OPEN ACCESS | ORIGINAL ARTICLE
DOI: 10.47743/lincu-2024-si-0386

A #CO-TEACHING STORY FROM THE DIGITAL PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK: ESCAPING THE ROUTINE LANGUAGE CLASS VIA A (NEW MEDIA) DIGITAL ESCAPE ROOM

Alexandra COTOC, Ioana MUDURE-IACOB
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

Abstract

The pairing of educational technology and pedagogy within new media in the exploration of foreign language teaching approaches reveals a proximity to genuine interaction among learners through immersion in language education and new media content creation. Shifting from the role of "learning to create" into a more "creating to learn"-focused role, students are empowered to become active media creators while using language and tech savviness, as well as digital apps and tools, as core skills. In doing so, the language class gains the potential to become a microcommunity of practice that encourages critical thinking and collaboration abilities while engaging in complex problem-solving skills, extending its utility into the facilitation of autonomous learning contexts. With language learners stimulated by new media in their communicative practice, it is the role of teachers to find an innovative and digital pedagogical method of matching the students' Netspeak needs to promote cognitive activation in the EAP class. The purpose of the current study is to showcase a tested example of how educational digital pedagogy within the context of new media can be leveraged to enhance language learning outcomes via a digital escape room learning context for students with various learning backgrounds and in an innovative co-teaching scenario. The collaboratively designed and implemented digital escape room activity challenges language learners to solve language puzzles, create new media content, and use receptive and productive language skills to find clues and passwords,

Received: 30 July 2024 | Accepted: 15 August 2024 | Published: 30 October 2024
LINGUACULTURE VOL. 15, SPECIAL ISSUE, 2024 – *Interconnected Learning and Teaching in the Post-Pandemic Era. Trends and Challenges in Teaching Foreign Languages*, edited by Oana-Maria Frențescu and Nalan Bayraktar Balkir
ISSN (print): 2067-9696 | ISSN (online): 2285-9403 | www.journal.linguaculture.ro

fostering collaboration and communication among learners who are motivated to make use of their transversal skills while breaking out from such a complex language activity.

Keywords: *digital escape room, digital pedagogical framework, content course, teaching ESP didactics*

INTRODUCTION

Active participation in the language class is a prerequisite of both autonomous learning and effective skill building, as language teachers and learners share the responsibility of collaborating in the process of lifelong and lifewide learning. Amid a plethora of digital apps, gamified platforms and interactive learning resources, designing a customised learning trajectory for students is both challenging and rewarding. Instructors must make proof of creativity, complex digital skills and they are in charge of crafting storytelling networks to facilitate more engagement on behalf of learners whose needs and interests are constantly updated. A co-teaching framework with instructors teaching different courses could provide a more jocular and applied perspective on learning, as students are invited to take up a gamified challenge while also doing one of their favourite leisure time activities.

The current paper dwells on results drawn from one questionnaire conducted on M.A. students enrolled in three different courses, as well as on the focus group organised with students upon their completion of a digital educational escape room. The gamified framework of collaboration between students from various study fields was also an endeavour of co-teaching and co-designing a complex assessment scenario on behalf of the two course instructors. The contents of the Digital Educational Escape Room (DEER) focused on reviewing and using terminology and practices in connection to the topics covered in the courses and this task is complex and challenging at the same time, both for instructors and learners, as the approach would have to combine a holistic perspective with hands-on specialised concepts and content.

These kinds of digital educational escape rooms function as storytelling frameworks in which roles shift and become inter-connected, with the aim of creating micro-communities of practice, particularly since the content and topics of the DEERs are easily compatible with learners from various fields. In

this respect, the purpose of the current paper is to show how the micro-community is constructed and to showcase a practical example of embedding digital pedagogy in a gamified learning environment generated by a digital educational escape room, in which a heterogeneous group of students share good practices, exchange information and collaborate.

