# **REVISTA KRONOS**



## The use of Escape Rooms to promote collaboration in English Language Learning among seventh graders

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ABSTRACT The present study attempts to establish the effectiveness of escape rooms in achieving an improvement in English language learning among seventh grade students. The study further explores how escape rooms can be used to increase cooperation among students in the language learning process as well as their level of participation.

The action research study was conducted from a qualitative approach, benefiting from diagnostic testing, student surveys, an initiative composed of several escape room activities, teacher observation, and final reflection. The results showed that first and foremost, escape rooms have great potential and would act as a means of fostering the pedagogical process by stoking interest and motivation among students as they focus more on communication in the target language than on formal instruction. Escape rooms promote teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills, but also the actual practice of English, something that is sometimes difficult to achieve in a formal learning environment.

The results of the study inform the need to add techniques to foster motivation and collaboration among students. In this way, the use of escape rooms is a great example of techniques that can boost not only cooperation and motivation among students but also significantly improve English language learning, as they must use it to decipher clues and communicate among peers. Furthermore, by carefully considering the various learning styles in the classroom, teachers can design enjoyable and appropriate activities for students' needs and pedagogical goals, overcoming such barriers

KEYWORDS Escape Rooms, collaborative learning, English language, middle school, EFL, Ecuador.

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El uso de Escape Rooms para promover la colaboración en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés entre estudiantes de séptimo grado

RESUMEN La habilidad de producir textos argumentativos es una herramienta fundamental que el escritor utiliza para demostrar la capacidad de transmitir ideas, opiniones y argumentos a través de un texto, tarea o proyecto escrito. Por lo tanto, no se puede pasar por alto su importancia. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar los retos que enfrentan los estudiantes de octavo semestre de la carrera de Pedagogía en Lenguas Nacionales y Extranjeras de una universidad pública al momento de elaborar sus Proyectos Integradores de Saberes como trabajo final de la asignatura denominada Aproximación Diagnóstica. Para esta investigación se aplicó el método de análisis de errores, ya que se refiere al proceso de deconstrucción del texto y abarca una comprensión holística del contenido. Para el análisis, los investigadores utilizaron 25 versiones escritas del Proyecto Integrador de Saberes. Los hallazgos muestran que los desafíos más comunes que los estudiantes enfrentan están relacionados con la estructura de párrafos y oraciones, la puntuación y la elección de palabras. Además, podría afirmarse que los estudiantes experimentaron dificultades con la utilización del Estilo APA y la presentación de contraargumentos firmes. Por lo que se concluye que existe la necesidad de seguir investigando sobre este tema.

PALABRAS CLAVE Escape Rooms, aprendizaje colaborativo, idioma inglés, middle school, EFL, Ecuador.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Teachers in English Language Learning (ELL) classrooms continually search for innovative ways to promote collaboration, engagement, and motivation in the class. Nowadays, many tools like AI, websites, and apps help teachers in their hard work. *Escape rooms* are an emerging tool that educators can use to increase collaboration, engagement, and motivation in English classes. This literature review explores the use of escape rooms in ELL classes and their potential to enhance student collaboration (Johnson, 2013). Given the increasing emphasis on collaborative learning and the need to prepare students for success in a globalized world. This research is vital for identifying innovative approaches such as Escape Rooms, that effectively address the unique needs of English language learners.

The main goal of education today is the development of some skills, such as Social skills, problem-solving, and resilience (Lathwesen & Belova, 2021). All of those skills can help students become independent thinkers, and the environments of collaborative learning provide an ideal way for their development. The advantages of collaborative learning have been demonstrated for decades, with theories such as Piaget's social constructivism and the theory of multiple intelligences. (Piaget, 1952, pág. 279).

Moula & Malafantis (2020) argue that collaboration and communication are closely linked to a stronger foundation in knowledge because they help develop complex thinking skills, such as expressing, formulating, discussing, and negotiating meaning. Group formation during activities and active participation are very important because students are involved in deeper information processing. The learner's participation also increases self-esteem and builds a positive attitude in their education.

Lathwesen & Belova (2021) acknowledge that research has progressively highlighted the importance of games for educational purposes, this helpful approach is known as Gamification. It can motivate learners and improve the knowledge-acquisition process; which consists of the application of game-like elements to learning, as a valuable approach to increase student motivation and collaboration in class. Moreover, games can transform the way educators teach, into engaging tasks that promote active participation of students and more understanding.

