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Six Advantages of Using Google to Make Educational Escape Rooms for Second Language Classes

By G. Maleki, Washington State University

Virtual escape rooms are interactive games in which players cooperate in an online environment to solve puzzles and find clues to escape from that setting and win the game. They are gaining popularity in education for the enjoyable adventures, creativity, and problem-solving skills, and second language classes can benefit from this engaging experience, too. There are six reasons why second language teachers can benefit from Google to make their Virtual escape rooms.

1. Google has collaborative features.

Google Docs, Forms, and Slides provide the opportunity for teachers and students from different places to work on a document at the same time. This feature can easily make a bridge among teachers to work together to create puzzles and clues and support each other in transferring the knowledge they have into making escape rooms. Learning how to employ these collaborative tools can work as professional development for teachers who are not that familiar with the technology, however the tools are fairly simple even for teachers with limited technical skills. Teachers who are not supported culturally or technologically will benefit from collaborating with each other, and a finished escape room could be made available to other teachers around the world.

2. Google's tools are flexible, accessible, and free to use.

Google Docs, Forms, and Slides are all user-friendly tools which can bring flexibility to the classroom as they can be used either individually or in groups, depending on the objectives of the escape room. If accessibility is a concern, virtual escape rooms are accessible from anywhere and can bring more equity to education. They are accessible and affordable tools that can be customized based on learners' age, interest, and the objective of the lessons, and can easily be shared with other teachers and students. They can facilitate creative differentiation and can engage students with different proficiency levels effectively. Price can be another concern to many teachers and educational institutions, and these tools are free to use.

3. Google can be integrated with other tools.

Google Slides, Docs and Forms have a wide range of functions that can be integrated with other Google tools such as Google Drive to enhance the quality of the puzzles and clues in the escape room and to improve students' experience with using technology effectively in the classroom. This integration can also facilitate sharing the virtual escape room with students, providing corrective feedback, and scaffolding students' needs throughout the process of learning a second language. For example, Figure 1 shows a virtual escape room that has been created on Google Slides called "Spooky Library", and after the learners click on the cat, it automatically takes them to Google Forms (Figure 2) on which the questions and the answers can be seen.

Figure 1.

The Virtual Escape Room on Google Slides.

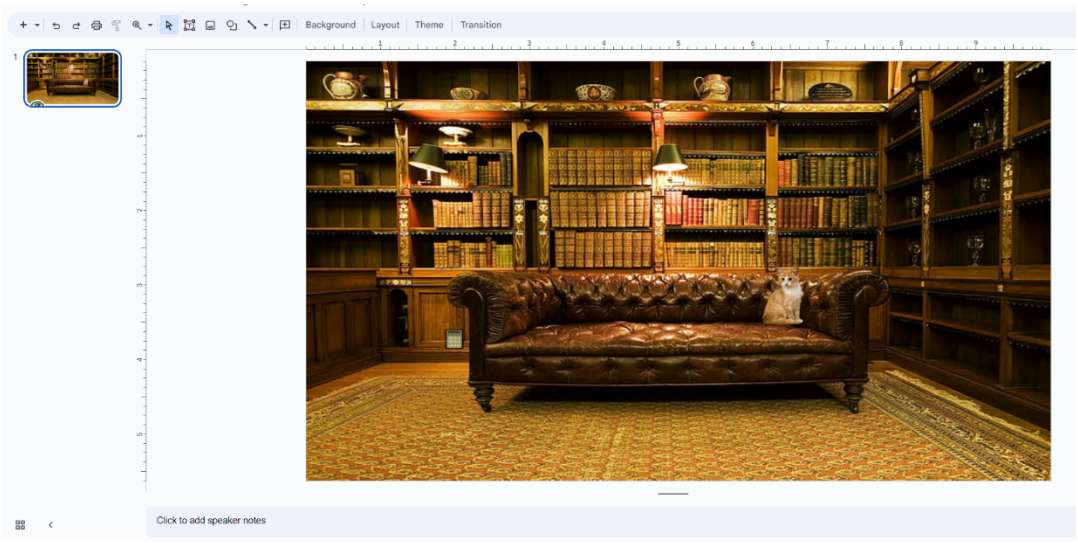
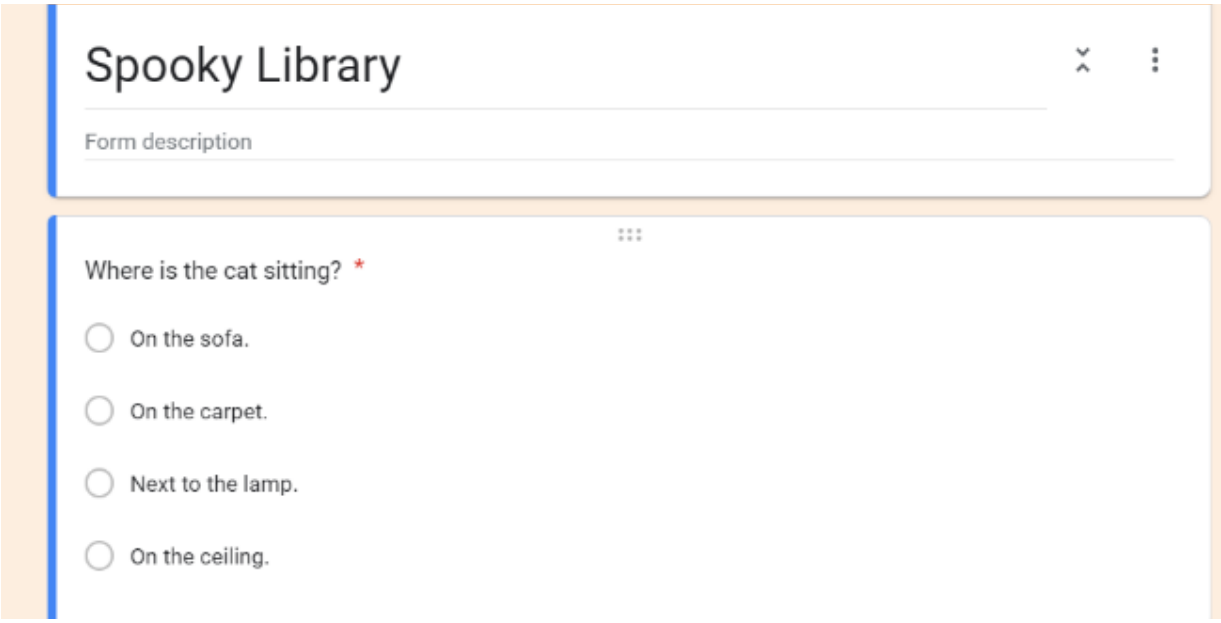