The theoretical framework focuses on aspects related to gamification, digital educational escape rooms as interactive learning environments, lifewide and lifelong learning, digital pedagogy framework as an instrument for designing storytelling and learning scenarios. The methodology section includes a detailed description of the digital educational escape room, its structure, participants, and procedures, as well as research hypotheses and tools. The analysis of selected responses from the questionnaire focuses on verifying the validity of the hypotheses and on discussing the particular features of such activities. The preliminary conclusions account for the creation of digital frameworks in the process of teaching content and language courses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Facing a vast array of technologies, information, new market requirements, learners "have to develop the ability not only to adapt and decide which technologies would support their purposes, but to synthesise online information effectively and appropriately" (Darvin 526). In this context, there is a constant need to engage with others via digital media, to negotiate new roles and perform in environments in which the decoding of multiple genres, the production of content and the interconnectedness of different media of communication are core features of meaning-making. This constitutes the premises for building and maintaining a digital mindset, which requires multitasking and operating in multimodal contexts on behalf of both learners and teachers and which views "expertise and authority as no longer vested solely in specific experts and institutions, but distributed across social networks" (Darvin 526).

Correlating the needs of Gen Z learners to updated methods and strategies of teaching language classes in the Romanian higher education environment can be achieved through proper frameworks for the acquisition of specialised knowledge and also the enhancement of transversal skills. Lifelong and lifewide learning practices can be supported by designing classes in which

the formal, informal and nonformal dimensions merge in gamified storytelling scenarios. In doing so, language instructors pair educational technology and the associated digital pedagogy to design genuine interactions and activities between learners, by exploring the interest in gamified learning and by activating cognition and use of 21st century skills in the language mediation context created by digital educational escape rooms.

Digital educational escape rooms rely on building micro-learning sequences in the framework of digital pedagogy, which, more than making use of digital tools, refers to "learning-focused values that have relevance not just for subject-specific education, but to personal and social processes and relationships and systems intrinsic to the learning process" (Anderson 463). Conceptualised as a blend of methods, strategies and resources for digital learning, digital pedagogy can account for a proper pedagogy behind "an integrative approach in which learners' up-to-date and continuously changing transferable skills enhance a more interactive, collaborative and creative practice of acquiring and improving macro- and micro- language skills" (Mudure-Iacob 75).

Gamification and game-based learning are up-to-date educational approaches with high potential in ensuring that students are incentivised throughout their learning process and motivated to use language mediation as currency for communicative and informative exchanges. "The affordances generated by the integration of gamification and game-based learning in the language classroom and the inherent stimulation to put to use digital skills in language mediation allow for an expansion beyond the online instruction scenario to encompass also the sustainability of tasks and activities in on-site and hybrid instruction" (Mudure-Iacob et al. 76).

The main principles of gamification stem from the embedding of game design elements in learning contexts that are not game-oriented with the purpose of "enhancing services with (motivational) affordances in order to invoke gameful experiences and further behavioral outcomes" (Koivisto et al.). Moreover, gamification allows for a scaffolding of stages of learning while emulating authentic interactions among learners, and triggering the use of digital skills to make proper use of apps and tools in content and language task completion. Learning objectives thus become milestones in this complex student-centered learning journey, which are "seen by the learner as challenges

to be accomplished in order to move from one stage to the other. At the end the challenge and moving from one stage to the other becomes part of the learning outcome" (Figueroa 43).

A case in point of gamified instruction is the use of digital educational escape rooms, which are learning and practice online environments that allow for content introduction and revision, are based on topic-centered digital storytelling, and involve content and language tasks, while requiring learners to make proper use of micro and macro-skills. An educational escape room is "an instructional method requiring learners to participate in collaborative playful activities explicitly designed for domain knowledge acquisition or skill development so that they can accomplish a specific goal (e.g., escape from a physical room or break into a box) by solving puzzles linked to unambiguous learning objectives in a limited amount of time" (Fotaris, Mastoras 235).

Designed with a variety of software and tools (OneNote, Google Forms, Canva, Genially), digital educational escape rooms (DEER) provide a productive playground for a large plethora of digital tasks and activities: puzzles, crosswords, interactive quizzes, recordings, meme creation, emoji decoding, Netspeak production. In solving these micro-challengers, learners make use of "all their psychosocial skills in order to foster learning, namely cognitive skills (logic, memorization, attention, creativity, problem solving, time management, etc.), social skills (teamwork, cooperation, including leadership), language skills (meaning negotiation, language puzzles, etc.) and psychological skills (management of feelings associated with gain or loss and self-knowledge), so that through collaborative work and permanent adaptation to the context and challenges they are able to "escape" from the room" (qtd. in Cruz, 2019: 27).