Games are nowadays part of people's lives. Not only are students starting to study gaming as part of modern society, but an increasing number of university degree programs have emerged like game design, game art, or video game programming and development (Oblinger, n.d.). Furthermore, games have transcended entertainment, becoming an educational tool and a field of academic study with innovative games like escape rooms to foster collaboration among students.

An escape room is a physical game where players can work together as a group to solve puzzles or challenges based on a theme. The teacher can consider a topic and give students clues to conduct research (Miller, 2021). Escape rooms can be recreated to provide learning, practice, or review past topics; this activity is useful for teachers because it can help students flourish their social skills.

Studies by (Rad, 2024) and (Heredia, 2024) have shown that escape room activities can significantly enhance students' vocabulary acquisition, particularly in the context of specific themes or topics. For instance, in a language learning escape room focused on the topic of "travel," students might need to decipher clues written in the target language and present their findings in a persuasive presentation, this requires them to actively use the target language for communicative purposes, leading to improved fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary.

According to (Elbæk, 2019) escape room activities were more effective than language learning apps in fostering student collaboration and improving communication skills due to

social interaction and collaborative problem-solving; this finding highlights the importance of face-to-face interaction as a crucial part of the learning process.

Existing research in Latin America suggests that escape rooms can effectively enhance student motivation and engagement in language learning. For example, a study by (Quichimbo Pesantez, 2023) in Ecuador found that students participating in escape room activities demonstrated significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation and perceived learning compared to those receiving traditional instruction.

This research employed an Action Research methodology, characterized by an iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Avison, 1999). The study involved implementing escape room activities in an English Language Learning classroom and observing student collaboration.

This research was carried out using reliable websites such as Edutopia, and Google Scholar. Google Scholar is considered the most adequate database where people can obtain quality journals that fulfill the criteria required to be recognized in the academic community (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2023).

Traditional ELL instruction tends to stimulate individual work, but real-world communication needs collaboration, because in most professional or social settings people interact with others, sharing ideas, and working together to achieve common goals. Figueroa, M. (2015) argues that an escape room is a good activity that focuses on teamwork; examining existing research is crucial to understanding how this can foster student collaboration. It is vital in education due to real-world communication needs collaboration.

The research is justified by a growing interest in educational games to promote students' motivation in ELL classrooms. Gómez López, A. (2019) acknowledges that understanding the use of Escape rooms in education can facilitate the role of teachers by providing them with a valuable pedagogical tool for creating dynamic learning experiences that promote student motivation and collaboration.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

This article aims to conduct a comprehensive literature review exploring the effectiveness of Escape Rooms as a Collaborative Learning Technique for English language learning, examining its potential benefits, challenges, and best practices for implementation.

Specific objectives of this work include:

- Analyze how Escape rooms help promote collaboration in class.
- Investigate the potential for Escape Rooms to enable motivation in students.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

Action Research is a cyclical process that aims to improve teaching and learning practices. It consists of identifying a problem or challenge, then planning and implementing interventions to address that issue, collecting and analyzing data on the impact of those interventions, and reflecting on the findings to inform future actions (Avison, 1999) (Almeida, 2022).

The methodology of this research is Qualitative, Action Research. The research employed Action Research by implementing Escape Rooms in the classroom and observing and analyzing the student's collaboration. Simple random sampling will also be carried out. The researcher applied the following techniques: a diagnostic test, a student questionnaire survey, and a final teacher reflection.

The study group consisted of 26 seventh-grade students who attended in the 2024–2025 academic year a private high school in Quito, Ecuador. The corresponding permission and informed consent were obtained from the institution and the students participating in this research. The data obtained by the researchers came from (1) diagnostic test results, (2) student survey, (3) observation of the performance of students in the activities, and (4) a final teacher reflection, the results of each test applied at the end of each stage during the application of the activities using the activity of Escape Rooms.

