Role playing games: A motivational tool to help EFL learners develop confident speaking

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AUTHOR: Vanessa Camprubí Gutiérrez
SUPERVISOR: Sílvia Garriga Galobardes
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ABSTRACT:

Even though it is true that the English Language plays a significant role all around the world today, it continues to be one of the most demanding subjects for secondary school students (Rubio and Martínez, 2008). This fact can be explained, among other reasons, by the pupils' lack of motivation (Harmer, 2007; Mores Cruz, 2022; Rost, 2006; Segura Alonso, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012; Wilkinson and Potts, 2022). It is precisely for this very reason that the purpose of the present research is to discover whether the speaking strategy of role-playing could be useful to foster both the scholars' English communicative competence and their incitement in the learning of this discipline. To investigate this issue, some 4th of ESO English students from a public high school in Osona were invited to answer two different questionnaires: in the first one, they were asked about their interests and tastes in television, responses that would help the author to create the premises of their subsequent performances; in the second one, they had to describe their feelings after having carried out such an exercise. In the same way, the implementation of peer assessment was also considered a potential motivational component for teenagers. The results of the study reveal a correlation between the sources studied, and the entertaining *manoeuvring* implemented during the practicum period of the trainee teacher, confirming, thus, that role-playing, if oriented to their needs, has a positive reception on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Keywords: Motivation; Motivational Strategies; Role-Playing; English as a Foreign Language; Teenagers; Tastes and Interests; Peer Assessment; Compulsory Secondary Education.

RESUM:

Si bé és cert que, actualment, l'anglès juga un paper veritablement important a nivell mundial, continua sent una de les assignatures més desafiants per als estudiants de l'Educació Secundària Obligatòria (ESO) (Rubio and Martínez, 2008). Aquesta constatació pot ser explicada, entre altres motius, per la falta de motivació per part dels alumnes (Harmer, 2007; Mores Cruz, 2022; Rost, 2006; Segura Alonso, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012; Wilkinson and Potts, 2022). És precisament per aquesta raó que l'objectiu d'aquesta investigació és descobrir si l'estratègia conversacional del joc de rols pot ser utilitària per a potenciar tant la competència comunicativa en anglès com la incitació dels estudiants en aquesta disciplina. Per investigar aquest assumpte, alguns estudiants de 4t d'ESO d'un institut públic de la comarca d'Osona van haver de respondre dos qüestionaris: en el primer, se'ls va demanar informació sobre els seus interessos i gustos televisius, respostes que ajudarien a l'autora a crear les premises de les posteriors actuacions; en el segon, van haver de descriure els seus sentiments i reaccions després d'haver portat a la pràctica un tal exercici. De la mateixa manera, l'ús de l'avaluació entre iguals també va ser considerada com un element motivacional pels adolescents. Els resultats de l'estudi revelen una correlació entre les fonts estudiades i la divertida *maniobra* implementada durant el període de pràctiques de la professora en formació, confirmant, així, que el joc de rols, sempre i quan estigui orientant cap a les seves necessitats, té un efecte positiu en els aprenents de "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL).

Paraules claus: Motivació; Estratègies de motivació; Joc de rols; Anglès com a Llengua Estrangera; Adolescents; Gustos i Interessos; Avaluació entre Iguals; ESO.

1. INTRODUCTION

> "Role-playing can be a great way to tap into your intrinsic motivation, as it allows you to explore different aspects of yourself and to discover new ways of being. When we are motivated from within, we are more likely to pursue our goals with passion and purpose." - Angela Duckworth (Chief scientist and co-founder of Character Lab[1])

Given the significant today's international and global power of English, it is undeniable that, besides mastering this language in its written form, it is essential to be proficient in oral communication as well. Moreover, having a good command of the spoken language can help future generations not only to enter labour work, but also to carry out one of the most basic functions of human beings: that of socialising and engaging in conversations with their peers, regardless of their origin or nationality.

Research over the years has shown that, unfortunately, English continues to be one of the most challenging subjects for secondary school students (Rubio and Martínez, 2008). Even if it is true that this failure can often be attributed to fear or to the difficulties they are highly likely to find in producing oral messages in this foreign language, lack of motivation must also be taken into consideration (Harmer, 2007; Mores Cruz, 2022; Rost, 2006; Segura Alonso, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012; Wilkinson and Potts, 2022). To cite an instance, as an English teacher, I have seen first-hand how unwilling teenagers, and even myself when I was younger, are to participate in oral activities in class. I do not consider that this behaviour is purely due to the boredom that can cause doing this type of exercises, but I do think that there is also a problem in the methodology that instructors use for approaching this skill. Apart from spending much more time studying grammar, writing or listening and reading comprehension, which are undoubtedly of great value, they hardly ever focus on the interests of young people, or at least, this is what my own experience has shown me. Therefore, instead of basing and adapting the lessons to their needs, educators simply follow the proposed curriculum for the school year, normally in a conventional way, showing PowerPoint presentations or describing given pictures by using comparisons and fixed expressions.

Faced with this situation, many researchers have started believing in the power of language play, that is to say, of learning through playing, a present-day procedure in which diversion

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[1] Character Lab is an American nonprofit organisation that connects researchers with educators to create greater knowledge about the conditions that lead to social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being for young people throughout the country. (Retrieved from https://characterlab.org/about/)

can adopt many different forms, from mobile play and digital games to pretend play (Ferguson et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the following paper will be focused on the influence of role-playing, a type of interactive activity where participants assume specific roles, hence the name, and act out various scenarios, often within a specific context or sitting. Even though this can be done with various purposes, such as for therapy, training or personal development, and can take different modalities, face to face or online, what is astounding are the tremendously positive effects it can have on young people. In fact, besides improving and enhancing language acquisition, "Drama and role play are also applicable in another subject of strengthen social skills and its values such as cooperative, readiness, planning and so on" (Mat et al., 2020, p. 6999). Along these lines, as believed by Christie (1990): "Engaging in dramatic play can help develop children's knowledge of story structure by giving them an opportunity to invent and act out their own narrative scripts" (p. 542). In the same way, these performances can also help them awaken their originality, imagination and creativity, faculties that, undoubtedly, keep them active and inspired, as the quote at the head of this section demonstrates.

Finally, in addition to the above, studies recently executed have shown a particular interest in the effectiveness of what is known as "peer assessment", a subject that has been called into serious question. Essentially, whereas Topping (2003) asserts that "some teachers might be anxious about going so far as to include self or peer assessments as part of summative assessment, where consequence follows from terminal judgements of accomplishments" (p. 56), others diverge from this affirmation, defending that this new approach can play an essential role in the learning process of students. Among them are, for example, Sadler and Good (2006) who confirm that this new attitude towards evaluation has four advantages: it is *logistical*, *pedagogical*, *metacognitive* and *affective*. As if this was not enough, Divjak and Maretic (2017) declare that "peer-assessment engages students to become more active learners, take responsibility for their learning, to apply deeper learning strategies and to gain a better understanding of their own subjectivity and judgment" (p. 24). It is precisely this statement that leads me to question the success of this new procedure and, even more, the gains it can have on both current and future pupils.

In order to provide a context for this "Treball Final de Master" (TFM), and thus ensure the reader's proper understanding, this document begins dealing with the objectives, the research questions and the initial hypotheses. Afterwards, not only is the theoretical framework based

on the different contributions made by specialists in the topics to work one (that is, the weight of the English Language, the benefits of role-playing as well as the different approaches of peer assessment) fully detailed, but also the methodology, together with its participants, instruments and data analyses are described. Certainly, following the *modus operandi*, a space will be dedicated to analyse, reveal and comment on the results obtained, both from the questionnaires and from the observations made in the classroom itself, and to mention, likewise, what conclusions are drawn. Only then, I would be able to establish the success of this conversational strategy in question, the role-playing, and the gains it can have on both current and future pupils.

2. OBJECTIVES

Before going into detail, it is essential to formulate the primary objectives of this research, which will be built upon the theoretical foundation presented in the following sections. Only in this way will the methodology undertaken to achieve results be much more understandable.

The majority of Spanish inhabitants acknowledge the importance of acquiring English skills due to its status as a universal means of communication. In fact, mastering this language provides a wide range of benefits, including professional advancement and better communication skills. Nevertheless, many studies have shown that demotivation of English learners in ESO level is increasingly evident. Thus, there is a need to devise and apply fresh approaches to awaken our youngster's interest as well as to give them greater self-confidence when expressing themselves in the target language.

Having said so, this TFM possesses two significant objectives. On the one hand, the primary goal of this dissertation is to shed light on how the implementation of some speaking strategies, such as role-playing, could be useful for scholars to foster both their English communicative competence and their incitement in the learning of such a discipline. On the other hand, it also seeks to discover whether the technique known as "peer assessment" has a positive and motivational impact on teenagers. Consequently, three main research questions emerge:

- To what extent is there an interaction between young EFL learners and role-playing games? Do they like this activity? Do they feel comfortable doing it?
- What is its potential effect on adolescents' stimulus and fluency when acting out a conversation in English? Is it really a true tool to motivate them and enhance their eloquence?
- Can peer evaluation be a trigger for students to strive to create a better interpretation and thus achieve a better result (mark)?

On this basis, just by putting these queries into practice, could I be able to prove to pupils that the development of their verbal capacity does not have to be boring and useless. On the contrary, coming to be an efficient or competent speaker of the English language, as well as being enriching for their personal growth and professional future, can also be enjoyable and gratifying.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
3.1. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Also known as "communication skills", communicative competence is one of the central arguments, and should be one of the main educators' concerns, in teaching a second language. In reality, it refers to the ability to communicate, that is to say, to exchange messages, effectively and suitably, in a given context or situation. Still, as future teaching experts, we are likely to ask ourselves what elements make up this definition and how we should instruct them so that our students acquire it, an achievement that is key for their training and their personal and professional development.