In this digital pedagogy framework, the roles of the actants not only shift but also reconfigure within an emergent micro-community founded on collaboration, creativity and storytelling. Given that digital educational escape rooms are based on group work, a variety of roles are consequently granted to learners, from storyteller, to group leader, to facilitator or coordinator, whereas instructors become monitors and also remote team workers. Moreover, the scaffolding of tasks in terms of difficulty and skill-centredness ensures that all participants perform their individual roles and employ a plethora of skills (critical thinking, communication, social, negotiation, digital, language). While immersed in the experience of the game, learners become players who are

actually completing milestones in their autonomous learning journey, both by aiming to win (by escaping the digital room) and by using their problem-solving skills in various specialised content and language tasks.

RESEARCH AND PROCEDURE

The digital escape room has a playful scenario that is highlighted in the very first section: *How this all happened* (see the text below). In this room, students are introduced to a story; they are told they have been locked in a digital room, they receive instructions for finding out passwords to open the next rooms and clues to escape the entire digital maze. They find out the passwords and clues by completing various activities and solving tasks designed for the content taught within English for Specific Purposes, Internet Linguistics and New Media courses. In addition to the introductory section (where participants receive an overview of the variety of tasks, as well as figure out the storyline) and the concluding section (which marks the completion of the task), the digital maze has 6 rooms that focus on topics of interest to all the students involved in the activity: Netspeak, AI, memes, professional identity construction. Students, split into heterogeneous groups by using breakout rooms, work online in order to use their theoretical know-how, transversal skills, and affordances of digital tools and apps and solve the tasks in each room.

> You and your friends are part of the chosen few to create a cyber hub at your university, dedicated to analyzing and debating online communication and the role of digital technologies in learning languages, linguistics and digital culture.
>
> You've been invited to a special talk where you'll have the opportunity to hear a speech on the impact of the digital world, but when you arrive at the event, you find that you've been locked in a digital room. It has actually been a trap which tests your skills to prove you are worthy of getting the membership to such an exclusive club.
>
> A message on the screen informs you that you have two hours to escape before the room is permanently sealed.
>
> To escape, you'll need to use your knowledge of Netspeak, critical thinking abilities, and English for Specific Purposes, Internet Linguistics and

> New Media studies know-how to solve a series of puzzles 🧩 and challenges 🤯 .
>
> Each challenge will require you to use different tools, such as Wordwall, Edpuzzle, Flipgrid, Padlet, and Imgflip.
>
> (section from the Digital Escape Room)

Each room starts with content that continues the narrative established in the preceding room, and this content is constructed by a fake Facebook chat (room 1), simulated Instagram chat (room 2), comments on an Instagram post (room 3), a counterfeit Linkedin post (room 4), and a fake tweet post (room 5). Within the context generated by all these productions, the two instructors offer a dynamic that gives the story a humorous dimension: the avatars of the teachers are visible in each digital room to support the idea that the chat illustrated in the (fake) social media teaser posts (see Fig. 1) is a dialogue between them while engaging in a recorded role-play video meant to exemplify a task, but also to ensure the jocular feature. In doing so, the two instructors are active participants in this complex digital maze and members of both the community and the game itself.

