UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito parcial para

optar al título de:

Licenciada en Lenguas Extranjeras

Brenda Margarita López Pérez

Universidad de Antioquia

Escuela de Idiomas

El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia

2023

Enhancing Writing as Social Situated Practice Through Critical Media Literacy

Brenda Margarita López Pérez

School of languages, Universidad de Antioquia

Teaching Practicum and Research Advisor

Ms. Natalia Arias Patiño

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Thesis Advisor

Ms. Carolina Herrera Carvajal

Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

El Carmen de Viboral

June 2023

Abstract

This action-research aimed at enhancing writing as Social Situated Practice through Critical Media Literacy. It was conducted in a public school in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia with 29 ninth graders. Action strategies included the implementation of the 4-stage Empowerment Spiral model and the 5-stage Teaching Learning cycle. Data gathering instruments included diagnosis, research memos, focus group and students' artifacts. Findings obtained were: Unveiling format elements in media texts analysis boosted text power, taking action through writing, teaching and using the foreign language to develop activities involving CML and moving beyond surface level descriptions of authorship.

Keywords: Critical Media Literacy, Empowerment Spiral, Writing as Social Situated Practice

Título en español: Escritura como práctica social situada a través de la alfabetización mediática crítica.

Degree requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree in foreign language education (English- French) at the Escuela de Idioms, Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to Natalia Arias and Carolina Herrera, who contributed to the progress of this research and consistently offered support and guidance to me in this process, personally and professionally.

Additionally, I am grateful to the students who participated in this research and the institution for giving me the opportunity to further explore the teaching practice.

To my loving family, I am immensely grateful for their unwavering love, support, understanding and motivation throughout my educational pursuit. Their belief in me has been a constant source of inspiration.

I want to extend a special thanks to my friends, Brigith and Laura, who accompanied me in the highs and lows of this process. Their invaluable support has made this journey more fulfilling. In addition, I want to thank the three classmates with whom I have spent the last few months.

I would like to thank myself for not giving up despite the setbacks that I encountered along the way. I'm proud of the effort I have put into this work and I'm grateful for the self-discovery and personal development it has brought me. Special mention to my favorite band for providing the soundtrack to my countless study sessions.

Table of Contents

Preface

I am a student of foreign languages teaching program from a public university in Antioquia, Colombia. I am a teacher interested in learning more about the power of languages in societies. The desire to conduct this research has originally come from my willingness to research and write about language teaching from a critical perspective and to explore the applicability of critical approaches to language acquisition for high school students in the EFL context. This research study was carried out from August 2022 to June in 2023. As a pre-service teacher, I conducted the project in a public school in a rural settlement of El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia and I was assigned to observe a group of 29 ninth graders. This research project is aimed primarily at educators who recognize the importance of fostering students' critical understanding of the role of language in society.

Brenda Margarita López Pérez

El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia, June, 2023

Description of the Context

The institution where this action research project was carried out was a public school, located in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia (Colombia). This school's mission was to educate children and youngsters with values and to provide them with meaningful learning that they can use in their lives and in the transformation of their community. As for the vision, the school wanted to be recognized for its holistic pedagogical proposal and for the formation of integrated, competent, autonomous people who contribute to the construction of a society that generates peace. Finally, the pedagogical model adopted at this institution was a holistic one and the methodology proposed by the institution is Project-Based Learning; the projects were organized around three training axes: training for the development of intellectual competencies, training for coexistence and citizenship, and training for life and work skills (Proyecto Educativo Institucional, 2014).

As for the class, it was a 9th grade English class that took place 2 times a week, with a two-hour period. The English class was based on the textbook 'English, Please!' (Based on Theme-Based Approach), which is aligned with the Core Standards for Foreign Language Proficiency (National Bilingualism Program). The English classes were planned based on the Competencies in Foreign Language-English and referencing the pedagogical and methodological principles of the Suggested English Curriculum Proposal.

Participants in this study were 29 students, whose ages were between 14 and 17. Most of them lived in rural areas, near to the school. Students' English proficiency level was basic. Most of them had a visual and auditory learning style and many had trouble expressing themselves and communicating their ideas in English. Some of the activities that

students liked to do in class include practicing pronunciation, watching videos, and playing

games (Students' Questionnaire, February 24, 2022). Regarding my Cooperating Teacher

(CT), he holds a bachelor's degree in languages, Spanish and English. He has been teaching

for twenty-eight years, five months at the current institution.

The major problem that I observed in this class was the lack of meaningful use and

production of written language. The writing activities performed by the students were

limited to answering questions and transcribing texts.

Statement of Problem

Based on the observations period, I identified that activities mostly focused on

receptive skills (reading and listening), limiting the practice of meaningful use and

production of written language. Indeed, students remained only in reproduction and

memorization instead of production of ideas, they had poor development of high order

thinking skills and lacked literacy skills.

I noticed that students' use of the language was more about reproduction and

memorization of words and sentence structure than about the use of the language to express

ideas and opinions. To illustrate, during the observations, one of the few production

activities was to write a paragraph about their family members. Although the students had

the opportunity to produce with the language, no previous activity was developed to guide

the writing process and most of them ended up transcribing the same model without

changing almost anything (Class observation journal, August 9, 2022). Likewise, the

teacher of the class acknowledged that the skills she prioritized in the classroom were

listening and reading, and that by working on those skills, the receptive ones, students

would be able to produce either written or spoken language (CT' Interview, September 29, 2022). Consequently, the benefits that the use of the language for meaningful purposes, like expressing their ideas and opinions can bring were disregarded.

