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Slave Away or Get Away: Escape Rooms as Motivational Tools for Learning English in the CLIL History Classroom in Higher Education

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Opresión o liberación: las salas de escape como herramienta de motivación para aprender inglés en el aula universitaria de AICLE en historia

Opressão ou liberação: as salas de fuga como ferramenta de motivação para aprender inglês na sala de aula universitária de AILC em História

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ABSTRACT. In present-day educational contexts, the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and gamification has been the basis for implementing escape rooms as pedagogical tools. This paper examines the role of virtual escape rooms in boosting History learners' motivation in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) contexts. Twenty-nine first-year undergraduates enrolled in a Classical History module delivered at a Spanish university have participated in this study by playing a virtual escape room game and answering a final survey. The findings reveal that escape rooms may result in highly-motivated students who feel less pressure when communicating in the target language. Therefore, the implementation of escape rooms can be a helpful resource in e-learning environments, fostering oral, collaborative, and critical thinking skills.

Keywords (Source: Unesco Thesaurus): Language learning; history; e-learning; higher education; motivation.

RESUMEN. En los contextos educativos actuales, la integración de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) y la gamificación han propiciado la implementación de las salas de escape como herramientas pedagógicas. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo examinar el impacto de las salas de escape virtuales en la motivación de los estudiantes de Historia en contextos de Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas (AICLE). Veintinueve alumnos matriculados en una asignatura de Historia Clásica, impartida en una universidad española, han participado en este estudio completando una sala de escape virtual y una encuesta. Los resultados indican que las salas de escape pueden incrementar la motivación de los estudiantes, los cuales se sienten menos presionados a comunicarse en la lengua meta. Por lo tanto, la implementación de salas de escape puede ser un recurso útil en los entornos de enseñanza virtual que promueven la adquisición de habilidades orales, colaborativas y de pensamiento crítico.

Palabras claves (Fuente: tesauro de la Unesco): Aprendizaje de lenguas; historia; aprendizaje digital; educación superior; motivación.

RESUMO. Nos contextos educacionais atuais, a integração das tecnologias da informação e comunicação e a gamificação vêm propiciando a implementação das salas de fuga como ferramentas pedagógicas. Este trabalho tem o objetivo de analisar o impacto das salas de fuga virtuais na motivação dos estudantes de História em contextos de Aprendizagem Integrada de Língua e Conteúdo (CLIL — *Content and Language Integrated Learning*). Participaram do estudo 29 estudantes matriculados na disciplina de História Clássica, ministrada numa universidade espanhola; o estudo contou com uma sala de fuga virtual e um questionário. Os resultados indicam que as salas de fuga podem aumentar a motivação dos estudantes, os quais se sentem menos pressionados a se comunicar na língua destino. Portanto, a implementação dessa ferramenta pode ser um recurso útil nos ambientes de ensino virtual que promovem a aquisição de habilidades orais, colaborativas e de pensamento crítico.

Palavras-chave (Fonte: tesauro da Unesco): Aprendizagem de línguas; História; aprendizagem digital; ensino superior; motivação.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have reshaped and revolutionised English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning in many aspects (Girón-García, 2015), giving rise to alternative teaching and learning formats. It goes without saying that during the global health crisis and subsequent safety measures provoked by the coronavirus, technologies played a paramount role in providing a temporary solution to education stakeholders (Ang et al., 2020; Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022). With video-conferencing tools and virtual learning platforms, education at all levels adopted a remote learning methodology (Vergne et al., 2020). The psychological strain on both faculty and student body during the national lockdown was a reality (Gopal et al., 2021); therefore, motivation levels dropped.