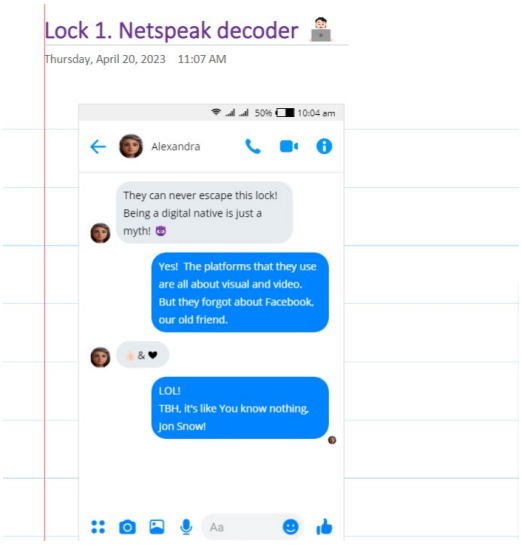

Figure 1. Facebook chat post from the Digital Escape Room

Participants are required to complete sets of tasks within each digital room, one focusing on receptive skills and one on productive skills, which were designed using a total of 12 apps. The following apps have been used for the development of receptive skills: Worwall, Nearpod, EdPuzzle, Liveworksheets, Islcollective, Geogreeting.com. Regarding the productive skills, we employed Jamboard, Flipgrid, Padlet, Ideaboardz, Mentimeter, Imgflip. The majority of apps have been previously used in game-based sequences as part of the semester courses, which meant that students were to some extent familiar with these digital tools, but also with the underlying digital pedagogical methods and strategies.

Considering that students were enrolled in different MA programs, one of the challenges consisted in selecting and adapting content, designing tasks and activities that would test knowledge from various niche topics: Netspeak, AI, memes, professional identity construction, emoji code-switching. For example, to cater for the topic related to Netspeak, one task focused on decoding Internet slang, in which students had to match words from Netspeak to their definitions (e.g. TRDL, IMHO, trolls, FOMO, YOLO, lurker) in a Wordwall activity. As a follow-up to the above-mentioned task focusing on receptive skills, the productive skill-building task asked them to create their own coded identity by using Netspeak (linguistic properties and digital practices) in a Jamboard and producing their own fake post impersonating a troll. The topics were designed following a storyline pattern (which was reinforced by fake posts as a form of interaction between game designers and players), with the content of each room adding up to the previous set of challenges.

While passwords were aimed at unlocking the rooms in a pre-defined order, clues were included in each digital room and were designed to provide keywords that would eventually constitute the key to completing the maze. The final password would be revealed only by putting together all the clues in the correct order. Clues were hidden in various formats and tools (geogreeting, behind a virtual magnifying glass, in a QR code, rebus pictograms, emoji codes) and would build a sentence that concluded the entire activity - "Netspeak is an emerging language centaur: part speech, part writing" (a quote by David Crystal). See an example in Fig. below.

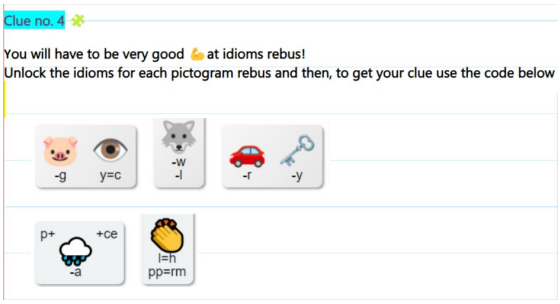

Figure 2. Clue from the Digital Escape Room

Each digital room had a similar pattern (fake post, two tasks focusing on receptive and productive skills, one clue to be decoded) and the core of the tasks was to formatively assess theoretical aspects discussed during courses, to enable collaborative work among participants with different backgrounds and to produce content by using app affordances. By completing the sets of tasks, the activity was meant to boost learner autonomy and create a gamified assessment scenario in which participants gained the status of players thus performing in a non-traditional learning environment.

The structure of the digital escape room is:
Lock 1. Netspeak decoder
fake Facebook chat
Topic focus: Netspeak
Task 1 Wordwall + Task 2 Jamboard
→ Crack the emoji code (clue)

Lock 2. Survival mode in an AI world
fake Instagram chat
Topic focus: AI
Task 1 Nearpod task + Task 2 Flipgrid recording
→ Scanning a QR code (clue)

Lock 3. Meme master
Comments to an Instagram post
Topic focus: Memes

Task 1 EdPuzzle + Task 2 Imgflip tool, padlet
→ geogreeting.com (clue)

Lock 4. Are you Linked In?
Fake Linkedin post
Focus: online professional identity
Task 1 Professional Digital Identity (PDI) text + Task 2 liveworksheets, Ideaboardz
→ idiom rebus (pictograms) (Clue)

Lock 5. "Codebreaker"
Fake tweet post
Focus: emoji
Task 1 YouTube video, Sli.do + + Task 2 islcollective.com, Mentimeter
→ Magnifying glass (clue)

Lock 6. So close
The digital realm complete

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the current study is to explore the potential of digital escape rooms for formative assessment of MA students from different content courses and to analyse students' perceptions of game-based and gamified learning in content language mediation.