- 1st session: The researcher assessed the students' knowledge through a diagnostic test. This step was important for tailoring the escape room to match their abilities, ensuring a fair and meaningful experience for all participants, which was essential for the project's success.
- 2nd session: The researcher asked students to complete a short and quick survey about how they felt while learning English through games. Their answers helped us understand their strengths and preferences through their responses.
- 3rd session: Students played the escape room designed by the researcher. It helped students connect with what they already knew to the activity, following the scaffolding strategy of "show and tell" (Alber,2014). Groups must collaborate and contribute with their ideas and help each other.
- 4th session: The researcher conducted direct observations, focusing on student interactions, problem-solving strategies, and their use of English within the escape room context. Then, the researcher analyzed the surveys and observations, and by comparing the results to the diagnostic test, the researcher identified patterns and trends.
- 5th session: After looking at all the information collected the researcher pointed out areas that required improvement, and made some adjustments to the escape room, such as changing the difficulty of puzzles or providing more hints.
- 6th session: The researcher applied a second escape room session implementing some changes. During the activity, the researcher saw if those changes made a difference in how students worked together and learned.
- 7th session: The teacher evaluated the overall effectiveness of the strategy, identified both positive and negative aspects of the experience, and wrote a final reflection.

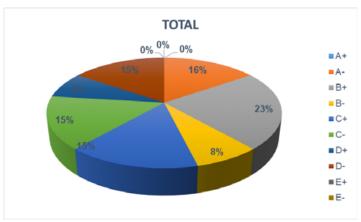
## RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following results were observed and analyzed:

• 1st Session: Diagnostic Test and Adaptation

Result: A significant number of students demonstrated difficulty remembering vocabulary and sentence structure, the results showed that 10% of students achieved the skill, while 85% are in the process. Analysis: This finding suggests that the students forgot vocabulary and Use of English. Discussion: The teacher decided to follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Education where students have three weeks for leveling activities (Lineamientos-pedagogicos-Sierra-Oriente-2024-2025, n.d), and using simpler language was a strategic approach to address the identified weakness.

Figure 1. Results obtained from students' diagnostic test



Source: Own elaboration.

### 2nd Session: Student Survey

Results: Regarding the first question asking students about the frequency, they consider they play games during English classes, 30% of students agree that they play monthly during English classes and 70% of students consider they play rarely. In this sense, most of the students affirm that they do not play games while they are learning English as a foreign language.

Concerning the second question asking students if they enjoy learning English through games, 100% of students agree that they enjoy games during the English class. Regarding this, all the students agree that playing games while they are learning is enjoyable.

About the third question asking students what they consider as benefits of using games in class, 100% of students agree that one benefit would be motivation during the class. At this point, all the students mentioned after the survey that they feel more motivated if they play games during their learning process.

Concerning the fourth question asking students about some challenges or difficulties they have encountered when using games in English class, 100% of students agree that one challenge they face is understanding the game instructions. In this regard, the whole class needs leveling activities to acquire or remember basic vocabulary.

Regarding the fifth question asking students if they have participated in an escape room activity in their English class, 100% of students mentioned that they have never participated in this type of activity.

The survey indicated a general preference for cooperative games and a positive attitude toward learning English through games. In the survey, we can see that students have a preference for learning through games during their English classes. It seems that the use of games may be an important strategy for learning another language because it can foster motivation in the classroom. However, there might be a challenge in understanding the game instructions because students might not have much experience with English language games. Discussion: The survey is so helpful for the research due to it offering valuable insights into the students' preferences and the challenges they face. In addition, the survey data also revealed important insights about student's interest in cooperative games and a positive attitude towards learning English through games.

120% 100% 80% 60% 40% 20% 0% Monthly Rarely Yes Motivation Understanding Never instructions Frequency of game play in Enjoyment of Benefits of Challenges in Participation English classes learning using games in using games in in escape English class class rooms through games

Figure 2. Results obtained from students' survey

Source: Own elaboration.

## 3rd Session: Escape Room

In this study, an Escape room activity was designed and implemented for two groups of students. The theme of the Escape room activity was a fictional mystery. It incorporated a series of interconnected puzzles and challenges that required students to work together to solve problems.

Result: One group showed high levels of teamwork and effective communication, and another group struggled to achieve the task within the time limits. The differences could be because of different initial networks, including preexisting relationships within the in-group and the introduction of new students in the out-group. Moreover, different levels of language proficiency could have been relevant as well. Discussion: The results of this experiment imply that we should focus on teamwork inside the classroom to prevent students from becoming isolated. Those who struggle or covet extra advice and coaching shall be supported to face the challenges and grow profitably.

#### 4th Session: Observation and Analysis

The observation method for collecting data was direct observation conducted during the escape room activity, this involved observing students' interaction, participation, and language use.