Chomsky (1957), in his *Syntactic Structures*, tried to formulate an interpretation of what could be considered as "competence" in modern linguistics. This term, and what it denoted, however, did not take into account other basic principles for good and real communication. In fact, according to Reishaan and Taha (2008), "competence" alludes to the knowledge that each individual possesses of the grammar of his language and its rules. In turn, the capacity of putting this theory into practice, producing, in this fashion, numerous sentences, is known as "performance". Yet, this proposal, being merely linguistic, was soon questioned through the emergence of the notion of "communicative competence":

> "This type of competence is different from the linguistic one in the sense that communicative competence focuses on the native speaker"'s ability to produce and understand sentences which are appropriate to the context in which they occur, i.e., what that speaker really needs to know in order to communicate effectively in socially distinctive settings. (Reishaan and Taha, 2008, p. 38-39).

It was precisely Hymes (1972), another specialist in the field, who decided to broaden this explanation years later. As it can be seen in the aforementioned citation, "communicative competence" should not only be limited to having knowledge of the grammatical rules of our language in order to produce certain structures, but also to being able to identify when to use them appropriately, and, above all, with whom. This skill, called sociolinguistic, takes into account social status, power relations and cultural norms, and it will be accompanied, some time later, by the "strategic competence" and the "discourse competence".

Defined by Canale and Swain (1980), "strategic competence" also deserves to be mentioned as it is actually the one that allows speakers to use language in a strategic way, usually, to achieve an objective, such as to persuade, inform or entertain our audience. To do that, they can also make use of the non-verbal communication, which can be utilised to address

communication breakdowns resulting from performance variables or insufficient competence. Two years later, Canale (1983) carried out some changes in his model, adding a new category: the so-called "discourse competence", which pays special attention to the creation of coherent and cohesive texts, a conversation or an argument, among others.

Although throughout the history of linguistics several ideologies have emerged on the subject, introducing minor modifications, the following one seems to have become a reference for many. In spite of the fact that, in the mid-nineties, Celce-Murcia (1995) had already added new notions to the systems that were already circulating, it was not until more than a decade later, in 2007, when the same author talked about "the formulaic language" and "to the paralinguistic aspects of face-to-face oral communication" (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 45). The first concept makes reference to those established and determined expressions that speakers use in their daily life activities (*of course, how are you?, I'm fine, thanks, collocations, idioms*). In reality, as they function as a unit and have a specific meaning, they are collected in our consciousness, patently playing an important role in language acquisition and fluent discourse production.

The second one, also known as "Interactional Competence", is subdivided into three competencies: The "actional competence", that is to say, "the students' knowledge to perform speech acts and interactions necessary for exchanging information" (Mores Cruz, 2022, p. 8) or the "conversational competence", which focuses on the turn-taking system in conversation. Finally, it is noteworthy not to forget the so-called "non-verbal/paralinguistic competence", which, as it name suggests, looks at aspects such as body language, the physical space of the interlocutors, silence, pauses, or non-linguistic utterances *(huh?)*. Notwithstanding the little importance that is often given to this last category, i.e "non-verbal/paralinguistic competence", it is important to know that it is really significant when carrying out a conversation, because in addition to being able to vary from language to language, it can help "second and foreign language learners to understand how to manage social introductions, how to complain, how to apologize and so forth (...)" (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 49).

Therefore, as future English teachers, it is of great value having knowledge about the *morphology* of the divergent components that constitute communicative competence so as to create a solid basis for our language teaching. Only thus will we be meeting the communicative needs of our pupils, preparing them to be linguistically and culturally competent to perform genuine and expressive intercourses in their foreign language.

3.2. SPEAKING INSTRUCTION

Nowadays, English is one of the most widely spoken and understood languages in the world, and it has become an essential tool for communication, especially in the age of globalisation. In fact, as businesses, governments, and individuals are more connected than ever before, the ability to master this language, emerged as the *Lingua Franca*, is a crucial skill for anyone who wants to participate fully in the global community. Actually, English enables individuals to communicate with people from different countries, to learn about new cultures and, what is more, to expand their horizons. In the same way, this language also creates opportunities for personal and professional growth, as English fluency is often a requirement for educational programs and many jobs.

Nevertheless, when we have a look at the situation of Spain, it is more than clear that our country and, consequently, its English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, appear in low positions in the list of European speakers of such a language, being its instruction and learning a social concern. In effect, according to the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), Spain ranks 33rd out of 100 countries surveyed in terms of English proficiency, with a score of "moderate proficiency." Therefore, despite the high number of hours of English formation that Educació Secundària Obligatòria (ESO) students enjoy, *how is it still possible to detect this school failure?* Apart from the possible linguistic and social factors that could explain it, in this investigation, we are going to concentrate on the Spanish educational system, mainly on its methodology and teaching training.

In reality, as teachers find themselves in secondary classrooms with more than 25 pupils, in most of the cases, it is completely acceptable that, on more than one occasion, they give more prestige to some activities than others, even if these might not be competence. As stated in Bueno et al. (2006)'s investigation, because of the importance and longevity of written culture, the oral practice tends to be left in the background: "It is important to keep a balance between oral and written learning tasks. At the present time, written work predominates, quite often around 75% of the time, leaving a bare 25% for oral interaction" (McLaren and Madrid, 2004, p. 170).

Thus, as already mentioned before, oral production, i.e, the one which can be more advantageous to our youngsters, takes second place. According to Celce-Murcia and Olhstein (2000): "In some ways, speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire since it

requires command of both listening comprehension and speech production subskills (e.g. vocabulary retrieval, pronunciation, choice of grammatical pattern and so forth) in unpredictable, unplanned situations" (p. 165). Likewise, besides being an improvised exercise, it should be taken into account that in order to carry out a proper conversation, it is necessary to activate our cognitive capacity, since we must not only process the message received, but also think about the possible answers and articulate them. This long process, which is impossible to deal with in English secondary classrooms due to the limited time available, can also lead students to reject this type of practice or even to abhor or fear it. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that having many students in a classroom can hinder their ability to receive proper instruction and correction for their mistakes.

This aforementioned "instruction" is, at the same time, closely related to the preparation and training of educators in charge of teaching foreign languages. While it is true that having a university degree is a requisite, it is even more important to have knowledge of didactics, a subject that, sad to say, is not always present in higher education. In addition to this fact, it is worth pointing out that the oral competence of the role-model is also a trigger for the correct learning of this language. For this reason, from a very young age, phonic errors should be corrected, as Clark and Clark (1977) manifest: "It is true that perception and production are closely linked: listeners rely on their own representation of the phonetic form of the word to recognise it, and when speaking themselves try to match their production with the same representation" (p. 376).

Having said so, it is logical then that, in order to train and form competent language learners, not only must they know the elements that make up communication, but they must also receive good training. For this to be possible, it is essential to pay attention to their needs and, above all, to their interests, yet this observation sometimes goes unnoticed. Only in this way will we, as teachers, be able to change our classroom practices or methodologies.

3.3.   MOTIVATION

In the same way, this lack of development of oral skills may be intimately connected to motivation. Although it is unquestionable that, as educational guides, we must follow the Curriculum of the School Year and the activities it proposes, it is also advisable that we orient our lessons or/and some of our explanations on the curiosity, tastes and pastimes of adolescents, our main object of study. Otherwise, with the few English inputs to which young

people are exposed today (any interactions with native speakers or celebrities promoting the advantages of becoming proficient in this foreign language…), the teaching and learning of this *lingua franca* can even become more problematic to handle: "There is almost nothing more exciting that a class of involved young people at this age pursuing a learning goal with enthusiasm. Our job, therefore, must be to provoke student engagement with material which is relevant and involving" (Harmer, 2007, p. 84).

Nonetheless, have we ever asked ourselves where the term "motivation" comes from and, most especially, what it means? As reported by Medina (2014): "The word motivation comes from the Latin "muovere", i.e., to move, to produce responses to certain stimuli. When a student is motivated to learn a subject, he/she is willing to engage in any activity that will help him/her to learn" (p. 71). This learners' predisposition to participate when suggested with an exercise that attracts them or fulfils their expectations also helps adolescents to remain active and focused on the task. This theory is supported by Rost (2006), who after having studied this issue in depth, describes the notion of "stimulus", "reason", or "spur" as a provider of "source of energy that is responsible for why learners decide to make an effort, *how long* they are willing to sustain an activity, *how hard* they are going to pursue it and *how connected* they feel to the activity" (p. 1). In reality, by acknowledging the interests and enthusiasm of our students, we can effectively enhance their English proficiency and cultivate their learning capabilities.

The concept of "motivation" being truly remarkable, it is natural that, throughout history, different researchers have been concerned with analysing and describing it, among them Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972). However, in spite of all the studies that have been carried out, basically focusing on the factors that have an impact on human stimuli, no one, in the last century, provided us with any clues as to how to motivate our students. This task was taken up by Dörnyei (2001) who in addition to confirming that motivational strategies are key to language learning, they must also be continuous over time, not an occasional practice. Thus, he submitted a set of 13 procedures, perfectly organised in four stages: Creating the basic motivational conditions; generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation.

Always starting from the idea that it is the teacher's beliefs and attitudes that motivate pupils to learn a new language, Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) had already tried to formulate a list of the

"10 commandments" to achieve this aim. It will be from these, and from other oral strategies discussed below, that my research will start.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNERS	
1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour.	6. Make the language classes interesting.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.	7. Promote learner autonomy.
3. Present the task properly.	8. Personalise the learning process.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.	9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.	10. Familiarise learners with the target language culture.

Table 1: Ten commandments for motivating language learners. Adapted from Dörnyei and Csizer (1998).

3.4.   ORAL STRATEGIES

We cannot start this new section without first discussing a key idea in our investigation: Apprehensive Communication. Created and used since the 1970s, this notion "is used when an individual or a learner feels fear to speak in the target language in front of another person" (Amogne and Yigzaw, 2013). As a consequence, while it is true that the 10 commandments mentioned above can be very helpful in reducing this *panic* or *anxiety* that many young people may experience, it is also important to apply certain oral strategies in the classroom to give them confidence and, above all, motivation.