Participants and Procedure

The study involved 15 students (73.3% of the participants were female and 26.7% were male) and consisted of three steps: collaboration in completing a digital escape room in an online format, filling in a questionnaire based on their experience, and participating in a focus group after completion of the tasks.

Participating students were pursuing different fields of M.A. studies, some being of EMI (English Medium Instruction) context: 53.3% British Cultural Studies (English as language of study), 20% Current Trends in Linguistics (English and Romanian as language of study), 6.7% History of Images and Ideas (Romanian as language of study), 6.7% Irish Studies (English as language of

study), 6.7% Romanian as Foreign Language (Romanian as language of study), 6.7% German Studies in the European Context (German as language of study).

Language proficiency was advanced for 86.7%, while 13.3% were B1-B2 independent users. The diversity of participants' fields of study reflects the multilingual identity of the sample group, 40% of the students speaking 4 foreign languages, 33.3% speaking 3 foreign languages, 13.3% speaking 2 languages and 13.3% speaking more than four languages. Digital skill levels were rated as advanced by 80% of respondents, and intermediate by 20%.

Description of the procedure

Regarding the research procedure, the study used a questionnaire administered to students to collect both quantitative and qualitative data using Google Forms. Submitting this survey was the second step in this co-teaching and testing procedure, and it was voluntary; personal data was kept confidential and the participants granted their informed consent. The questionnaire has 3 main sections: Demographic, Content-related and the Experience of playing. The survey had 23 questions in total, distributed as follows: 6 for the first section, 7 for the second section, and 10 for the last section. Out of these, there were 10 Multiple-choice questions, 5 Checkboxes, 2 Linear scale questions, and 6 Open questions.

In addition to the questionnaire, participants were invited to attend a focus group discussion and provide verbal feedback on their experience of completing the digital escape room. Their input was a valuable resource in validating the instructors' aims when designing the activity and in providing ideas for improvement.

Research hypotheses

The present study examines the following hypotheses:

1. The potential of digital escape rooms lies in designing diverse content which can target various fields of study.
2. Content creation in a digital escape room activates previously acquired theoretical input and puts to practice transversal skills.
3. The impact of collaborative learning within digital escape rooms targets motivation and efficiency while enhancing communities of practice.

4. The immersion in storytelling leads to more engagement in the learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study covers a selection of items from each of the three sections of the questionnaire, correlating the results with the research hypotheses. The aim is to show the potential of digital escape rooms to cater simultaneously to the needs and interests of students from various fields of study, as well as to bring forth the fundamental feature of digital escape rooms of using theoretical knowledge and skills in the co-production of interdisciplinary content. Another aspect under focus is the way in which this kind of gamified environment fosters communities of practice, motivates students, and provides efficiency and engagement to the learning process.

Related to the respondent's perception of the choice of topics in this digital escape room, the aim was to analyse the extent to which this digital collaborative activity can include diverse fields of study, providing an interdisciplinary framework in which students can navigate content that pertains to their own fields of study but also to fields that are tangential or that would trigger the use of soft and hard skills that build a synthesis of uptodate information, methods, techniques, tools and apps that are useful in their academic and professional life as well. Starting from the premise that DER represents the perfect combination of content, methods, and structure for such a multi-faced endeavour, we asked our students whether the topics (AI, Netspeak, Identity construction, creating educational content) tackled in all digital rooms were relevant for their fields of study.

The results obtained (see Fig. 3 below) show that 86.7% of the students perceive the topics included in all digital rooms to be very and extremely relevant for their fields of study. Only 13.3% of the students adopted a neutral stance, and no student perceived the topics as being unrelated. This indicates that the premise that we started from was validated, DERs being useful instruments for collaborative formative assessment, an efficient cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary tool for both instructors and students, having the potential to use elements from the pool of knowledge previously taught and reconfigure

them in a digital format in which students not only test previously taught content, but also become content producers.

