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Using games in English classes

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Abstract: *There must have been part of your childhood which reminds you of a video game you could not resist! Do you remember the thrill while playing games like Tetris, Pac-Man or Super Mario? Times have changed and games have become even more colourful, more demanding, and more complicated, but that feeling of playing games has remained the same. People who often practice this activity, especially children, become addicted in some way but they are not aware of that. There is a question: How can we use games as a learning strategy that can facilitate children's motivation of learning? When we create breakout games and escape rooms we reach our aim, students learn while they are playing games. They have to use their reasoning, knowledge, and skills to solve puzzles and challenges related to the content of the curriculum of native and foreign languages. What is more important, in these strategies, students must work as a team which leads to better classroom atmosphere, and a better score in pro-social and anti-social behaviors. If you go a step forward and involve students in creating games on their own, with contents from language classes, then you will succeed in creating STE(A)M classes.*

Keywords: *escape room, ICT,*

cross-disciplinary, innovative teaching methods, motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

Students are keen on using educational games in classes because it reminds them on their favourite fun which is playing computer games. Interactive boards in the classroom make them feel like playing games on their smart phones so they find it rather interesting. Web based tools like Kahoot, Educaplay or Nearpod are popular with students at elementary school because they get a pin code from teacher and play on their phones.
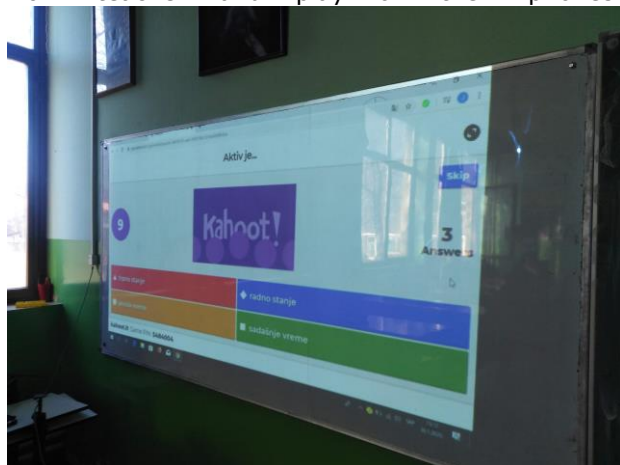

Figure 1. An example of a test question created in Kahoot

There are a lot of templates for different type of exercises not only quizzes. With Pro Profs for example you can create wordsearch, crosswords puzzle, hangman, jigsaw and many others. The biggest advantage of these activities is you can use them in classes but you can share them with students for additional exercises.

Figure 2. An example of using educational games in class

Mastery of specialized programming skills is not a requirement for using digital tools in teaching. The web is a wellspring of information that can be very

useful if used in the right way. There are numerous websites with content already adapted to students' needs that can be modified further to be implemented in your classroom. For those who desire to use their imagination and create their own educational resources, there is a wide range of options available [1].

The most popular among my students are breakout games or escape rooms.

1.1. Escape room in English classes

Most escape rooms are purely recreational; however, educational escape rooms are becoming more popular with professional programs to involve students in their learning environment, and encourage collaboration and the development of social skills [2]. The results of recent studies show that games and the use of escape rooms have been effective in involving students in the learning process and helping them retain information [3]. Why are escape rooms so popular with students and teachers worldwide?

Game-based learning can involve students in a learning activity, thus achieving high levels of commitment (concentration, interest, and enjoyment). This can be accomplished by increasing the levels of challenges and skills during the game [4]. Ensuring the game is a challenge, therefore, is an especially strong predictor of learning outcomes. The motivation to undertake challenging tasks is related to the classroom flow. Flow is defined as a state of total immersion and fusion of action and consciousness [5], and is associated with positive emotional, motivational, and cognitive experiences [6].

When students have to work in a team and solve puzzles or riddles together they introduce new language knowledge in an unobtrusive way, and even when they make a mistake they will remember that clue. An escape room is a challenge and it makes them solve the problem so they can move forward to the next level. It is enjoyable not only for students but for teachers also.