Within education, motivation has been regarded as “a willingness to learn or do something” (van Patten & Benati, 2010), which internal or external sources can trigger. Recent research on implementing a game-based approach, such as the virtual escape room, shows that it can positively affect learning and student participation (Manzano-León, Aguilar-Parra, et al., 2021) in the online classroom and boost extrinsic (i.e., rewarded behaviour) and intrinsic motivation (i.e., an inner wish or goal, stress-free/relaxed) for learning (Lister, 2015; Manzano-León, Aguilar-Parra, et al., 2021; Mystakidis et al. 2019; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017). Furthermore, virtual escape rooms incorporate team-building and decision-building skills (Girón-García, 2015) in the classroom dynamics. In that regard, they break the monotony in the virtual classroom and offer students the chance to develop communicative skills in the target language, focusing on speaking. Literature revolving around the application of virtual escape rooms in the language classroom is scarce; therefore, this study aims to fill in that gap in this emerging gamification technique. This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ(1): Do students feel motivated to communicate in the target language, i.e., English, with game-based learning initiatives, such as virtual escape rooms, in the CLIL classroom?

RQ(2): To what extent do students view the completion of escape rooms as an effective teaching strategy?

A traditional escape room consists of puzzles, enigmas, riddles, or questions to be solved collaboratively with the help of some clues. These must be completed successfully within the allotted time to break out of a physical room (Brown et al., 2019; Manzano-León, Camacho-Lazarraga, et al., 2021). However, the premise varies slightly for the virtual escape room, as participants cannot literally “escape a room.” Instead, the goal is to complete the questions correctly before running out of time and escape the metaphorical room, i.e., complete the challenges in the game.

The EFL classroom, and more broadly, education in general, have traditionally been considered a non-game context (Contreras Espinosa, 2016; Manzano-León, Camacho-Lazarraga, et al., 2021; Rutledge et al., 2018; Suelves et al., 2020). Nevertheless, game-based learning practices have been picking up speed in the last two decades, especially those approaches adopting the use ICTs to transmit moral and social values (Bellés-Calvera, 2018; Bellés-Calvera & Bellés-Fortuño, 2018; Bellés-Fortuño & Bellés-Calvera, 2017; Bellés-Fortuño & Martínez-Hernández, 2019, 2020; Clarke et al., 2017; Dichev et al., 2020). Consequently, gamification is fast becoming a key instrument in learners’ engagement in on-site and online classrooms. One budding form of gamification is escape rooms inside and outside the classroom. The prime focus of this paper is on the use of escape rooms as a gamification technique (Suelves et al., 2020) to boost learner motivation in the online classroom.

Existing research recognises the critical role played by this teaching-learning approach, namely gamification. Such studies have provided important information over the past two decades on improved content retention, higher participation rates, an increase in motivation, concentration, and attendance rates (Bellés-Fortuño & Bellés-Calvera, 2017; Cain, 2019; Dichev et al., 2020; Fotaris & Mastoras, 2019; Girón-García, 2015; López-Pernas et al., 2019; Mystakidis et al., 2019). Gamification approaches apply aesthetics and dynamics endemic to traditional games to learning (Suelves et al., 2020). When applied in the classroom, the principles of gamification allow for, on the one hand, positive reinforcement and incentives, which trigger extrinsic motivation in learners (Brown, 2014). On the other hand, communication and reaching an

agreement with their peers using the target language promote intrinsic motivation and self-confidence (Mystakidis et al., 2019; Salehpour & Roohani, 2020). Even though playful learning techniques are more common at primary (Vidergor, 2021) and secondary education levels (Fotaris & Mastoras, 2019; Fuentes-Cabrera et al., 2020), the tenets of gaming have been flourishing in the higher education context, where faculty see the potential of these collaborative games for learning (Taraldsen et al., 2020; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017).