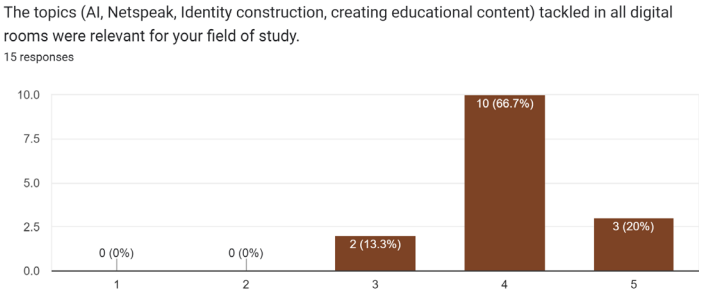

Figure 3. Correlation between topics and fields of study

Since various tasks that students had to complete consisted in creating topic-based content that would mimic a Netspeak persona identity, our AIM was to investigate whether such digital escape room task completion can be a form of digital cognitive activation and can lead to the employment of transversal skills (communication, creativity, digital skills). The specific elements of content that students had to create as part of the productive skill tasks were: creating a meme showing what a teacher influencer would look like, translating an emoji conversation into English and using code-switching to decode a Netspeak message, writing a fake social media post impersonating a troll using Netspeak language about a trending topic. To analyse the manner in which students had the metacognitive awareness that they needed to use the previously taught content (media studies) in order to create such content, participants were asked to identify the aspects related to language, humour, irony or pop culture taken into account when creating the memes.

Their answers, illustrated in Fig. 4 below, show that students were fully knowledgeable of the elements of a meme without focusing only on the creative aspect. They managed to use and resort to the taught theoretical content by mentioning elements pertaining to sociocultural competence, such as irony, humour, stereotypes, abbreviations, or familiarity, and produced their own meme according to the task.

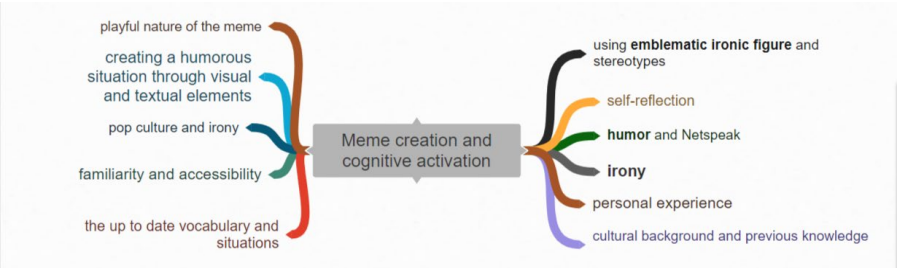

Figure 4. Meme production and cognitive activation

Another aspect that we intended to investigate referred to the way in which students employ metacognition while using Netspeak features, particularly emojis, embedded in written communication in both formal and informal settings. In this respect, the question *Which are the reasons for using emojis in written communication (informal and formal settings)?* was meant to indicate that this digital native generation of students makes a conscious use of code-switching with emojis according to particular purposes they might have in the act of communication. (see Fig. 5 below)

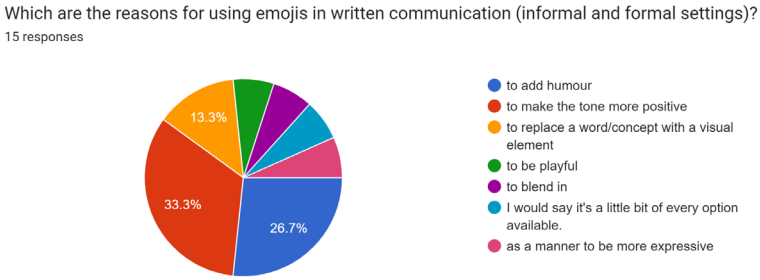

Figure 5. Reasons for using emojis in written communication

The answers show that the majority of respondents (33.3%) use emojis in order to make the tone of the written message more positive, while 25.7% indicated humour as an added value when using emojis. Another relevant function that respondents identified was the replacement of a word/concept with a visual element, perhaps a manner of substituting the non-verbal aspect for a written Netspeak feature. These three functions of using emojis that students selected indicate recurrent digital practices of users within online communities. They

also show that our students identify with a particular group identity and linguistically mark solidarity within a community of practice that emerges from such practices. The second hypothesis (content creation in a digital escape room activates previously acquired theoretical input and puts to practice transversal skills) was validated.