Result: It was shown that better language skills took on leadership roles, and there was a positive correlation between not sitting on English and taking an active part, so they had more leaders than the other group. Analysis: This could imply that language proficiency may predict higher self-confidence and willingness to undertake leadership roles among students. Besides, a positive attitude toward English has been reported as a factor enhancing voluntary participation in learning activities (UNESCO, n.d.). Discussion: The observations and survey data seem to underscore the potential helpfulness of fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment in which students feel that every interaction is valued, and where any student is willing and able to contribute. In this situation, providing leadership opportunities and individual recognition might help increase confidence and motivation among the students.

#### 5th Session: Adjustments and Improvements

Outcome: The researcher decided to integrate more project-based learning tasks in the game where individuals must collaborate on their part, for example: The Museum Heist, The Lost City, and The innovation challenge; which are games where students work together to brainstorm ideas, solve problems and present a final solution. Analysis: Making this change shows that students are more confident to share their parts and are more open to the opportunity of collaborative learning instead. Discussion: The researcher tried to break apart the individualism of the group by allowing for personal but cooperative work, this can assist in boosting confidence and inspire increased participation.

## • 6th Session: Second Escape Room

The researcher conducted a second escape room where students were divided into two groups, as in the previous activity. It was a fictional game which has some changes, for example, simplified puzzles that required only basic logic and observation; the instructions were concise with visual aids and step-by-step guidance; and students were assigned specific roles in their teams, such as scientist, communicator, etc.

Results: the researcher noticed increased engagement, motivation, participation, and group collaboration. Analysis: As an analysis, it can be mentioned that the positive changes may be because of the adjustments made based on the previous activity with its observations and analysis. Discussion: The success of the activity highlights the importance of periodic guidance and the adaptation of the activities to the students.

#### 7th Session: Evaluation and Reflection

Result: The teacher concluded that the escape room strategy promoted language acquisition and enhanced students' collaboration. Analysis: The teacher's reflection is an all-round evaluation of the efficacy of the escape room strategy. Identifying particular areas to improve shows that the teacher is dedicated to continuous professional development in improving his or her practice. Discussion: The teacher's observations would be useful in making later instructional decisions and formulating other interventions for students with certain learning difficulties.

After introducing the Escape Rooms in the English class, the researcher assesses this didactic methodology by observing that it significantly increases students' collaborative behavior in lessons. The participating students responded to the activity implementation with high motivation and engagement. According to the analysis, three overarching themes were obtained: Escape Room as a strategy for (1) a motivational tool for language learning, (2) collaborative learning, and (3) different learning styles.

## • Overarching Theme 1. Escape Rooms as a Language Learning Motivational Tool

The major theme that emerged from the data within this study is that Escape rooms can fall under an overarching idea; it is a motivational strategy of learning by acting to be immersed in reality where the teaching/learning process takes place. Perhaps the goal-directed nature of an escape room may be particularly appealing to students in spurring their curiosity and desire to learn. Escape rooms will depict the language learning journey as more than a difficulty, but some adventures need to be thrilling and exciting (Dornyei, Z., 2001) (Table 1).

Table 1: Escape Rooms as a Language Learning Motivational Tool

Theme	Category	Descriptor
Motivation	Intrinsic	Enjoyment and interest in the activity
	Extrinsic	Rewards and recognition
Engagement	Active participation	Contribution to problem-solving
	Task commitment	Completion of the activity
Difficulty	Challenge level	Complexity of clues
	Zone of proximal development	Challenge that promotes learning
Adaptation	Personalization	Modification of activities based on student needs
	Inclusion	Consideration of different learning styles
Feedback	Immediate feedback	Responses to student actions

Source: Own elaboration.

## • Overarching Theme 2. How Escape Rooms Enhance Group Learning

The second major theme that was discovered is that focusing on the advantage of peer interaction, because of how students solve puzzles and figure out challenges with each other to escape using Escape Rooms to promote collaborative problems (Nunan, D., 1992). Encouraging one another from the students makes language learning less of a scary task to do, and more enjoyable overall in a collaborative environment. In addition, they also teach students how to interact with each other (a key element in all great escape rooms) and develop strong social connections. (Table 2).

Table 2: How Escape Rooms Enhance Group Learning

Theme	Category	Descriptor
Teamwork	Collaboration	Interaction and mutual support
	Effective communication	Exchange of ideas and conflict resolution
Leadership	Decision-making	Assignment of roles and responsibilities
	Problem-solving	Identification and solution of obstacles
Group dynamics	Group cohesion	Sense of belonging and trust
	Conflict and negotiation	Management of disagreements and search for consensus solutions

Source: Own elaboration.