Figure 2.

Clicking on Objects That Have Already Been Linked Can Take Learners to Google Forms.



4. Google can provide immediate feedback.

Google provides features to give immediate feedback to the students. For example, comments can be added to Google docs or Google Forms Response Validation to appear when learners choose specific right/wrong answers. Depending on the targeted skills, students can receive feedback on their language skills and real-life skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking. The immediate feedback the students receive can promote student-centered learning in which students feel responsible for what they learn. It can also scaffold the students while they may be moving out of their comfort zones into fear zones and through to learning zones. Students can be redirected to focus on areas needing improvement. In these ways the immediate feedback can reinforce learning and increase student confidence. For example, learners can reflect on the feedback they receive on Google Slides in virtual escape rooms to set goals and achieve them next time they receive that type of question. So, as teachers, we should provide enough opportunity for learners to reflect on the feedback to correct themselves.

5. Google supports effective assessment.

Assessment can be less time-consuming and more effective than other regular class activities when integrated into the virtual escape room game. The skills that can be assessed can include and are not limited to language skills, critical thinking, time management, and communication skills. For example, reading comprehension can be assessed creatively by providing the text as the clue that should be interpreted to find the correct answer on the Google Docs. Other types of assessments include:

1. Providing creative writing prompts: Relate the escape room theme to some writing prompts and assess what range of vocabulary the learners can use.
2. Pronunciation challenges: Utilize audio recordings which are related to the escape room theme to assess oral efficiency of the learners.
3. Story-based tasks: Elements of interactive storytelling can help assess grammar, vocabulary skills and comprehension.

Activity-integrated assessment and feedback can benefit students in several ways. Students can feel more engaged in their learning process, and the assessment can demonstrate their weakness as a practical skill that can help them or their team escape the room. The setting and the context provided in the escape room can create more meaningful assessments that are less direct and formal and can be personalized.

6. Google enhances using technology in the classroom.

The integration of technology into engaging tasks to create a sense of achievement can be a motivating factor to introduce new literacies into more conventional educational settings in which digital tools are not culturally appropriate to use in classrooms. Rather than culture, another obstacle in implementing more educational technology is time constraint. For example, language teachers may assume that they have no time to talk about technology in their classrooms as they need to cover language skills such as comprehension. By using technology-mediated classroom activities, language teachers can advocate for new literacies as well. If teachers can incorporate technology within the context of a usual lesson, it may encourage more creativity, collaboration and engagement.

Conclusion

Jonge and Labrador (2020) state how routinized learning and teaching can keep teachers in their comfort zones and hinder critical thinking. Using virtual escape rooms as a class activity in language classrooms can bring more equity to offer more engaging context, elevated practice, and more efficient feedback to students while using free and accessible tools. Virtual escape rooms, built by using Google Docs, Google Slides and Google Forms, can be integrated into different educational and cultural settings to facilitate engaging students, giving them agency and a sense of achievement, and scaffolding their learning. Using Google in making virtual escape rooms can pave the way for cooperation between teachers and students to teach and learn in a meaningful context made available through technology.

Reference

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