The literature revolving around gamification is abundant on the grounds of the interest it generates in educators as a new area to explore; however, escape rooms have received scant attention in arts and humanities (Fotaris & Mastoras, 2019; Spreen & Vu, 2013). Even though studies on the application of escape rooms to educational contexts are burgeoning (Kinio et al., 2019; Taraldsen et al., 2020), research on escape rooms as a teaching technique has been limited to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, that is STEM disciplines, and medical sciences (Ang et al., 2020; Baker et al., 2020; Borrego et al., 2017; Cain, 2019; Cózar-Gutiérrez & Sáez-López, 2016; Eukel et al., 2017; Fuentes-Cabrera et al., 2020; Guckian et al., 2020; Jiménez Sánchez et al., 2017; Kinio et al., 2019; Lior, 2020; Morrell & Eukel, 2021; Vörös & Sárközi, 2017; Walsh & Spence, 2018). Notwithstanding, the escalating trend of escape rooms has reached other social spheres, for instance, the cultural domain with their implementation in museums such as the Palthehuis Museum in the Netherlands (Vriens, 2019).

The results related to student motivation levels after implementing an online escape room in the Classical History classroom at a Spanish university are detailed in this paper. Participants in the game are assigned the role of a slave in the Roman Empire, whose freedom is contingent on demonstrating the acquired knowledge and teamwork. The virtual escape room was devised taking into account the competencies and learning outcomes detailed in the course syllabus of the module, which follows a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach. CLIL entails instruction of subject matter in a language other than the learners' mother tongue (Coyle et al., 2010). This paper will summarise the previous research regarding motivation and gamification in education, particularly in EFL and CLIL classrooms. Furthermore, the study's objectives will be detailed, followed by the study's methodology, results, discussion, and conclusions.

Literature review

The existing literature on gamification, albeit rather recent, is extensive. However, a relatively small body of said literature is concerned with implementing educational escape rooms. These games are on the rise in the education arena because several studies have reported increased academic performance and knowledge acquisition (Brusi & Cornellà, 2020; Sánchez Lamas, 2018). Gamification is a blanket term used to refer to playfulness in non-game contexts, such as education (Contreras Espinosa, 2016; Manzano-León, Camacho-Lazarraga, et al., 2021; O'Brien & Pitera, 2019; Rutledge et al., 2018; Subhash & Cudney, 2018; Suelves et al., 2020) with clear learning objectives to pursue less traditional forms of teaching and learning that engage learners in the learning process. For instance, a study by Carrión Candel et al. (2021) analysed the effectiveness of gamification strategies in a CLIL context, where both content and a foreign language are practised simultaneously (Coyle et al., 2010). Even though three different CLIL experiences may be implemented in educational settings (i.e., soft-CLIL, modular CLIL, and hard-CLIL programmes (Bentley, 2010)) this study opted for a modular CLIL programme. Carrión Candel et al.'s (2021) paper concludes that motivation and student performance improved in the music classroom. The advantages of gamification have also been tested in the EFL classroom to encourage participation and language production (Putra & Priyatmojo, 2021).

Several lines of evidence suggest that the implementation of innovative instructional approaches such as these gameful educational experiences maximises learning achievement and motivation (Fotaris & Mastoras, 2019; Spreen & Vu, 2013; Vidergor, 2021), both intrinsic (Dickey, 2011) and extrinsic (Dichev et al., 2014), as previously mentioned. Notwithstanding, Dichev et al. (2020) look at both sides of the coin, offering a panoramic view of the idea of motivation in gamified contexts. They maintain that while there are specific “motivators,” i.e., relevant and engaging content, and “de-motivators” (p. 54), such as boring content, in educational games, their application does not guarantee higher motivation and engagement levels in learners (Barata et al., 2017; Dichev et al., 2020). This can be a controversial issue (O'Brien & Pitera, 2019), as not all authors agree with the fact

that gamified activities can include demotivating factors (e.g., Ang et al., 2020; Cain, 2019; Fotaris & Mastoras, 2019; Fuentes-Cabrera et al., 2020; Mystakidis et al., 2019). Vidergor (2021) highlights the potential of the principles of play for content acquisition (O'Brien & Pitera, 2019; Subhash & Cudney, 2018) and social skills, namely collaborative work (Fotaris & Mastoras, 2019). Nevertheless, Manzano-León, Aguilar-Parra, et al. (2021) reported the levels of stress, anxiety, and fear that learners experienced as a possible limitation of virtual escape rooms, especially regarding the lack of clues or help whenever they could not move on to the next mission.