Having said so, a set of practical activities aimed at enhancing students' fluency in spoken English has been suggested (Tejada and Nieto, 1996). These exercises are designed to be enjoyable, creating a more relaxed environment for pupils to express themselves orally. These include discussions, a technique that encourages the creation of conversations and exchanges on topics *familiar* to the learners; memorisation of dialogues, which apart from being open-ended, provide better syntax or oral games that with the help of other materials, such as pictures or texts, help young people give instructions and interrogate their classmates. It is also important to stress *stories* and *speeches*, being the teenagers the ones who tell a story to the rest of their peers and, finally, *role-playing*, in which the pupils take on and play the role of a specific character.

In closing, the implementation of speaking strategies in the English class is of paramount substance. These not only reinforce language proficiency, active engagement and authentic language use but also facilitate error correction, feedback and motivation among students. By prioritising them, instructors can effectively empower teenagers to become competent and confident communicators of English.

3.5. PLAYFUL LEARNING

"Imagine a group of neighbourhood children playing on a playground. These children are pretending to be part of a family, with different children taking on different roles in the family (....). At first glance, this appears to be a simple game of pretend. But when viewed through the lens of playful learning, we see that the children are actually building much more than a pretend family. As they negotiate roles, they are building the skills of communication and collaboration". (Zosh et al., 2017, p. 10).

Always adapting the previous strategies to suit the specific needs of our pupils, as teachers, we have the responsibility to combine play and academic content to create an engaging and enjoyable learning experience. This is precisely what is known as "playful learning", an educational approach that, while often associated with early childhood education, can also be advantageous for adolescents, permitting them to explore, experiment and learn through playing.

Even if this appealing methodology is not usually part of the course curriculum and, as a result, sometimes, it can be hardly integrated into the lesson (Fergurson et al., 2019), it is also a fundamental source of motivation and involvement, capable of generating positive and dynamic atmospheres that encourage active participation and a love for learning. Effectively, as the web page Heather R. Hayes and Associates (2020) confirms, adolescents explore and uncover their interests and innate abilities by engaging in play. In this way, it also seems to be a methodology completely convenient for their personal and cognitive development, providing them opportunities to engage in problem-solving, critical-thinking and decision-making (Ferguson et al., 2019). In addition, "play is an activity or expression that is carried out with the goal of *increasing joy with respect to oneself and their surroundings*. It involves an enthusiastic and *in-the-now* attitude or approach and is highly interactive among players or with the activity itself" (Van Vleet and Feeney, 2015, p. 640). In fact, cooperative games, role-playing activities and group projects promote social interaction, teamwork, and the development of interpersonal skills, as it lets teenagers learn how to collaborate, negotiate, and communicate effectively. Play also allows young people to investigate and

express their emotions, because, being under safe and non-threatening circumstances, they are highly likely to develop empathy and raise their self-awareness through moments of reflection and introspection. These skills are valuable not only for academic success, but also for managing sentiments in various aspects of life.

However, within this present-day learning procedure, diversion can adopt many different forms, among which we find, for example, pretend play, mobile play and digital games (Ferguson et al., 2019). While it is true that technological devices and applications are indispensable in the lives of adolescents today, the following paper will be focused on the influence of role-playing, where drama is also another one of the protagonists.

3.6.   ROLE-PLAYING

In order to gain a proper understanding of the didactic proposal, it is essential to elucidate the central component of such an activity, that is, role-playing. As maintained by the Cambridge Dictionary, this exercise involves "pretending to be a particular character and to behave and react in the way that character would". To this definition, we must add the words of Yardley-Matwiejczuk (1997), who upholds that "role-playing is a distinct form of imaginative play where individuals actively take part in a series of verbal and/or non-verbal interactions adopting an "as if" connection with a predefined set of instructions that depicts the qualities of a different persona". Certainly, in spite of having gone through a period of low popularity, these pretended and creative practice have, at least, three positive aspects**:**

> In the first place, they can be good fun and are thus motivating. Secondly, they allow hesitant students to be more forthright in their opinions and behaviour without having to take responsibility for what they say in the way they do when they are speaking for themselves. Thirdly, by broadening the world of the classroom to include the world outsider, they allow students to use a much wider range of language than some more task-centred activities may do (Harmer, 2007, p. 353).

On top of that, as Boudreault himself (2020) has experienced and testified: "ESL/EFL professionals need to use this medium more because the artificial world of the classroom can be transformed into a quasi-real language situation and provides endless amount of opportunities for student's personal growth" (p. 48). After all, drama not only enables us to teach grammar and phonetics, but also possesses the transformative power to change both the actors and the audience. In addition, we should also remember that acting, due to its interactive and visual nature, holds the potential to create an amusing and unforgettable learning experience for pupils.

It is precisely for this last reason that we cannot approach the concept of "role-playing" without specifying the advantages of its applications in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. To begin with, this type of game, in contrast to curricular activities and lessons, makes the teacher become less active, giving up trying to control everything that happens around him or her. It is now that youngsters are finally starting to take responsibility for their own learning: they put all of their language skills into practice, they let their imagination run free and, most of all, they begin to think much more independently and freely, without feeling guilty about the use of their words or for making mistakes, as supported by Harmer (2007).

Along the same lines, there are studies that prove that role-playing can be very beneficial for the improvement of young people's self-esteem (Porter-Ladousse, 1987). Indeed, as we have already mentioned in the previous paragraph, teaching them not only to be in charge of their tasks but also to develop problem-solving skills and to enhance management and organisational competencies on their own makes them feel very proud of their progress. This realisation, obviously, causes them great happiness and joy, a fact which, although favourable to their *amour propre* or self-assurance, also leads them to carry out their representations much more proficiently, without fears or pressures that block their learning. As if it was not enough, acting out can also help pupils with certain types of educational needs. To cite an instance, psychiatric conditions such as autism, schizophrenia or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) often benefit from the use of role-playing and theatre-based interventions, as they constantly improve social skills, verbal expression, interpersonal behaviour and self-esteem (Corbett et al., 2014; Corbett et al., 2014; Wanneburg and Van Niekerk, 2019; Wilkes-Gillan et al., 2016; Yotis, 2017).

In closing, drama can play a notable role in the acquisition and improvement of their English skills too. In reality, by imitating the performance of other characters, it is more than logical that both fluency and pronunciation of certain words (including its prosodic features) in the target language are well-polished or perfected. Furthermore, we must not forget that role-playing is inherently an interactional activity as it permits participants to actively engage with each other, communicate, and react to one another's action and announcements within the context of the portrayals they are performing. As Kusnierek (2015) states: "Altering the classroom interaction is important because it prevents learners from getting bored when working still on their own. There is also a greater opportunity of different opinions and varied

involvements (...) and it encourages learner's autonomy by enabling students to make their own choices within the group" (p. 85).

In conclusion, role-playing exercises offer significant advantages in ESL classes. By engaging in simulated scenarios, learners are highly likely to enhance their language, social and communication skills, learning to develop empathy and adapting their language and behaviour to diverse situations. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that drama also cooperates with confidence building, since students by taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zones, are not only overcoming fear of making mistakes, but they are also developing a positive attitude towards language learning.

3.7.   PEER ASSESSMENT

As detailed in previous sections of this study, "motivation" refers to the internal or external factors that drive subjects to pursue and achieve their goals. Indeed, in the context of teenagers, it plays a crucial role in their academic performance, personal growth and various other areas of their lives. For this reason, during this stage of life, peer support and encouragement can fuel their stimulus, as positive feedback and recognition can inspire them to set goals, work hard, and strive for success:

> "Adolescence is bound up, after all, with a pronounced search for identity and a need for self-esteem; adolescents need to feel good about themselves and valued." (Harmer 2007, p. 26).

> "Of course; teenage students often have an acute need for peer approval, too (or, at the very least, are extremely vulnerable to the negative judgments of their own age group)" (Harmer, 2007, p. 83).

Born in the mid 1990s, this technique, in which individuals of the same age group or social circle are given the chance to rate the work or performance of their equals, is known as peer assessment. This methodology, however, as fresh as it may seem, can present certain barriers. It is not only teachers who may feel anxious and nervous about leaving a part of their work in the hands of their learners (Topping, 2003), shifting their roles from being the sole evaluator to that of a facilitator, but students themselves may experience similar feelings. In this context, certain learners might place greater importance on evaluations conducted by experts compared to those made by their peers, disregarding the latter due to a lack of consistency between the professional's viewpoint and that of their equals (Seifert and Feliks, 2018). To make matters worse, often, youngsters, believing that assessment is the direct responsibility

of the educational guide, do not take this activity very seriously, and are therefore led by the type of relationship they have established with their classmates. For this very reason, "friendship also influences students' assessment in which they give a good score to their close friends and bad score for those who have problems with them" (Musfirah, 2019, p. 71).

Others diverge from this affirmation, defending that this new approach can play an essential role in the learning process of students. Among them are, for example, Divjak and Maretic (2017) who confirm that "peer-assessment engages students to become more active learners, take responsibility for their learning, to apply deeper learning strategies and to gain a better understanding of their own subjectivity and judgment" (p. 24). As if this was not enough, Sadler and Good (2006) tried already to detail the previous definition given some years ago, corroborating that this new attitude towards evaluation has four advantages: it is *logistical*, as it can alleviate the workload of teachers, who can now focus on preparing the proceeding, provide guidance and validate the assessment; *pedagogical*, since it promotes a deeper understanding of the subject; *metacognitive* because students become more invested in their own learning and *affective*, fostering a stronger sense of collective ownership thanks to the adolescents' productivity and cooperation. In other words, peer assessment helps teenagers develop the ability to critically evaluate the quality and effectiveness of others' work, a skill that is of use in various professional and academic contexts where critical thinking and judgement are essential.