A teacher's job is to find the appropriate web-based tool and fill in the templates with English language content. Those teachers who are creative can make a leap forward and create cross-disciplinary classes with other colleagues using escape games, and making the game more challenging and interesting.

Problem-solving and critical thinking can be highlighted among the skills that can be developed with the use of escape rooms in the classroom. Critical thinking consists of being able to understand thoughts, make sense of ideas, and make logical decisions [7]. The escape rooms pose different challenges and tasks that make students question and evaluate their ideas, and solve problems. Escape rooms can generate intrinsic motivation in the players. Other advantages include favouring learning, improving attitudes and social skills, and involving students with the subject and teamwork [8,9].

1.2. Escape room in practice

Figure 3. An example of escape room themes

Guided with idea to create some new and innovative contents for the students I created the first escape room with the Halloween theme. It was a revision class and a preparation for the test. I chose Halloween background because it was the end of October. Students were astonished, they liked this game so much that we had to play it a few times. Though the most important is the fact they all took part in playing it, the team spirit was at high level and they really enjoyed while they were studying.

Background themes are various and teachers should pay attention to students ages and interests but there is no doubt that escape rooms can be adjusted to all types of classes and subjects. There are numerous examples of good practice but I would like to highlight some of them , which our students liked the most.

Holiday themes are popular with all ages of students, especially Christmas holidays, everyone looks forward to decorating Christmas tree. In one of the escape room quizzes the final award for students was to decorate Christmas tree, students had to solve difficult grammar riddles before they reach the end , but that was even more challenging.

According to popularity of escape rooms in the real world, I choose topics and missions students find interesting like saving missions, breaking out the codes of safes with some secret documents, helping solve environmental problems etc.

Using games makes classes motivating not only for students but for teachers also.

2.   STE(A)M in language teaching

Although it may seem to be inappropriate in the disciplines such as native and foreign languages provide fertile ground for STE(A)M based teaching. Language teaching material, especially different texts are suitable for applying an interdisciplinary approach. In the course of the text analysis, students are instructed to engage in research and project-based activities and to incorporate the results of their research into the digital setting, finding ways to make the task they completed useful to others too. Web-based tools are adapted to students' needs and therefore are very user-friendly, allowing them to learn about digital presentations and design at the same time. All these tools are built for teamwork and collaborative editing enabling students to share content, work together and support one another during distance learning sessions. Analyzing texts belonging to the domain of literature and art develops students' critical thinking and teaches them to put forward their opinion and critically assess the value of a literary work. They then use the arguments acquired through research to justify their point of view. It is possible to make the first steps in the field of programming as part of this process by using microbit computers. When organizing student debates (one of the means of teaching that is quite successful in stimulating the development of students' critical), introducing microbit as value button (I do/don't like it, you are/ are not right, you do/don't follow the rules…) comes in very handy [10].

Figure . An example of using mirobit device

3.   CONCLUSION

The use of gamification and playful strategies improves motivational learning because it allows students to experience and discover, while practising skills and learning in a playful manner [11]. Other benefits of using escape rooms may be as a potential avenue for co-workers, classmates, or friends to explore and improve their collaborative skills, socialize with others, and develop team morale [12]. Collaborative learning is an effective approach to improving student outcomes. These tasks allow small groups of students to collaborate and share perspectives, discuss points of disagreement, question and understand the points of view of others, solve complex problems, and reach agreements [13]. Using escape rooms improves developing STE(A)M skills as we already mentioned and enhances the level of student interest in classes since these teaching aids are closely related to their everyday needs. This is how students are no longer simply passive participants. Instead, they become creators of the educational content and the teaching process as well. The emphasis is placed on achieving gender equality in the rural setting thereby ensuring a higher level of participation of girls in STE(A)M disciplines that used to be regarded as largely male-dominated! Innovative digital activities and the application of SEL make inclusion of children belonging to vulnerable social groups easier [1].

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