The gameful experience, collaboration, and motivation are other constructs considered in recent research (Vidergor, 2021). Regarding escape rooms, they are games in which the participants form part of a compelling narrative (Dickey, 2011). In order to complete the story, players need to reach the final objective of the game, stated at the outset by the game master, which can only be attained by solving a series of puzzles within the given time limit (Brusi & Cornellà, 2020; Kroski, 2019; Nicholson, 2015; Pan et al., 2017; Vidergor, 2021). Such multifaceted games allow for a learner-centred, collaborative, and cross-curricular learning methodology, fostering student participation and enhancing motivation (Ang et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019; Cain, 2019; Dorado Escribano, 2018; Huang et al., 2020; Taraldsen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in designing escape rooms, educators should bear in mind the difficulty of the content to avoid frustrations and create achievable puzzles or missions (Dichev et al., 2020).

The setting for educational escape rooms is not necessarily limited to four brick-and-mortar walls; they could also be designed for an online context (Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022; Brusi & Cornellà, 2020). In the study presented here, participants' motivation levels are analysed concerning learning Classical History through a virtual escape room.

Objectives of the study

Bearing in mind that research on the implementation of escape rooms seems to be scarce in the disciplinary field of Humanities (Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022), the current study seeks to

determine the role of virtual escape rooms as a pedagogical tool triggering learners' motivation in the Classical History classroom with a CLIL approach. Thus, we have departed from the following research questions:

RQ(1): Do students feel motivated to communicate in the target language, i.e., English, with game-based learning initiatives, such as virtual escape rooms, in the CLIL classroom?

RQ(2): To what extent do students view the completion of escape rooms as an effective teaching strategy?

The context and the subjects taking part in the study will be described in the section below. A description of the research instruments and the methodological procedures employed will also be given.

Methodology

The target audience, the setting, the materials designed for this study, and the data collection process will be explained in detail. An account of these elements is paramount for the corresponding examination of the results obtained in the domain of Classical History.

Context

The global transmission of the COVID-19 disease has had a severe impact on education, urging the adaptation of face-to-face instruction to online or hybrid learning scenarios. The latter has been followed in a CLIL module dealing with the History of the Classical World taught at a Spanish university. Its course syllabus covered the origins of European culture, more specifically, the rise and fall of Ancient Greece and Rome.

This module may be regarded as a modular CLIL programme (Bentley, 2010) because instruction occurs entirely in Spanish and Catalan, except for some practical sessions devoted solely to integrating content on the Roman civilisation and English as the target language. The revision of subject matter concerning Rome's social and artistic evolution was at the core of instruction in these sessions, which aimed at boosting interaction in the target language when transmitting the assimilated contents (Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022;

Martínez-Hernández, 2022). Therefore, an escape room design was an excellent opportunity for students to produce oral outcomes actively and reflect upon their learning (Makri et al., 2021).

Keeping in mind that the escape room was allocated during a week with virtual instruction in the academic year 2020/2021, it was accessible through digital media (Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022; Martínez-Hernández, 2022). The escape room, made up of five missions, was concerned with slavery, the lowest social status in Roman times. This narrative was closely related to what had been seen in previous lessons. Throughout the escape room, learners were expected to apply their disciplinary knowledge and exchange their views using the target language on how to solve the enigmas to complete the task satisfactorily.

Sample

The aforementioned digital escape room was created for 69 undergraduates undertaking the degrees of History and Heritage and Humanities: Intercultural Studies, with ages ranging from 18 to 48. Even though the escape room took place during an online lesson, not all participants were connected to the institutional platform or attended lessons regularly. Therefore, the total number of participants involved in this study dropped to 29.