## • Overarching Theme 3. Escape Rooms for Various Types of Learners

The third theme as derived from the data showed that the problem was effective in being tailored to many different learning styles. The Escape room is a tool, but rapid feedback research has proven values of inquiry (Kolb, 2012). Using different elements and strategies like: levels of difficulty for puzzles, interactive whiteboards, educational games, or online platforms, teachers can introduce a variety of opportunities for students to interact with the content and perform.

Visual Escape rooms are also a great choice for kids who learn best with lots of visuals. Classrooms can be filled with plenty of visual cues and puzzles. Visual learners usually get the best out of these clear and organized presentations of information (Gardner, H., 1983).

Additionally, there is an aspect for kinesthetic learners as well. Since escape rooms are hands-on. Some of the common features of an escape room include looking for hidden clues, solving puzzles and riddles, and physical interactions with the objects in the room itself. Get moving: kinesthetic learners with activities; for example, creating opportunities for movement and interaction that serve as interesting (and likely memorable) ways to learn for kinesthetic students (Fleming, N., 2001) (Table 3).

Table 3 Escape Rooms for Various Types of Learners

Theme	Category	Descriptor
Learning styles	Visual	Use of images and diagrams
	Auditory	Use of verbal cues and sounds
	Kinesthetic	Physical and manipulative activities
Special needs	Accommodations	Modifications for students with learning difficulties
Cultural diversity	Inclusion	Representation of different cultures

Source: Own elaboration.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The current research explored and illustrated the effectiveness of escape rooms as a collaborative learning tool in improving the proficiency of the English language among seventh graders. The findings of this study showed that this type of activity helps the students to work in teams, communicate, and solve problems-that is, the students were motivated to be on task throughout the activity.

- Enhanced teamwork and collaboration: Escape rooms make it easier for students to cooperate with their peers, learn how to collaborate fruitfully, share ideas, and support each other.
- Improved language skills: The students who participate in this study had the chance to put into practice, in meaningful and valid contexts, their English language.
- Increased motivation: The game-like nature of escape rooms provided stimulus for the students to be active participants in learning.
- Positive attitudes: Through the engaging character of the activities, students developed positive attitudes toward the learning of the English language.

• Learning styles: By incorporating a variety of elements or challenges, escape rooms can cater to different learning styles, ensuring that all students have opportunities to demonstrate their understanding.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has some limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which might limit the generalizability of results to other populations consisting of larger and more diverse students. Secondly, the research was carried out in one institution, so it may not be very representative of the different educational contexts and student demographics. In addition, it focused mainly on seventh graders, its findings have limited applicability to other age groups. Lastly, there is always some degree of research bias in observing and interpreting student interactions.

#### **FURTHER STUDIES**

Future research should explore the effectiveness of escape rooms across different subjects, grade levels, and learning contexts. Further studies are vital to examine the long-term impact of the escape room activity. Furthermore, exploring the potential of technology-enhanced escape rooms, like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can significantly increase student engagement and provide more immersive learning opportunities.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study demonstrates the significant potential of escape rooms as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing English language learning. By implementing escape room activities, teachers can create dynamic and collaborative learning experiences that foster student motivation and communication skills.

- Incorporate Escape Rooms on a regular basis: Educators can incorporate Escape rooms as part of English activities that are used to refer for learning and teamwork.
- Customize assignments: Modify the Escape Rooms to fit with what students are most interested in and need help with, thus making learning easier for everyone.
- Directions and support: Having clear guidelines that are simple to follow and supplemental help for those who need it is necessary to make the activities work.
- Evaluate and iterate: Escape Rooms should be reviewed for their efficacy periodically based on observed impact, to make changes necessary with the overall goal of improving learning.

#### Contribuciones de los autores

Brigida Priscilla Bucciarelli Mena: redacción de objetivos, introducción, recolección y análisis de datos, redacción de los resultados y discusión del manuscrito, revisión y edición.

Evelyn Verónica Almeida García: redacción de objetivos, introducción, conclusiones, recomendaciones y resumen; revisión y edición del manuscrito.

#### Implicaciones éticas

Las autoras declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas.

#### Conflicto de interés

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