Along the same lines, equals may offer insights, suggestions and constructive criticism that educators may not have considered, creating thus a better communication between both parties. This diverse feedback can enrich the learning experience and provide a broader range of perceptions for advancement. Notwithstanding, in order to enhance all the strong points described so far, anonymity is indispensable, be it unidirectional or bidirectional. As believed by Seifert and Feliks (2018) only in this way, can the person being tested reduce the apprehension or uneasiness levels and the examiner be ensured full freedom of expression.

In closing, peer assessment can positively influence teenager motivation by promoting autonomy and self-reflection, but notably, by the desire to be liked and to make an impression on their classmates, the only way to obtain the highest score. When implemented effectively and supported by instructors, this type of evaluation can be a powerful tool for enhancing autonomy and fomenting a deeper involvement in the schooling performance.

4. METHODOLOGY
4.1. GENERAL METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Because of the nature of the research, this TFM mainly follows the qualitative approach, which aims to understand and interpret social phenomena by examining the subjective experiences and perspectives of a specific individual or a group. In other words, given that I wanted to comprehend, explore and analyse ideas, my main intention has always been to receive detailed feedback from the participants, mostly after having effectuated the communicative strategy, i.e., the role-playing. To do so, not only have three questionnaires been used (See Annex 1), but classroom observation has been equally needed and revealing. Only after having summarised, categorised, and interpreted the results, I have been capable of verifying whether my hypothesis formulated at the very beginning was correct or accurate. Nonetheless, since it was a trial conducted with a limited number of students, I refrain from extrapolating the findings, even though they could potentially be applicable in a comparable setting.

To attain authentic results, I implemented an intervention project in a Secondary level classroom, taking the pupils themselves as the object of study. For this purpose, my study was conducted at the "Institut de Vic", the largest public secondary school in Osona. With around 180 teachers and more than 1800 students, this educational institution offers not only ESO studies but also three different modalities of Baccalaureate (Humanities and Social Sciences; Science and Technology and Baccalaureate with sporting teaching, that, unlike the others, allow adolescents to obtain the diploma in three years). Besides, it also has 22 Vocational Training Courses which, in addition to covering different branches of knowledge, are carried out in dual mode (in class and in a real-world company). Regarding the linguistic reality of the high school, although the "Institut de Vic" is located in one of the regions where Catalan has a truly significant presence among the population, a portion of the boys and the girls who attend it is formed by children of immigrants and, as a result, each of them possesses different cultures, traditions languages, and backgrounds in general. In this way, even though Spanish is a part of their lives (mainly for South American youngsters), in the lessons, they always try to communicate in Catalan, the vehicular language of the building.

Given this information, it should be noted that the choice of the location has not been made randomly. On the contrary, the "Institut de Vic" has become the setting for such an experiment because it was the place where I had been assigned to perform my master's

degree internship. In fact, it was precisely during my stage there that I was able to carefully observe each one of the groups that my mentor was in charge of: 1 of 3rd of ESO and 3 from 4th of ESO. Nonetheless, taking into account that two of these classes were made up of pupils with obvious learning difficulties, which is why they had been placed in what is known as *Aula Oberta*, I decided that the adolescents that were going to be involved in my investigation would be those belonging to the remaining classrooms: 4th of ESO B, which, from now on, will be called "focus group" and C, the "control group". This latter notion means that the learners of this particular classroom were not able to carry out the role-playing in the same way their other classmates did, but they simply followed the curricular Speaking activities proposed by the Unit we were dealing with at that time: create a dialogue that they would have, in their real life, in a specific shop (department store, car dealership… etc.) (See Annex 4). This differentiation was made not only on the basis of the teenagers' level of English (which was much higher in group B [B2] than in group C [A2-B1]) but especially on the basis of their behaviour and the commitment shown to the proposed task. After all, working with motivated and dynamic individuals would facilitate the elaboration, preparation, and subsequent performance of the oral strategy under examination.

Ultimately, regarding classroom methodology, I considered it appropriate to divide the pupils into small groups (between 3 and 4 people) as I believed, as demonstrated in the theoretical background, that collective work can also bring them many benefits. I then assigned them a situation to act out (always in line with their tastes) (See Annex 2) which they would present in the form of a short video, as if it was a real sketch, in front of their classmates.

4.2.   DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The instrument design has played a crucial role in this study since, without it, neither the thinking-up nor the organisation of the role-playings would have been put into effect. Likewise, the peer assessment, one of the constituent blocks of this thesis, would not have taken place either. With this in mind, the different tools that have been used to take this project forward have been: 2 questionnaires for the focus group (See Annex 1), which have been performed twice (before and after the implementation of the communicative practice); 1 quiz for 4th of ESO C, the control group (See Annex 1); a set of cards with the different situations to role-play in groups (See Annex 2); a brief and simple rubric, specifying the different criteria to be taken into consideration (See Annex 3) and the observation made in class as a trainee teacher, which although seemingly of no use, was certainly revealing.

With reference to the two different questionnaires, it should be cited that both of them were designed (by me) with *Google Forms* and subsequently uploaded to the Virtual Classroom of the 4th of ESO in the high school's Moodle. The first of them, entitled "The personal tastes and interests of our teenagers", was created at the end of February with the aim of discovering, as its title suggests, what the sources of inspiration or stimuli of the students were. To find out this information, I asked them some of the following questions: "Which of the following platforms do you normally use to watch your TV series or movies?"; "In which language do you watch them?"; "Can you name your three favourite TV series/films?" "Why do you love them that much?" "What makes it interesting"?; "If you could choose a character (one of the series you have just mentioned), which one would you be?", among others (see Annex 1). Although these data may seem irrelevant, they really helped to both plan the premises of the role-playing (See Annex 2) and form and organise the groups in which the sketches were to be performed.

Concerning the second one, generated at the end of March and whose heading was "Let's play our favourite TV shows", I would like to say that it was, without a doubt, the tool that provided me with the most valuable information: "What do you think about role-playing in class? "Have you done it before"?; "What did you like the most about this activity? "And the least"?; "How did you feel when preparing it?"; "And when it came to recording your sequence?"; "Would you have planned the role-playing differently?"; "If so, how?"; "What would you have liked to act?"; "How did you feel when you discover that your classmates were going to put a mark on you?"; "Did you make an effort to do it better?"; "Would you recommend this activity to another English teacher so as to do it in a Speaking class?" (see Annex 1). Indeed, having been intended as a self-assessment exercise on the suggested oral technique, *i.e.* role-playing, the answers of each of the pupils to the previous questions gave me the possibility to learn how they felt at the moment of arranging, filming, and putting themselves in the shoes of the real actors. Furthermore, this practice also permitted them to reflect on their learning process, their involvement and their responsibility towards the task.

Touching the 3rd quiz, distributed only to the students of the control group, it contained questions very similar to those of the second questionnaire as, like the previous one, "Let's go shopping" was basically used as a self-assessment instrument (see Annex 1). Actually, I wanted to check whether, even though this group of adolescents had to follow the role-playing proposed by the textbook (see Annex 4), the pupils were still attracted by this

oral strategy, whether it motivated them and, above all, whether it helped them both with their fluency and eloquence in English and with working collectively. As acknowledged above, conducting this brief written "interview" allowed them to look back on their performance and work and me, as the investigator, to carry out a better differentiation or contrast of the results. Before moving on to the next paragraph, I should clarify that in this group, peer assessment was not done. In reality, apart from not having enough time, I wanted the lesson to develop normally, and unfortunately, the latter process is never part of their curriculum English classes.

Apropos of the rubric, formulated solely and exclusively to carry out the peer assessment, it is important to indicate that it turned out to be a little ambiguous and not very understandable, at the beginning, as the final year ESO learners were not used to utilising such an assessment methodology. Accordingly, a few days earlier, I explained to them both how it worked and the criteria to be scored (see Annex 3). Once done, I thought it would be best to use a scale of points from 0 to 2, each of them gradually representing the symbology commonly used by their teachers at the educational centre when marking their homework or exams. It was thus: 0p. (*NA = No apte*); 1p. (*AS= Assoliment Suficient*); 1,5p. (*AN= Assoliment Notable*); 2p. (*AE= Assoliment Excel·lent*) (see Annex 3). These designations did not confuse and therefore facilitated their work as examiners. The last step that I took was to provide a space to leave a comment (see Annex 3) that, in addition to the individual criteria, summarised the total quality of the work based on the combined assessment of all the aforementioned premises. In short, the rubric at issue was supposed to be an excellent instrument not only to examine their peers' labour (and even their own) but also to understand what areas the adolescents excel in and where they need to improve, fostering their growth and development in the assessed skills.

With respect to the classroom observation, I gathered data specifically pertaining to the participants' individual reactions and responses. Nevertheless, as indicated in the previous section, the choice of the group to join this research was actually made thanks to the prior monitoring that I had conducted before, when I was only a mere witness to the situation. Frankly, because of their behaviour, the way they approached the subject, their dynamics and their general optimism and willingness to cooperate, I knew that 4th of ESO B had to be the winner. That is why, from that moment on, I started to pay much more attention to the components of this busy but fruitful school classroom.

4.3. DATA COLLECTION

As mentioned in the previous part, the boys and girls of 4th of ESO had to answer the first questionnaire during the last week of February. In order to do so, they utilised the first 10 minutes of the lesson (the first one I was going to give in my internship) and, obviously, they had to do it each one individually with their respective laptops. The second quiz was carried out in a very similar way: although it is true that it was replied much later, at the end of March, the learners had to complete it online one by one, without sharing their opinions and points of view with their other classmates. This was the only way I could be sure to get completely truthful results. Of course, prior to administering the questionnaires, my mentor explained to them the purpose and instructions of the questions, ensuring that any potential misunderstanding was avoided. Additionally, the teenagers were given assurance that their answers would only be used for research purposes, that is, for the completion of this Master's Degree Final Project. Similarly, concerning the questionnaire for the control group, it also had to be answered separately, automatically after their acting in the class.