The sample consisted of local students from the Valencian Community and migrants from Latin American, Arabic, and other European regions. Most of them were thus proficient in Spanish and Catalan, but English level requirements were not compulsory to complete this module. This is why the mastery of the target language was far from homogeneous in the CLIL classroom. Considering that students with a lower command of the foreign language would feel embarrassed to communicate or would not be actively engaged in the classroom, the implementation of a digital escape room was meant to boost (intrinsic) motivation levels.

Research instruments

The data analysed in this research were collected using a survey carried out at the end of the module. The usefulness and versatility of

a well-planned questionnaire, also referred to as research questionnaires (Rowley, 2014) or self-completion questionnaires (Bryman & Bell, 2018), may help researchers get the results about students' motivation while they optimise their time, as pointed out by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009). As this instrument is administered to respondents who should fill it in without the presence of a researcher, open- and closed-ended items are combined (Rowley, 2014). For instance, *Do you think learning English is relevant in your field of study? Why?* would be an example of open-ended questions, whereas Likert scales would be conceived as closed-ended questions, as shown in this survey in Q1: *The implementation of escape rooms helps me feel more relaxed when using the target language.*

Learning about students' motivation has been explored with variables, namely value, expectations, affect, and executive volition, as in the Learning Motivation Scale by Liu et al. (2010). Notwithstanding, the survey distributed in the current study was structured with eleven criteria to look into the respondents' positive and negative feedback in this game-based learning experience. The first ten questions, linked to participants' learning process and motivational factors, were included in a Likert scale so that they could measure their conformity or discord with the statements, where 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 correspond to Totally disagree, Disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, and Totally agree respectively. The last item was an open-ended question that allowed students to comment on any issue worth mentioning about the escape room dynamics. This arrangement would encourage students' participation; they are guided on the aspects relevant to researchers so that they can make their voices heard (Oppenheim, 1992), which are of utmost importance for new teaching strategies to be successful. The ten questions that dealt with motivational and attitudinal factors towards the use of escape rooms as pedagogical resources were:

Q1: *The implementation of escape rooms helps me feel more relaxed when using the target language.*

Q2: *Solving riddles with my group to reach a final aim made me feel motivated.*

Q3: *The implementation of escape rooms has boosted my oral performance.*

Q4: *It has encouraged me to interact with the members of my group.*

Q5: *This game-based learning initiative has been useful for understanding and remembering what I am learning.*

Q6: *Using the escape room as a means to consolidate and test knowledge was fun.*

Q7: *Taking part in escape rooms is NOT useful. It is a distraction rather than a tool that integrates disciplinary knowledge and a foreign language.*

Q8: *I am satisfied with the use of escape rooms in the EFL classroom.*

Q9: *The online escape room offered a different, non-traditional way of learning and assessment.*

Q10: *Playing the escape room in groups has boosted my confidence in the target language.*

Access to this online survey was possible through a link shared with the participants during the seminar scheduled for the escape room. It was also available in the virtual classroom because, even though the time needed to complete the missions was around 50 minutes, it took longer for other groups who should also attend other modules. In this sense, reliable and meaningful data could be gathered from the educational setting, provided that those who submitted the final survey were volunteers. The data collected from the participants were completely anonymous, and it complied with the ethical considerations of confidentiality and data protection.

Procedure

The teaching plan for the Classical History course conducted in 2020/2021, more specifically in May, included three two-hour preliminary seminar lessons dedicated to the review of disciplinary notions. The first two seminars concerned the different social groups in ancient Rome, emphasising the role of women and slaves. Architectural and artistic issues were practised during the third and the beginning of the fourth sessions, the latter being also devoted to challenging individuals with the escape room.

Before the intervention, lecturer collaboration was pivotal to testing the game and avoiding any disruption during the game. In the meantime, the lecturer was also responsible for grouping individuals into small teams of four or five members with heterogeneous language

levels so that those with a poor command of the English language had peer support when completing the online digital escape room. The fact that groups worked separately and did not compete against each other but against their knowledge could also boost learner motivation, resulting in higher participation in the target language.