Asked about the benefits that they identified from their group work collaboration, students mentioned that the different perspectives and different levels of digital skills helped them solve the tasks efficiently, and they acknowledged the division of tasks as a productive strategy. They also mentioned that working in groups is time-efficient, comfortable, fun, motivating. All of these aspects enhance a community of practice in which students gain transversal skills like organisation, time management, communication, and digital skills. In this community of practice, students brainstorm ideas, support each other in the process, and engage in productive dialogues across interconnected disciplines and fields of study. In contrast to the benefits offered, the challenges encountered by our students during this collaborative learning event concern mainly minor technical issues like the constant switch from "share screen" to individual answers, internet connection, speaking at the same time, and not being able to properly hear each other. However, our students perceived these as insignificant as they did not affect community formation or the completion of the tasks. All of these aspects support our third hypothesis and prove that digital escape rooms are a good way for people to learn together in a way that boosts motivation and efficiency while also creating and maintaining communities of practice.

Figure 6. Perceived benefits of collaboration in the Digital Escape Room

Another aspect we aimed to analyse was the extent to which students could immerse in storytelling (via different multimodal narrative cues) and how storytelling can be a motivational and engagement booster in gamified learning. The various multimodal narrative cues consisted in:

- fake social media posts showing dialogues between the creators of the digital escape room (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Whatsapp) which accounts for the real-life online engagement of digital natives and activates all facets of one's online identity;
- written narrative micro-plots based on specialised content and terminology rendered in a playful storyline;
- the recurrent use of the personal pronoun you with the purpose of communicating with the players through a chain of dialogues;
- the audio-video interaction between the two language instructors engaging in a role-play that mimicked a student-teacher dialogue;
- the use of avatars of the two instructors throughout all digital rooms to create the impression of a monitored activity in which the narrators guide students as story characters;
- discursive strategies through which irony, sarcasm and humour are embedded in the storyline in order to support an informal atmosphere and make students more at ease with completing the tasks;
- coded clues as fictional leads that players/participants need to decipher and put together as a puzzle of cues which pave the way to the resolution, namely completing the escape room.

An analysis of the respondents' impressions regarding these narrative cues and immersion strategies shows two contrasting views. On the one hand, the majority of students identified the intended strategies (humour, playfulness, irony, peek into the topic and the design of the activity itself) and saw these as motivating and engaging factors that determined them to move forward:

> I believe they helped immensely with the creation of a context for the escape room, so the tasks would have more charm and would be integrated better one into the other.

> I mostly glanced over them, although they were a playful addition and provided immersion to the story.

> They were humorous and enjoyable but also informative.
>
> In most cases they felt like a peek into the making of the escape room, similar to the new trend of movies being shown from the perspective of the laptop/smartphone of the characters.
>
> They were funny because I was thinking about you two professors spending time creating fake Instagram profiles just for this.

On the other hand, some students paced through the digital rooms, foregrounding the tasks themselves and not focusing on the strategies/ multimodal narrative cues, by mentioning merely the humorous aspect or simply admitting they paid little attention to these elements:

> They contextualized the task somewhat, but we glided over them quickly, cut to the chase and started solving the tasks.
>
> They were presenting as authentic, so they made me think that the line between what is fake and what is true on the internet can sometimes be blurred.
>
> just made me laugh
>
> Yes, because they remember me of some other I saw on my social networks.

One explanation for the above-mentioned perspectives (which acknowledge the narrative cues but belittle them) can be related to students being more immersed in completing the escape room, to reduced attention span and the overall tendency to skip the descriptive/instructional lines before doing a task and using intuition instead.

Asking students what motivated them to continue playing showed that digital escape rooms, through their storytelling dimension, truly have the potential to engage and motivate players. At the same time, similar to a binge-watching session, DERs have the feature of make-believe, triggering participants into going through all the rooms and completing tasks one at a time to see what comes next in terms of content and also narrative cues. Below are some of the students' answers regarding their motivation to continue playing:

The new and creative ways of solving tasks that I have not encountered before made me curious to see what comes next and what do we have to do to solve the tasks.

Curiosity to see what was going to happen next and what new tasks needed to be solved.

The mistery

My wonderful colleague, with whom I had such great collaboration, and the thought that a lot of work went into creating this very intricate puzzle.

Well, I was really curious about the outcome of this 'game'.