My mentor and the tutors of both classes (4th of ESO B and C) were notified about the study's nature and objectives. After coordination with the school, it was determined that due to the investigation's specific requirement (only group recording), obtaining additional permission forms was unnecessary. The youngsters had already provided their consent as far as the general use of information for academic purposes is concerned. Therefore, there was no need for them to repeat the same process on this occasion.

As for the rubric, the procedure of collecting the necessary information was fairly straightforward. As it was a matter of giving marks to their peers, who, we have to recall, worked in small groups of 3 or 4 people, I decided that they would work, in the same way, collectively. That being the case, once they were all organised with their scene "partners" in different parts of the classroom, I distributed two sheets of paper to each of them: on the first one, there was a detailed description of the 5 criteria to be evaluated related to the videos presented (Special Effect, Characterisation, Pronunciation, Fluency and Originality) (See Annex 3); on the second worksheet, they could find the rubric itself, which they had to fill in, together and as honestly as possible, just after viewing the audiovisual material (See Annex 3). In this, they could also leave a comment on which performance they had enjoyed the most and the justification for it (See Annex 3). Once this assignment was finalised, the *reviewers* of the short films were to hand over to me the agreements and conclusions they had reached.

At last, it only remains to announce that classroom observation was accomplished in a quick and easy way. In truth, without them knowing that they were being analysed while writing the dialogues and, specifically, when watching their own videos and those of their classmates, I began to carry out anecdotal records. To rephrase it, this term means that, while they were working in groups, I took brief notes about specific behaviours or events of interest. These reports helped me, later on, to both analyse the information, identifying patterns, trends, strengths and areas for rectification and to draw conclusions. It is significant to bear in mind that maintaining an open communication with other instructors, in this case my mentor, and with pupils themselves can help create a supportive and cooperative environment for effective data collection and interpretation.

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

As pointed out previously, in section 4.1, the analysis of data in this study adheres to the principles of qualitative methodology, that is to say, on non-statistical methods. "This means that no aspect of the research design is tightly prefigured, and a study is kept one and fluid so that it can respond in a flexible way to new details or openings that may emerge during the process of investigation" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 37). Consequently, the individual data derived from the three questionnaires, the rubric and the classroom observation primarily relies on the participants and the researcher's perception and judgements, not yielding to orders of a numerical nature.

With reference to the earliest questionnaire, I firstly read through all the pupils' responses to familiarise myself with the content. This step helped me gain a general understanding of the data, starting to identify common TV series. Once I had all the titles written down and recorded in an excel spreadsheet, I proceeded to form groups. To do this, I organised the students according to their tastes in television, making, thus, the task much more enjoyable for them. However, I formerly had to carry out an extensive search on the theoretical or literature framework of the TV production in question, finding out about the characters who appear, their personalities and the best-known scenes they had starred in. It is precisely these findings which let me create the premises of the various role-playings (See Annex 2).

Again, as Dörnyei (2007) specifies: "Qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 38). For this very reason, in

the second quiz, teenagers were interrogated, one more time, so that I could examine the results of the realisation of this activity, *id est*, role-playing. Yet, as I wanted to obtain results in a summarised and clear way, I considered it appropriate to categorise the open-ended responses into polar opposites (yes/no). In such a manner, this approach offered me a qualitative representation of the prevalence of these two different values, allowing for later comparison and prioritisation.

On a similar note, while it is true that, theoretically, the data contained in the rubric should have been examined in a mathematical way, it turned out to follow the rules of the qualitative perspective. The fact is that, in spite of having asked the adolescents to rate their peers' work with a number from 0 to 2, being always objective towards their equals' work, they decided to grade them by virtue of the bonds of friendships that united them. This being said, it is interpreted that the analysis did not fail to capture examiners' subjective opinions and experiences. This is why they did not faithfully represent the real grades that the focus group should have got, nor did they ascertain the accuracy and veracity of the results obtained.

Finally, as to the class observation, I concluded that the best method for scrutinising the object under examination, namely the students *themselves*, was through a comparison. It is at this point that the control group takes over. Certainly, by organising my surveillance and consequent notes into different categories (classroom management, behaviour, non-verbal language, dedication and motivation) and cleaning any type of inconsistencies and errors, I was able to recollect key patterns and trends in both groups that aligned with my analysis objectives**.** For this reason, when I finished interpreting and drawing an inference, as a researcher, I discovered significant data for the resolution of my hypothesis.

5.   RESULTS OF THE STUDY

As mentioned on the previous page, this section presents the results of the questionnaires conducted, the peer assessment rubric and the observation made in class, both at the time of preparing the task or when carrying out the performances/viewing the videos. Nevertheless, they will not be interpreted yet: they will simply be shown and listed to facilitate the reader's understanding.

- QUESTIONNAIRE Nº1: "The personal tastes and interests of our teenagers", although intended for each one of the students in the focus group, was finally answered by a total of 19 teenagers, as the rest were either not in class or did not have access to it. Still, their responses were ample enough to demonstrate two facts: the first one was that currently, the most used platform for watching films and series is Netflix; the second evidence showed that the favourite language to do so is either Catalan or Spanish, as it is more comfortable and understandable for them. As far as the series themselves are concerned, I obtained 32 different answers that included all kinds of genres and nationalities (American, Japanese, Spanish, Catalan, etc.). However, in order to create the role-playing premises (See Annex 2), I only took into consideration those that had been said the most by the respondents, among which the following stand out, as shown in the graph below: *Outerbanks* (17%); *La Casa de Papel* (17%), *Vis a Vis* (13%), *Inazuma Eleven* (9%), *Merlí* (9%), *Élite* (9%), *La Que Se Avecina* (9%), *Top Boy* (9%) *and Anne with an "E"* (8%).
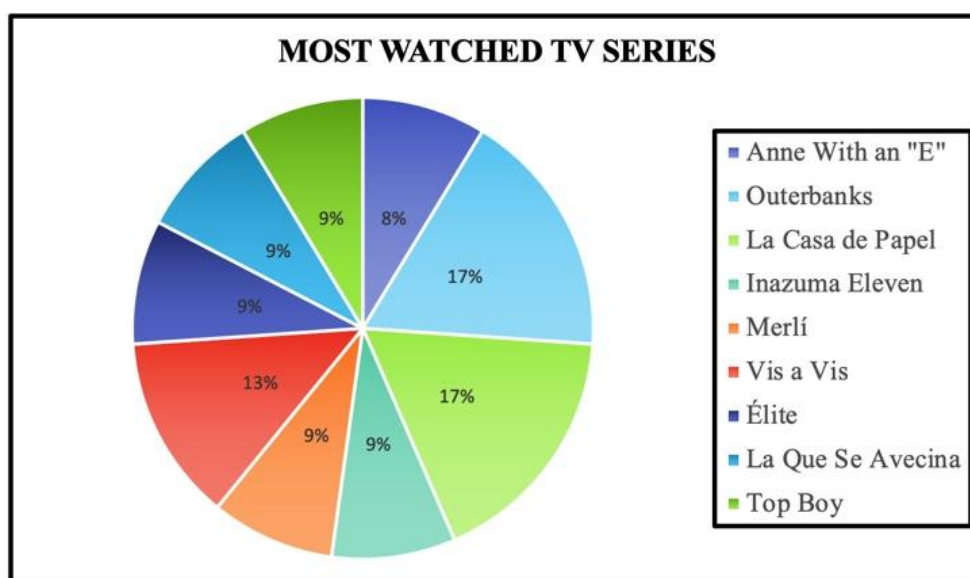
Graph 1: The TV series most watched by 4th of ESO C students of the "Institut de Vic".

Therefore, taking into account the total number of pupils who were going to participate in my study, 24, I decided to organise them into groups of 4 people, according to their interests and tastes (not based on their friendship ties). This decision led me, therefore, to get rid of 3 other television productions which, even if entertaining, I estimated *inappropriate* or *unethical* to show in a school context.

● QUESTIONNAIRE Nº2: "Let's role-play our favorite TV shows!" was, again, a completely open questionnaire, where there was no single option to choose from. For this very reason, I received a wide variety of responses regarding the practice of this oral strategy in class, ranging from positive criticism to, in some measure, negative comments. Although all the teenagers loved the activity, not all of them felt the same way when planning and interpreting it afterwards. As was to be expected, I found a range of students who, thanks to being completely motivated and active, thoroughly enjoyed both the recording and their performance. But others, much more withdrawn and shy learners, felt not only embarrassed but also panicked by the staging, the aspect of the exercise that was least liked overall. As it is impossible to produce a graph or a table that reflects the veracity and authenticity of the results, below are some of the opinions and feedback that the students gave at the time.
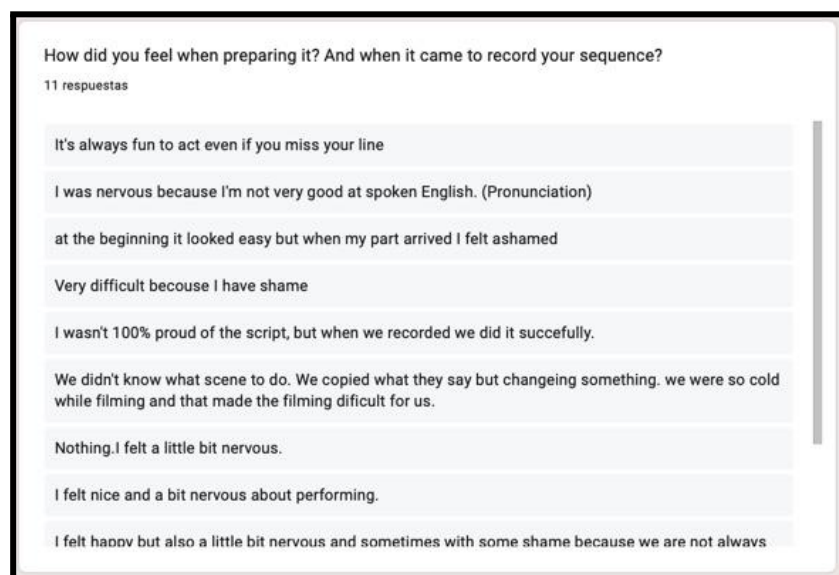
Figure 1: Sensations of some of the students of the focus group when it came to recording their sequence.
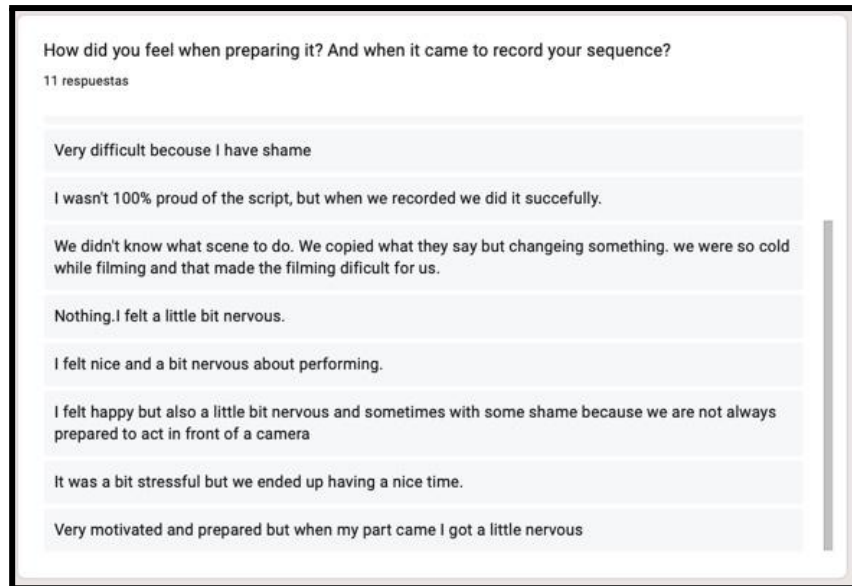
Figure 2: Sensations of some of the students of the focus group when it came to recording their sequence.