The lecturer played the role of the game master, monitoring the experience and providing help where necessary. The implementation of the escape room was divided into three phases (i.e., preparation, development and integrative phases), in line with Huang et al.'s (2020) study. Firstly, the preparation phase entailed the lecturer setting up the context of the game and providing students with the necessary virtual support, either live with the lecturer entering students' online meeting rooms or from self-explanatory slides available through a help icon leading to a help screen (see Figure 1). Secondly, the development phase consisted of teams interacting and exploring the resources at their disposal to get the necessary clues to move from one mission to the following one. Finally, students were asked to answer an anonymous survey voluntarily in the integrative phase. The data gathered from those questionnaires were analysed quantitatively.

Results and discussion

Prior to having a detailed look at the results, it should be noted that this research paper departed from two RQs:

RQ(1): Do students feel motivated to communicate in the target language, i.e., English, with game-based learning initiatives, such as virtual escape rooms, in the CLIL classroom?

RQ(2): To what extent do students view the completion of escape rooms as an effective teaching strategy?

The results obtained from the analysis of History undergraduates' surveys are discussed below. The items concerning affective and motivational factors towards learning the target language in CLIL settings have been contemplated.

Other issues worth mentioning arose from students' responses to the questionnaire. In Q1: *The implementation of escape rooms helps me feel*

more relaxed when using the target language, 82.75% of the surveyed report that stress factors are relieved, contrary to the results obtained by Manzano-León, Aguilar-Parra, et al. (2021), probably because they are immersed in a game and do not feel pressured or judged by their team members (see Figure 2). Hence, they may be intrinsically motivated to take part in escape rooms. A lower proportion of the respondents (10.35%) are not totally convinced about the absence of stress, which might be due to using a foreign language to communicate with their peers. However, 6.90% of the subjects disagreed with this statement in Q1, preventing them from being actively engaged in the practice.

Figure 1. Help screen.

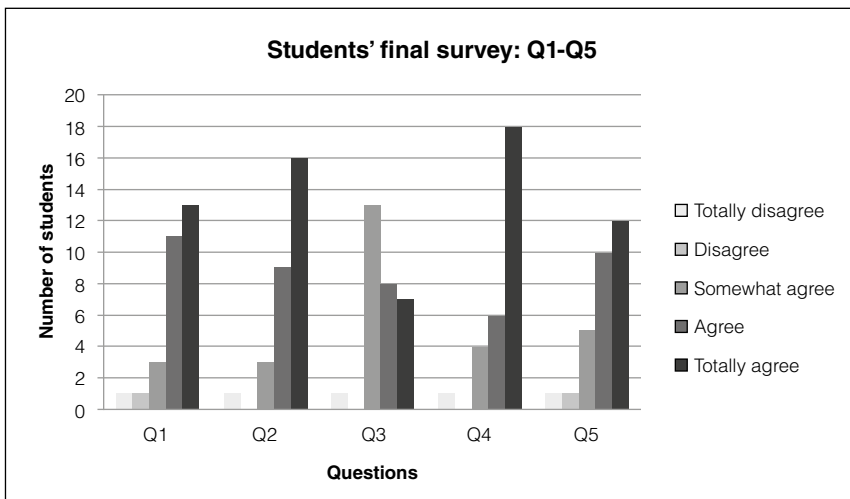


Source: Own elaboration.

The proportion of learners agreeing, whether partially or strongly, is even higher in Q2: *Solving riddles with my group to reach a final aim made me feel motivated*, with nearly 96.55% of positive answers. These findings suggest that their extrinsic motivation played a significant role in triggering their participation in the game dynamics. In reflecting upon their oral performance, the rate of students who consider that escape rooms have increased their productive oral skills amounts to 44.83%, as observed in Q3: *The implementation of escape rooms has boosted my oral performance*. Although these responses are not negative, individuals acknowledging the positive results in their oral performance represent 51.14%.

