use the Spanish language sometimes.

3.1. Barriers

Barriers to education can take a variety of forms. Some are obvious while others are more subtle. In this article, we must recognize the barriers that, although not insurmountable, pose continued challenges for an experience with escape rooms. To name a few, we could find:

- Current educational system: In the present educational system, educators are demanded to follow a curriculum that should be completed by the end of the year.
- Attitudes: Games in educational environments are often not well regarded by some teachers, parents or students. Negative attitudes and stereotypes are also due to lack of knowledge and it can make this kind of experiences difficult.

- Timing: Lack of time to plan and implement. On the one hand, educators do not have time to prepare this kind of projects that require extra time. On the other, the time structure of classes does not always allow completing the entire game.
- Support from other teachers: Various teachers should be involved in this game by rendering assistance. However, lack of time or interest might do it more cumbersome to manage. Some of them might consider that there is a lack of balance between entertainment and education.

3.2. Success indicators

- a) Success indicators for the escape room itself, that is, the fact of escaping the room.

The success of the project will not be possible if any of the individual challenges has not been overcome. Hence, the vital importance of the autonomy of all students and the confidence placed in every member of the group. It will give them a boost of confidence. All groups were able to escape from the classroom so the success of the escape room itself was obvious in all respects.

- b) Success indicators for the success of the escape room as a cooperative learning activity.

As reported by some schools (e.g. colegio Artica in Madrid), in a cooperative learning, three questions must be answered in order to assure that the proposal will be successful.

- Does everybody participate? It can be documented that every student in the class has participated as some assignments could only be carried out by some students. As we explained in the methodology, groups will be done taking into consideration optional subjects. Therefore, not all students will know the content area of some exercises.
- Do they need each other? Every person in the group needs the others because not everybody studies the same subjects. Accordingly, when facing at a specific activity, in some cases, students are experts and in some others, they are novice.
- Can I verify the task? The task can be verified because they must escape from the class.

4. RESULTS

At the beginning, the paper presented a theoretical framework related to the main aims that we intended to fulfill with this educational proposal. The framework attempted to provide a deeply and reasonable justification regarding the axes of this article, emotions, limited linkage among subjects and competitiveness, some of the difficulties that educators find in their daily routine and that represent the main objectives of this paper.

Taking into account these aims, the results obtained are the following.

- To incorporate the emotional content in a class.

Students believed not be working while the fulfillment of this project. They were motivated and they did not want the experience to finish. One of the students' opinions was: "It was a nice activity because it wasn't something hard to do, it could help us to relax from other exams we had been doing".

- To enable the interest of different subjects to be married in the same class.

Teachers had the arduous task to think about exercises that could mix various subjects. Another student' opinion: "This was amazing and unique and I would like to repeat this in future because this helped me to improve my skills in subjects such as Biology, French or even English. This helped me to learn more about other subjects that nowadays I don't know for example Technical Drawing or TICS".

Students were more attentive to the fact of being the first to escape the room than to the fact of accomplishing the assignments in the correct manner. This could have had as a negative aspect the production of sloppy tasks. Nevertheless, in order to reach admission to the next stage, activities should have been completed properly so they were learning skills indirectly, they were working, revising and assimilating the content studied in class.

- To lower the competitiveness level among students.

The fact of including in each group a student with a distinct optional subject made this objective easy and clear. There were assignments in which two dissimilar subjects were interwoven so some students had not studied what it was asked in a part of the exercise. Therefore, students needed the collaboration of everyone in order to carry out the activity. One student said: "Another thing that I liked is that there were different subjects and every member of the group had one task to do".

Every student needed to make an effort by working quickly and actively in order to escape the room. They learnt how to cope with stress when everybody is counting on them and when time is at premium.

- To use the second language as the language in order to communicate and to strengthen new vocabulary from other subjects in this foreign language.

The use of English throughout the whole experience was a must and students were penalized with time if they were using Spanish. That made them speak in English or in French depending on the task that they were completing. According to the appropriate level for these students in this experience, that is, B2, students were able to understand abstract and concrete conversations or texts. Therefore, they interacted with fluency and spontaneity.

Apart from the main objectives, we have provided the results concerning the rubrics in which more strengths than limitations can be observed. Furthermore, other secondary aims have been achieved too. On the one hand and just to mention a few examples, we could refer to those secondary objectives related to students. Students were able to sharpen their decision-making; to learn how to concentrate when surrounded by noisy environments or situations; to improve the speed at which they can solve problems, to develop social skills and to make effective use of the collaborative learning and ICT in a language class. On the other hand and in a more general way, this educational proposal fostered student learning as well as student performance and it made students revise the content area with an original and attractive project.

Our findings so far have indicated that the challenges and objectives presented at the beginning of this article have been met. Several conclusions may be drawn from the results highlighted above.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Presented in this paper has been the case of educational escape rooms as a new trend in education. Having been displayed and analyzed some of the current and ongoing challenges ahead in foreign language teaching, we have proposed the escape rooms as a powerful tool in education. Needless to say, this is not the wand to all existing problems but it could be of great assistance. We could also add that we are no outlier in carrying out this kind of experience as there has been worldwide growth regarding escape rooms.

With reference to emotions and the “affective filter”, we believe to be able to say outright that the escape room spurs students to do well as the emotional aspect is included in the class.

The second difficult item to be covered was the limited linkage among subjects. The escape room was formed by different activities and each one was related to a subject. However, there was a linkage among activities (or subjects) since the fulfillment of every assignment made students be closer to the ultimate goal.

Competitiveness is an element to be present as students have to compete against other groups in order to escape the room. Nevertheless, in this competitiveness, they will have to rely on their group members as there will be some tasks that not everybody in the group will be able to solve. Yet another viewpoint emphasized the teamwork and cooperation rather than competitiveness. Furthermore, failure (a meaningful characteristic in competitiveness) is a possibility that might take place and should take place in order to learn.

Escape room align with educational standards and student engagement is supervised (through the rubrics previously presented). They represent another way to gauge student understanding in a different and informal way, moving away from exams and formal ways to evaluate or revise. Thus, students will learn skills both directly and indirectly. Following the old adage, practice makes perfect, we were sure that, those students who had not yet acquired the content, would have the opportunity to learn it.

In conclusion, the foregoing analyses lead us to hypothesize that the potential of escape rooms is undeniable. Not only the main objectives stressed at the beginning of the article were fulfilled, other secondary and underlying targets have been achieved too. This kind of learning might have an impact in education as all the objectives were covered and it helped to enhance students’ confidence.

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