CONCLUSIONS

This pilot study presented the DER as a case in point for a digital approach to collaborative formative assessment and content teaching in an EMI setting for master students enrolled in different fields of study.

The DER under focus is a collaboratively designed digital ecosystem containing interdisciplinary content and language challenges in the form of puzzles, new media content consumption and creation, complex activities of deciphering clues and decoding passwords. It also emulates the audience design framework of role shifting in social media scenarios where users consume and produce content at the same time while performing in front of an audience and being watched and observed at all times. As such, DER demonstrates the pairing of digital technologies and digital pedagogy within the framework of new media, being a valuable tool both for students and instructors. On the one hand, DER immerses students in a story with genuine storylines and interactional patterns, provides interactive features and ensures collaboration, motivation and engagement. On the other hand, instructors can use this type of digital environment as a formative assessment session and engage with the students in a micro-community of practice in which roles are continuously changed, creating a polyphony of interactional patterns (instructor-instructor; instructors-students, students-students, student-student), fostering

collaboration among students and among instructors and students and a playful and relaxed atmosphere.

Breaking out of this digital maze shows that students and instructors were both immersed in a teaching-learning story that activated theoretical knowledge and practical skills along the way, bringing together instructors and students from various fields of study with the final result of building a community of practice and interdisciplinary content.

Works Cited

Anderson, Valerie. "A digital pedagogy pivot: re-thinking higher education practice from an HRD perspective.", *Human Resource Development International*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2010, pp. 452-467, DOI: 10.1080/13678868.2020.1778999.

Cruz, Mário "Escaping from the Traditional Classroom - The 'Escape Room Methodology' in the Foreign Languages Classroom." *Babylonia - Rivista svizzera per l'insegnamento delle lingue* 3, 2019, pp. 26–29.

Darvin, Ron. "Language and Identity in the Digital Age.", *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*, edited by Siân Preece, 2016, pp. 523-540.

Figueroa-Flores, Jorge. "Using Gamification to Enhance Second Language Learning." *Digital Education Review*, 2015, 27, pp. 32-54.

Fotaris, Panagiotis, Mastoras, Theodoros. "Escape Rooms for Learning: a Systematic Review.", *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Game Based Learning*, edited by Elbaek et. al., ECGBL Academic Conferences and Publishing International Limited, 2019, DOI: 10.34190/GBL.19.179

Koivisto, Jonna, Hamari, Juho, Sarsa, Haari. "Does Gamification Work? — A Literature Review of Empirical Studies on Gamification." *Proceedings of the Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, Hawaii, 2014, USA, p. 206. 10.1109/HICSS.2014.377.

Mudure-Iacob, Ioana, Cotoc, Alexandra, Micle, Veronica-Diana, Hopârtean, Ana Maria, Andronache, Daniel, Pop, Raluca. "Digital Skills through the Lens of Gamified Activities in Language Mediation. The DIAL4U Erasmus+Project." *Educația 21*, vol. 24, 2023, pp.74-84, DOI: 10.24193/ed21.2023.24.08.

BIONOTE

Alexandra COTOC is Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania. Her scientific fields of interest are Internet Linguistics, Cultural Sociolinguistics, Online Identity, New Media Studies, Digital Pedagogy and New Technologies, The Grammatical Structure of the English Language, English for Academic Purposes. She was research staff in the

DIAL4U Erasmus+ project - Digital pedagogy to develop Autonomy, mediate and certify Lifewide and Lifelong Language Learning for (European) Universities.
E-mail: **alexandra.cotoc@ubbcluj.ro**

Ioana MUDURE-IACOB is Lecturer in the Department of Specialised Foreign Languages, Faculty of Letters, and has been teaching English for Specific Purposes since 2009. She is currently working in the DIAL4U Erasmus+ project - Digital pedagogy to develop Autonomy, mediate and certify Lifewide and Lifelong Language Learning for (European) Universities, focusing on developing digital technologies and pedagogy in language learning and teaching processes. Her scientific fields of interest include Blended Learning, Assessment using digital tools, Gamification in Language Teaching and Assessment, Digital Escape Rooms in Formative Assessment, incorporating ICT tools in teaching and evaluation.
E-mail: **ioana.mudure@ubbcluj.ro**