Nonetheless, the findings denote that the participants have benefited from joining the escape room since they claim that it has prompted student-student interaction, as illustrated in Q4: *It has encouraged me to interact with the members of my group*. Only 13.79% share a similar view, in contrast to 82.76% of the respondents who show total agreement. The results examined in Q5: *This game-based learning initiative has been useful for understanding and remembering what I am learning* reveal that escape rooms can be employed as additional tools in CLIL environments, bearing in mind that their use can help learners assimilate content while communicating in a second or foreign language, in this case, English.

Figure 2. Results obtained from students' final survey: Q1-Q5.



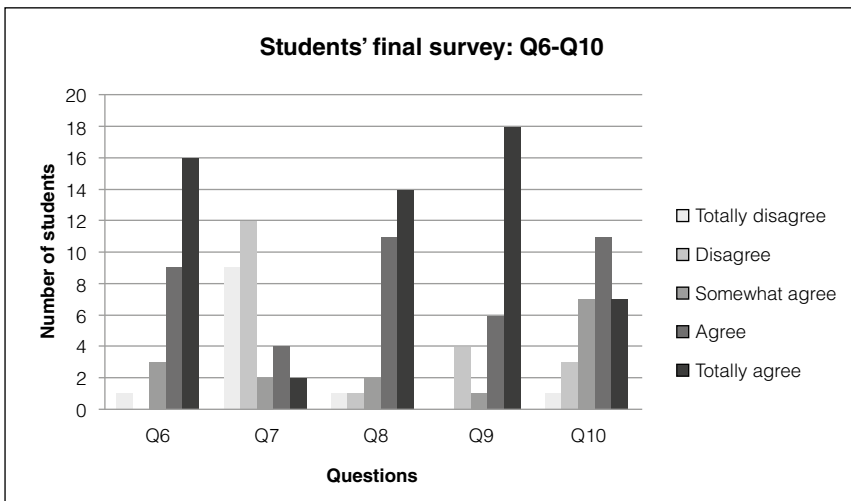
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3 displays the results obtained from Q6 to Q10. In Q6: *Using the escape room to consolidate and test knowledge was fun*, the vast majority of the surveyed (96.55%) asserted they had a fun time while finding out whether the subject matter had been assimilated satisfactorily or not. As with Q1-Q5, disagreement was found in a small percentage of the responses (3.45%), which makes us think that one of the participants was keen on more traditional teaching strategies. The findings analysed in Q7: *Taking part in escape rooms is NOT useful. It is a distraction rather than a tool that integrates disciplinary knowledge, and a foreign language* are quite surprising in that they diverge from those obtained in Q5. Thus,

around 93.1% of the subjects perceived escape rooms as functional resources enhancing the comprehension of disciplinary knowledge; this rate decreased to 79.01% when considering the integration of content and language. These findings suggest that students may not be aware of exposure to the target language, which may foster the acquisition of specialised terminology.

Furthermore, satisfaction levels with this teaching proposal are worth noting, with 93.11% positive responses in Q8: *I am satisfied with the use of escape rooms in the EFL classroom*. Following with Q9: *The online escape room offered a different, non-traditional way of learning and assessment*, not all of the students believed there was a methodological shift in learning and evaluation strategies, as expressed by 13.79% of them. Finally, according to Q10: *Playing the escape room in groups has boosted my confidence in the target language*, approximately 86.21% of the surveyed value escape rooms as tools increasing their self-confidence, proving the many advantages these aids may have in the CLIL classroom.

Figure 3. Results from students' final survey: Q6-Q10.



Source: Own elaboration.