Continuing with the analysis of this same questionnaire, I am aware that while it was true that none of the pupils would change or alter the way in which the role-playing was devised, they did not come to the same agreement in the matter of the peer assessment: most of them stated that they felt good, proud and happy with their work, a fact that their classmates would corroborate. The rest declared that their fear or their pronunciation had clearly worked against them. To my surprise, there were even adolescents who answered that they had not been told such information, an affirmation not trustworthy, as, in previous classes, we had already presented and worked on the rubric they would be using to carry out this methodology. Finally, just one remark is left: the impact of this game on the participants was such that they did not hesitate to recommend it to other English teachers.

● THE PEER ASSESSMENT RUBRICS: After having collected and observed the rubrics distributed to each of the groups so as to assess their peers' video in the classroom, I noticed that none of the performances had obtained a numerical score lower than 8.5. In fact, the results of the grading guide indicated that all students consistently awarded their classmates, in most of the cases, the maximum mark across all the criteria, in spite of the range of numbers available (from 0 to 2). In that vein, the comments left on the back of the rubric were equally positive: actually, when assessing, the boys and the girls paid attention, above all, to the characterisation, the special effects and the degree of amusement conveyed. Without a doubt, group 2,

responsible for interpreting a scene from the series "Anne with an E", was the one that was most liked. Interestingly, the members of this formation were also some of the most popular in the classroom. This was literally this verification that led me to think that, instead of being completely objective, sticking to the instructors given by the researcher/teacher, the examiners let themselves be guided by their subjectivity. Be that as it may, this subject will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

Figure 3: Some of the final grades that students of the focus group gave to their peers' work.

Figure 4: One of the comments that a student wrote about "Group 2".

- CLASSROOM OBSERVATION (Focus group): Based on the classroom observations, the youngsters exhibited a positive response towards the proposed role-play in certain areas examined, while its impact was negligible in other ones. On the one hand, in general, pupils demonstrated increased attentiveness by actively listening to their classmates, participating in group work and engaging in more class interaction, especially, at the moment of creating the sketch and writing the consequent dialogues. Besides, when it came to watching the recorded videos, learners fully enjoyed the experience, expressing laughter and enthusiasm throughout. Though, what I was most interested to notice was the motivation and compromise that took hold of the students from the very first moment this oral game was introduced in the EFL classroom. On the other hand, sometimes, the most troublesome and active young people showed a disruptive attitude by disregarding the teacher's instructions and failing to complete the required tasks. However, after talking to them and making them reflect on their actions, they were equally hard-working and responsible, carrying out performances that were difficult to imitate or surpass. Thus, to summarise, it could be said that in general, the results indicated that the participants did not display any negative reactions to the aspects that were being studied, specially, *stimulus and fluency.*

Before closing this section of the investigation, it is essential to let the readers know that these results, much to my surprise, were virtually identical to those acquired in the control group, that is, in 4th of ESO C. In fact, in that classroom, despite having to carry out a role-play based on the textbook (See Annex 4) and having only half an hour to prepare it, (as, unlike their classmates, they did not have to record themselves) they found the activity highly innovative and interesting, especially for practising their oral English.

- QUESTIONNAIRE 3: Entitled, this time, "Let's go shopping!", this questionnaire also served as a method of self-evaluation, not only for the students themselves, who were able to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the exercise, but also for myself, who wanted to check and evaluate the differences, if any, between the two classes. Nonetheless, their responses, once again, showed me that the role-playing had been very well received by 89.5% of the adolescents, who, in turn, stated that this activity, apart from being a wonderful idea to work on the orality of the target language, was also creative and extremely useful for learning collectively.

Undoubtedly, the answers that most caught my attention, even if expected, was that, in that case, the fact of having to perform their dialogue or respective roles in front of the class, without being able to use any kind of audiovisual support, made them feel under pressure and uncomfortable. In reality, public speaking is something that almost no one liked, even the teenagers who adored to be the focus of interest. Still, they agreed with their equals in recommending this oral game to other instructors.
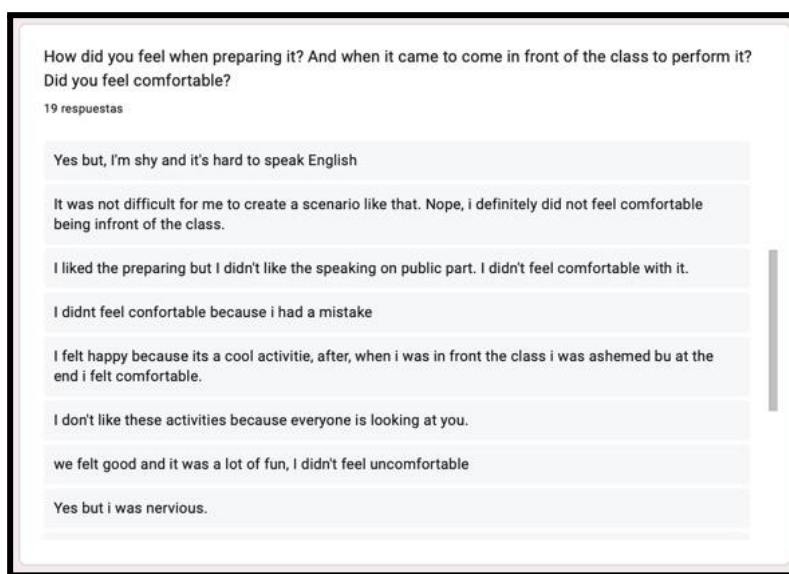
Figure 5: Sensations of 4th of ESO C students when it came to performing their dialogues.

- CLASSROOM OBSERVATION (Control group): Contrary to what happened with their equals of the other class, perhaps because they had less preparation time, I observed a general quiet atmosphere within the classroom. They kept incessantly calm, without having no one misbehaving or failing to obey the researcher's orders. Conversely, when the youngsters learned about the activity they were to present at the end of the hour, they quickly organised themselves in pairs or groups and got to work without a second thought. I was thrilled to see that working cooperatively provided them with lots of benefits: indeed, not only could they share ideas, but they could also help each other. Of course, although at certain moments, there were students who were a bit lazy or uncommitted to the task, in the end, they created truly rich and grammatically perfect dialogues, manifesting that when they set their minds to it, they can achieve anything they want. Finally, it is important to mention that, although the pupils knew that their classmates were not going to rate them, both actors and audience, roles that were constantly being rotated, did their best to respect the work of others.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Based on the objectives and research questions of the present study, the aforementioned results and correlations indicate a general inclination to believe that role-playing, our other object of study, is definitely an oral strategy that manages to integrate well into the dynamics of the class group. As it has been seen from the questionnaires created and distributed, as well as from first-hand observation by the research, this dramatic play is not only well received by the adolescents, but also brings them many advantages for both their personal development and their English language training.

Answering, therefore, the first investigation inquiry, it is more than evident that all the participants of this trial, including both the members of the focus and of the control groups, have strongly demonstrated that they liked this kind of activity. For them, most of whom were not used to doing it, carrying out this short performance seemed motivating and interesting, as it gave them the chance to get out of their comfort zone and, especially, to come into contact with a new methodology and way of learning. Moreover, always in line with the theoretical background explained, role-playing, as well as allowing young people to take responsibility for their homework, also invites them to use their imagination in a way that, in curricular lessons, they cannot. In fact, when they take the lead, even if they are inspired by a scene from their favourite series, they create completely new and unique dialogues, a mark of their essence; of their personalities; of the way they see the world. It is for this very reason that they feel comfortable with the planning, organisation and creation of their sketches, as these actions let them be themselves, that is, to express themselves freely and to invent a character that, although existing, they manage to make their own. This ease vanishes, however, when it comes to playing their roles in public or, in other words, in front of the whole class. While it is true that the pupils in the focus group, who were able to use an audiovisual medium to present their work, enjoyed projecting their videos and seeing themselves reflected on the screen, the same was not true of the control group. In reality, as detailed above, the fact of having to read the invented dialogues ahead of their peers caused panic in most students, who did not even dare to raise their eyes from the paper to avoid the gaze and reaction of their classmates. This datum proves that, even for the most reticent or shy learners, drama may not be sufficient to reduce their levels of distrust or apprehension, respectively.