From a qualitative perspective, the survey included a non-compulsory field for further comments the participants wished to make at the end, as suggested by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009). Therefore, the qualitative data obtained from the participants in the study

is scant, namely, two contributions. Nevertheless, other issues were pointed out that are of interest to this study and future lines of research. Based on these comments, it can be highlighted that one of the students was not pleased with this teaching proposal. Instead, this participant did not find it convenient at all, as can be read in the following excerpt:

SX1: *It's useless*

Unlike this individual, the two other participants who voluntarily gave their general views on the escape room praised the use of this tool. Both of them draw attention to the linguistic gains this type of initiative may entail, stressing that it directly impacted their production of oral outcomes without even noticing it. They wrote¹:

SX2: *I think it was very fun and useful because if you talk English while playing, you end up talking it without even realizing it, it's like automatic, so I think this is a good way to improve not only your level of English but also your confident in using it orally and without some short of guidelines (like in the high school, where all is prepared in advance). I'm very happy with this scape room.*

SX3: *The only issue I would see (to mention something), is that the foreign language level may vary within a class, so the groups may be impaired, or people with a higher level may end up carrying their group. Other than that, I think it's a really useful learning tool, especially for those who feel more self-conscious about speaking a foreign language (which I think is the main issue when learning a new language, being shy about it). I think speaking from behind a screen is really helpful for that. The escape room was really fun!*

As seen in the extract above, working with heterogeneous groups has been reported as a challenge, given that students with a low command of the target language may rely on their peers to understand and solve the puzzles. Leaving that aside, it is clear that they had an enjoyable experience.

1 Students' original comments have been retrieved from the questionnaire; therefore, they may contain errors.

Conclusions

The measures devised to fight against coronavirus have triggered the incorporation of ICTs in education. The potential of these resources in CLIL settings has been explored from different productive and receptive areas, such as pronunciation, writing and listening. Nonetheless, university programmes following a CLIL approach may benefit from the implementation of escape rooms, not only because learners may feel more motivated but also because they have the opportunity to improve their performance in the target language. This study was intended to ascertain the role digital escape rooms play in boosting students' motivation in the Classical History classroom. To attain this goal, this study aimed to find whether virtual escape rooms motivated learners to communicate in the target language in the CLIL classroom and to what extent escape rooms are an effective way to teach and learn content.

Dealing with RQ(1) *Do students feel motivated to communicate in the target language, i.e. English, with game-based learning initiatives, such as virtual escape rooms, in the CLIL classroom?*, the results stemming from this study have indicated that many CLIL learners feel intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to take part in this type of classroom dynamics. In addition, most of them may feel calmer, leading to enriching and fun teaching practice, as shown in Q6.

Turning to RQ(2) *To what extent do students view the completion of escape rooms as an effective teaching strategy?*, twenty-eight participants acknowledged the advantages of escape rooms in boosting motivation to consolidate content and communicate in the target language. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with this proposal is minimal, with two negative responses. Many individuals were motivated to learn content and practise their oral English skills via the escape room.

The scope of this study was limited by the lack of information on learners' views since only two comments were given in the open-ended question of the survey (i.e., other issues). While the opinions of the student cohort were taken into consideration to measure their motivation and the effectiveness of the escape room in teaching and assessing content, the educators' views were not collected. Furthermore, lecturers' motivation to design such games and their proficiency in ICTs

would be valuable because the amount of time and effort instructors need to invest in these playful practices might be disheartening. In hindsight, another source of weakness in this study which could have affected the measurement of learning achievement is the absence of tests. These were not initially contemplated, but upon re-examining the study, they could have provided some insight into the assimilation of disciplinary and linguistic knowledge. In order to attain an accurate appreciation of students' perceptions about knowledge acquisition and oral performance in the target language, a pre-test and post-test would have been appropriate to determine the content they have learnt with the game.

In general, therefore, the evidence from this study suggests that escape rooms are an effective way to consolidate content and assess oral production skills and where learners apply and develop other skills which are relevant to our era, such as problem-solving, teamwork, social interaction or computer literacy, among others, through a gameful experience. Further research should focus on educators' training and willingness to implement escape rooms in the CLIL classroom. Another question that remains to be answered is related to the criteria to be considered when assessing the production of oral outcomes in technology-enhanced practices. Investigating how students read or produce language would also be significant for lecturers willing to integrate technological resources in e-learning environments. Another possible research study could involve replicating this study considering the limitations above.

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