As regards the second question I asked myself at the beginning of this paper, I can now confirm that engaging in the performance of a conversation in English can offer teenagers a language learning experience that is both dynamic and complementary in nature. As unbelievable as it may seem, just by changing the exercise format, leaving the book behind and focusing much more on their interests and motivations in life, they can develop and improve their interaction with the English language faster and more effectively. Subsequently, when pupils enter into a context of authentic communication, either to represent a scene from a TV series or film or a real-life situation, their linguistic skills, including vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, are stimulated. Peculiarly, I have discovered that this activation is mainly due to a better understanding of the cultural aspects, as well as to the non-verbal cues that accompany spoken languages. To comprehend this statement much better, we just have to look at the way young people imitate their idols. Indeed, they admired them so much that they not only look for information about their biography, for example, but also make an effort to move, think, gesture or speak like them. From what I have been able to witness in the high school, the same happens when they have to put themselves in the shoes of their favourite TV characters, whom, because of the attraction they feel for them, they know perfectly. It is this connection which, in turn, led them to move or articulate in a more creative and refined way and to develop a sense of accomplishment when successfully performing their dialogues. To all this, we should add the element of fun and excitement, factors which, precisely because of their motivational nature, can contribute to a more positive attitude towards language learning and sustained progress over time, as the participants in 4th of ESO C, the control group, argued. That said, it could be corroborated that role-playing has such an impact on youngsters' stimuli that it automatically becomes a truly reliable tool to motivate them and enhance their eloquence.

To conclude, let us now focus on the power and influence of peer assessment, a strategy that, while innovative, may not be as successful as expected. Actually, despite what experts such as Sadler and Good (2006) or Harmer (2007) claim, this rating technique might not play an important role in the dramatic performance of learners, going even unnoticed. As it can be read in the previous section, more particularly, in the part dealing with the answers obtained in the questionnaire "Let's role-play our favourite TV shows" (See Annex 1), many of the respondents of the focus group insisted on not knowing that their equals were going to score their work, an evidence that makes clear the little significance and consideration they had towards this information. While this substantiation is completely understandable, since, for

their academic experience, students are used to being graded by their teachers, it is really frustrating, as a researcher, to realise that these adolescents have not been able to take advantage of the feedback from their peers or make constructive comments to them either. Doing so, as alleged by Divjack and Maretic (2017), not only would have enabled them to reflect much more on their learning process, paying attention to their strong points and mistakes, but it would also have enhanced their critical thinking, a categorically necessary competence in today's educational system. Therefore, this finding leads me to recognize that the participants in this study relied primarily on the emotional ties that bound them to one another, like Musfirah (2019) had already anticipated. In effect, instead of concentrating on the premises suggested by the trainee instructor (See Annex 3), they decided to be guided by their friendships. In addition, as many of the pupils had participated in the process of filming the scenes, they decided to score the groups with which they had collaborated with higher marks, resulting in an entirely subjective and poorly argued evaluation. Can, then, peer assessment be a trigger for students to strive to create a better performance and thus achieve a better result? Taking into account that the results of this research should not be seen as a reference or generalisation, it is serious to point out that, in this case, this type of approach has not caused the desired effect. Feasibly, having explained the criteria to be borne in mind in more detail would have made this *modus operandi* a better motivational instigator.

Consequently, after analysing and reflecting on the acquired outcomes, I have come to the conclusion that role-playing *per se* is an instrument that, without a doubt, inspires and seems fascinating to carry out in the EFL lesson. Besides being a non-curricular activity, as well as offering the possibility of becoming another individual, it allows gamers to disconnect from the educational or school world, breaking, with the imagination, the four walls that make up the classroom to reach unknown places. This report makes me realise that, virtually, it is the fun and the original exercises that invite students to foster their oral English skills which, contrary to what many teachers believe, are great. Therefore, the only problem seems to be to find the right means to empower adolescents to communicate in this language that, albeit not native, many of them are able to master without any problem. In effect, as this investigation has shown, if instead of trying to develop the learners' verbal competences through Oral Presentations, we fixate on their interests, tastes and motivations, we can find strategies that, without a doubt, meet their needs. This *affinity* not only makes them devote themselves to the task, but also allows both students and teachers to enjoy the learning process, one of the objectives that the "Department of Educació" should seek.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study has aimed to examine the efficacy of role-playing as an oral strategy. In order to find this information out, I not only looked at the correlation between these games and the students, but I also wanted to verify whether it was a sufficiently suitable tool to motivate them and boost their eloquence in the target language, as the title indicates. Similarly, I also paid attention to peer assessment, a methodology that can act as a possible inspiring driver, as it apparently pushes them to make a bigger effort when creating a performance.

In consequence, the researcher decided to create, in 4th of ESO classrooms of the "Institut de Vic" different situations to act out in which the students and, evidently, their oral skills were the protagonists. While it is true that the control group carried out the same game proposed by the textbook, in which they had to pretend to be the clients of a particular shop, the focus group had the objective of interpreting one of the scenes from their favourite series to represent it, later on, in front of their classmates. However, in order to discover much more about their interests and tastes as far as television is concerned, 6 different instruments were used to collect data: 3 different questionnaires, answered twice by the focus group (one at the beginning and the other one at the end, as a self evaluation tool) and once by the control group, a set of cards with the different situations to role-play in group; a rubric and the classroom observation.

In general, the results showed that role-playing is undoubtedly one of the best plans of action that any English teacher can use to stimulate their young pupils. As it has already been mentioned in the theoretical background, not only does it allow them to let their creativity and mind's eye run wild, moving mentally (4th of ESO C) or physically (4t B) to other workplaces, but it is also a means that certain teenagers can use to leave their shyness behind. In fact, in some cases, they adopted roles that were that different from their true personality that let them express with much more clarity and freedom. Moreover, we cannot overlook the fact that having to create either a sketch or a real-life circumstance together forced them to work in groups, a methodology that, surprisingly, was very well accepted and executed.

In relation to "confident speaking", applying drama in the EFL classroom seems to enhance the youngsters' oral abilities, pushing them to open up and, thus, to show all the knowledge they possess about the English language. Nevertheless, not everyone managed to create an unbreakable relationship with role-playing. Actually, some of the participants, especially

those in the control group, made it clear that, although it was an appealing game, it can also cause a certain amount of panic, above all, in the moment of having to act out or read the dialogues aloud in front of all their equals. Yet, this statement was not shared by the focus group who, after having had much more time to organise the activity and plan their interventions correctly, enjoyed watching themselves as real actors in their recordings. This realisation made the students aware of the fact that, in one way or another, they were completely capable of communicating and creating interactive situations in English, however simple some of them were. They just need someone to give them the opportunity to put their skills into practice.

Finally, I have learned that peer assessment, despite usually being an innovative method of evaluation in which classmates put themselves in the shoes of the educator, on this occasion, it did not produce the results that I had hoped for. Therefore, in addition to not having been crowd-pleasing enough, it was not carried out in an honest and objective way, as I would have liked. Instead, many of the adolescents rated the various performances on the basis of their friendship, not of that of the criteria indicated in the rubric, giving practically all the groups a score no less than 8.5. This revelation made me realise that, as a teacher, I should probably have devoted one more lesson to explaining the instructions; to detailing each of the premises in more depth and, most of all, to clarifying my learners what I expected of them with this task in question.

On a final note, notwithstanding the drawbacks encountered, based on the findings of this study, it can be inferred that motivation, particularly when coupled with games, significantly influences the language learning process. It is tangible that incorporating role-playing activities not only benefits pupils, but also increases their enjoyment of the learning experience.

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9.   ANNEXES

Annex 1: Questionnaires

- <u>The Tastes and Interests of Our Teenagers:</u> First questionnaire distributed to the focus group to discover their personal tastes and interests.

THE PERSONAL TASTES AND INTERESTS OF OUR TEENAGERS

For my TFM (Treball de Final de Màster), I have decided to focus on the analysis of the production of **spoken English**. To do so, I want to verify if:

1. "Role-playing" is a **comfortable and fun activity** to motivate students (that is to say, YOU) to speak in this foreign language.
2. **Co-evaluation** can make you strive and create a better interpretation to achieve, thus, a better result.

Having said that, in order to discover what your personal tastes and interests are, I invite you to answer (in a free way) the following questions. Then, I am going to collect them all and so as to create the different "role-playings" that you are supposed to write and interpret either in front of a camera or of your class.

Thank you very much for your collaboration!

vanessacamprubi@gmail.com Cambiar de cuenta

☐ No compartido

* Indica que la pregunta es obligatoria

Write your **full name** (do not worry! I am the only one who is going to see it) *

Tu respuesta

Which of the following platforms do you normally use to watch your favorite films/series? *

☐ Netflix

☐ Amazon Prime Video

☐ HBO

☐ SKY TV

☐ Movistar +

☐ Filmin

☐ Otro:

In which language do you watch them? *

○ In its original version

○ Always in Catalan or Spanish

If you always watch in Catalan or Spanish, why do you that?

Tu respuesta

Can you name your **3 favorite series**? (No matter what platform you use to watch *
them). Why do you love them that much? What makes it interesting? Be honest,
please.

Tu respuesta

If you could choose a **character** (of one of the series you have just mentioned) *
which one would you be? **Why?**

Tu respuesta
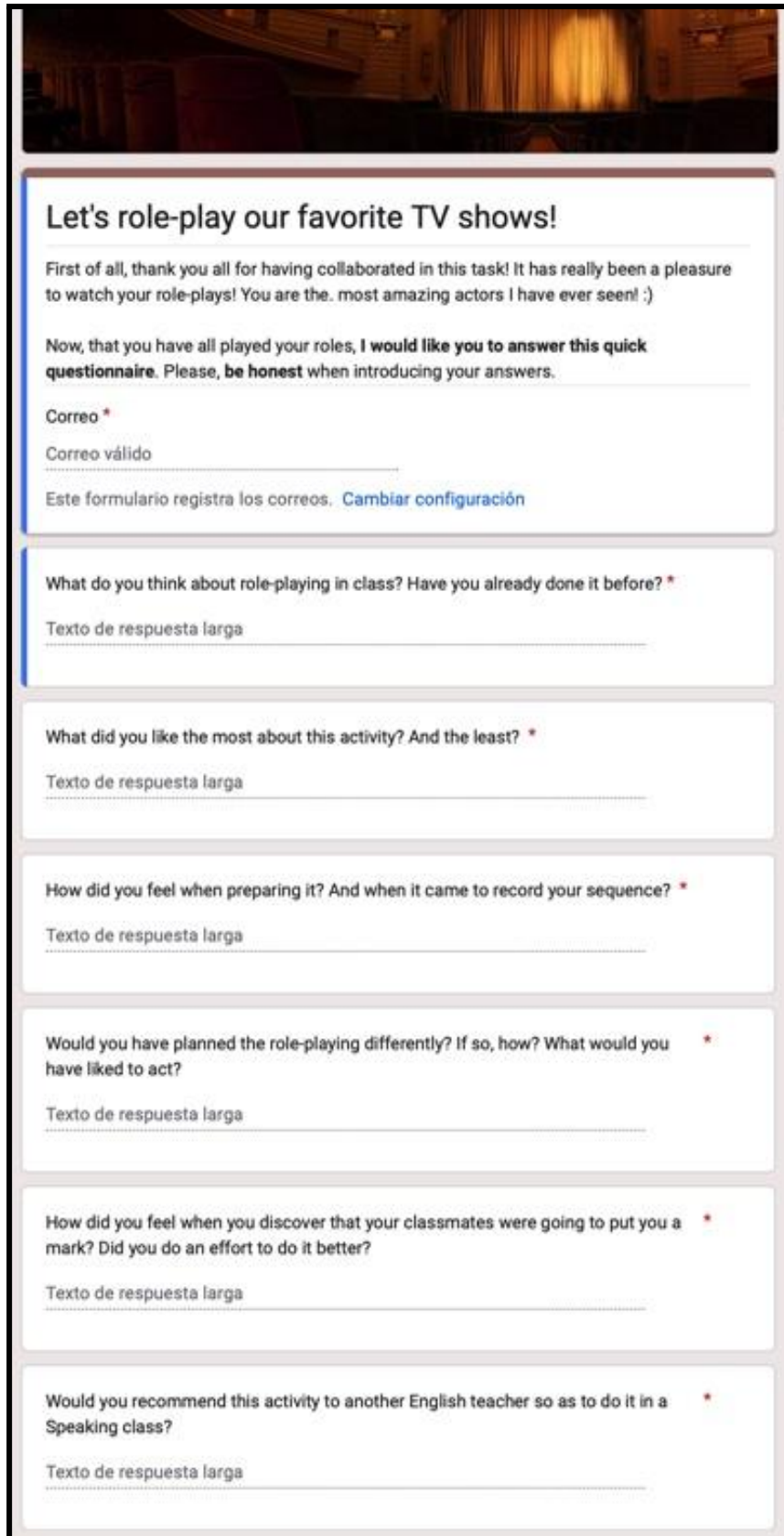
And, finally, what do you adore doing in your free time? **Name three activities**. *

Tu respuesta

Enviar   Borrar formulario

- Let's role-play our favorite TV shows!: Second questionnaire distributed to the focus group so that they could both give feedback on the activity and self-evaluate themselves.

● Let's go shopping!: First and only questionnaire distributed to 4th ESO C students with the aim of allowing them to give their opinion on the activity per se, as well as on their feelings at the moment of elaborating it and carrying it out in class.

Annex 2: The role-playings to act out in the EFL classroom

● These were the cards distributed in the class to the different members of the formed groups.

ROLE-PLAYING CARDS

OUTERBANKS

Characters: John B, Sarah Cameron, Kiara and JJ

Situation to role-play: Imagine you're a member of the Pogues. You're on the hunt for a long-lost treasure rumoured to be hidden in the Outer Banks. Describe how you would organize yourself to find it.

LA CASA DE PAPEL

Characters: The professor, Tokio, Berlin and Nairobi

Situation to role-play: Imagine you're part of the heist crew led by the Professor in "La Casa de Papel". All together, you're planning and executing a high-stakes heist at the Royal Mint of Spain. Describe your strategy.

VIS A VIS

Characters: Macarena Ferreiro, Zulema Zahir, Saray Vargas and Miranda Murillo

Situation to role-play: Imagine you're an inmate in the Cruz del Sur prison from "Vis a Vis". Choose a character and describe the challenges faced within the prison walls. Explore the complex alliance and rivalries that arise as you strive to survive.

MERLÍ

Characters: Merlí, Pol Rubio, Bruno Bergeron and Tània Illa

Situation to role-play: Imagine you're a student in Merlí's philosophy class. Engage in an intellectual discussion and share personal dilemmas related to "love". Embrace the spirit of curiosity and critical thinking.

INAZUMA ELEVEN

Characters: Mark Evans, Axel Blaze, Jude Sharp and Nelly Raimon,

Situation to role-play: Imagine you're a member of the Raimon Junior High soccer team from "Inazuma Eleven". Choose a character and describe your contributions to the team's success and the exhilarating you participate against rival teams.

ANNE WITH AN "E"

Characters: Anne Shirley-Cuthbert and The Cuthbert.,

Situation to role-play: Imagine the moment when Anna meets Matthew Cuthbert and, later, his sister, Marilla. Act out the scene, paying attention to the feelings of the orphan girl and those of the old siblings who take her in.

● Explanation of the 5 different criteria to take into account (by the focus group) when rating their videos: *Special effects, characterization, pronunciation, fluency and originality.,*

Let's role-play our favorite TV shows!

Project Name:
Role-playing games: A motivational tool to help EFL learners develop confident speaking.

SPECIAL EFFECTS	It refers to any visual or audio elements that you can make use when recording your sketching video. This could include things like animation, graphics, sounds effects or any other creative techniques that make the video visually attractive.
CHARACTERISATION	It refers to how well the students in the video interpret their roles or characters. Therefore, it can pay attention to the way participants express their emotions, personality traits and behaviors through their actions, expressions and gestures. Of course, this criteria also focuses on costumes.
PRONUNCIATION	It refers to the manner in which words are pronounced in English. In the context of evaluation sketching videos, this criterium concentrates in how well the adolescents pronoun their words: "The better pronounce; the better performance".
FLUENCY	It refers to the flow that people have at the moment of speaking. It takes into account, for example, the rhythm (he/she speaks fast/quickly?) and the spontaneity
ORIGINALITY	It refers to the uniqueness of the ideas and concepts represented in the sketching videos. Here, coming up with fresh and innovative content is much better than relying on clichés or copying existing material.

With these criteria in mind, you will have to evaluate the different video of your classmates.

- In the first one, the outline of the evaluation grid is provided, indicating, again, the criteria and with it, the range of marks (0-2) with their respective characteristics.

This is the rubrics that you have to follow to evaluate your peers' work.

CRITERIA	GRADE 0 (NA)	GRADE 1 (AS)	GRADE 1,5 (AN)	GRADE 2 (AE)
SPECIAL EFFECTS	In the sketch, there is not any special effect.	The special effects are poorly used.	The special effects appear quite often, but they are not well-integrated.	The special effects are creative and well-executed. They increase the comedic or dramatic elements of the sketches.
CHARACTERISATION	In the sketch, the characters are flat. They do not express anything.	The student has a little idea of the character, but he/she cannot imitate it properly.	Some characters show development, but other don't.	The characters are well-developed, consistent and effectively portrayed by the actors.
PRONUNCIATION	The pronunciation is unclear unintelligible.	The pronunciation has improved a little bit, but there are still quite a lot of mistakes.	The pronunciation is generally clear, but with occasional errors.	The pronunciation is clear, accurate and easily comprehensible during all the sketches.
FLUENCY	The actors are hesitant, they make a lot of mistakes, or they get in a blank.	The actors show some doubts or stumbles (tartamudeig)	The actors are generally fluent, but with occasional doubts.	The actors are confident, demonstrating strong fluency in their performances.
ORIGINALITY	The sketch is not original or creative. It is completely copied.	The sketch is not original, and it is based on clichés an overused ideas.	The sketch shows originality, but with elements that are not fully developed.	The sketch is very original, creative and innovative. It has been very well done.

- In the second one, we find the rubric that is to be filled by the students, that is to say, by the audience of the different groups. This is the main side of the sheet.

Please, evaluate the videos of your classmates taking into account the following legend:

LEGEND:	0 points (NA)	1 point (AS)	1,5 points (AN)	2 points (AE)

CRITERIA	GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4	GROUP 5	GROUP 6	GROUP 7
Special effects							
Characterisation							
Pronunciation							
Fluency							
Originality							
FINAL SCORE	/10	/10	/10	/10	/10	/10	/10

- On the back of the rubric, there is a space for comments. Here, students could anonymously say which performance they liked best, together with a short justification.

TREBALL DE FINAL DE MÀSTER
Let's role-play our favourite TV Series!

FACULTAT
D'EDUCACIÓ, TRADUCCIÓ,
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Once you finish, you are invited to complete the last section, called "Comments". There you can note **any observation you want**, including for example, the **justification** of your final mark or explaining **what you like most about the video** and what you have learnt about it.

Comments:

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

When it comes to evaluating your classmates, try to be as **honest** as you can. Try to be objective: look at both the **positive and** the **negative** aspects of their presentations, giving them advice on how to improve when necessary.

Annex 4: Role-playing proposed by the textbook

- This was the activity that the students of the control group had to carry out from the Marks, L. and Addison, Ch. (2015).