In addition to this lack of students' written production, the fact that most of the proposed activities were limited to low order thinking skills like remembering, understanding and, few times, applying, hindered the students' opportunities for challenging themselves and developing high order thinking skills. This is the case of the activities that were carried out in some classes, where students only had to remember words and phrases (Class observation journals, August 9, 16, 25, 2022). According to Westwood (2008) writing entails the adequate coordination of diverse cognitive, linguistic, and psycho-motor processes, which are related to the range of human thinking skills proposed by Bloom (1965). This led me to consider the importance of implementing a variety of activities that imply analyzing, evaluating, and creating since, as stated by Sholihah et al. (2021), high order thinking skills impacts all language skills. Therefore, those types of activities could become opportunities to improve writing skills.

Moreover, students lacked the literacy skills that help them understand and perform in the world they live in. In this sense, students could not decode ideologies that circulate through language and, henceforth, their options to make sense of the world and re-write what they see were overlooked. As claimed by Freire (1983) reading the word is not only reading the world, but it also always entails writing it or re-writing it. To illustrate, students once had the opportunity to do a project in which they could have developed literacy skills through the analysis of songs. Nonetheless, that project ended up focusing on linguistic

items only and lacked the analysis of how those linguistic items contained messages that could have a certain influence on them and ignored, similarly, the opportunity to write alternative versions that could better represent their realities (Class observation journals, August 23, 30, 2022). As a result, students could not move towards re-writing both language and world.

In conclusion, students' language learning purpose was reduced to reproduction and memorization, students' chances to work on high order thinking skills were limited and students lacked the skills to read the world that language speaks to, for and about. According to Thoman and Jolls (2005) student production is a key element in Critical Media Literacy (CML) because it allows students to apply theoretical concepts in the "real world", thus providing students with meaningful opportunities for written language use and production by engaging their experiences in today's media culture. Besides, CML allows students to learn and practice skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating, that are not only necessary in the writing process, but also to read and write the world.

Theoretical Background

In this section, I present the theoretical approaches and concepts that guided this action research. In the first place, I define Critical Media Literacy (CML). In second place, I provide some features of CML and the Empowerment Spiral strategy to implement it. Then, I describe the advantages, challenges, and the criteria to analyze the CML process. Later, I define writing production as a Social Situated Practice. And finally, I state the relationship between CML and writing production.

Critical Media Literacy is an approach that "provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the Internet" (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 21). Instead of viewing young people as passive consumers of dangerous content to protect them from this content, CML helps them to have the tools and skills to analyze, evaluate, interpret and create media texts (Mirra et al., 2018).

Thoman and Jolls (2005) describe 5 five basic concepts that are the central components of Media Literacy. From these concepts, 5 key questions are directly derived to help explore the analytical aspects of a media message, these concepts are:

1. All media messages are 'constructed' (Author).

2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules (Format).

3. Different people experience the same media message differently (Audience).

4. Media have embedded values and points of view (Content).

5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power (Purpose). (p. 22-27)

According to Mirra et al. (2018) "Teachers and students must analyze not only the text itself, but also the roles of the creator, the audience, and the stakeholders with interest in this power relationship" (p. 14). Writing is shaped by the social and cultural context in which it is produced. Therefore, analyzing the roles of the creator, the audience, and the stakeholders involved in the power relationship of media text can help students to see the broader implications of their writing, understand the power dynamics that exist between the writer and the reader, and how it can impact different audiences.

Regarding the strategy to be implemented, Thoman and Jolls (2005) describe a four-step model called Empowerment Spiral, based on Freire's work (1973). This cycle includes the steps of awareness, analysis, reflection, and action which were used in the development of this project. In the awareness step, students make connections after finding something that triggers their curiosity and leads them to a critical inquiry. The analysis consists of discovering the 'how' and 'what' about the media messages through key questions related to the basic concepts. In the reflection step, students identify the influence that media messages could have in their lives, taking into account their own values and worldviews. Finally, in the action step, learning by doing is encouraged, which can range from the development of internal awareness to the creation or dissemination of means of communication.

One of the advantages of using CML in the classroom is that, as stated by Kellner and Share (2007), CML functions as a guide for students and teachers to an understanding of ideology, power and domination, and how these are linked to media and information. Besides, "students not only gain knowledge about the content of contemporary media but perhaps more importantly, they learn and practice the skills needed to navigate one's way in a global media culture" (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 28). Additionally, according to Kellner and Share (2007), CML helps people to use media wisely, to discern and evaluate media content, effects and uses, and to create alternative media in order to be active rather than passive recipients.

Notwithstanding, one of the challenges of using CML in a classroom is that it is not strictly intended as a pedagogical model, but rather guidelines from which educators can

frame their concerns and strategies. Although the principles and programs may vary in

different contexts, it is essential to identify the elements and objectives necessary for good

media pedagogy provided by CML (Kellner & Share, 2007). Taking into consideration this

challenge and that CML is not an approach to teach foreign languages, I combined CML

with the 5-stage teaching-learning cycle to have a clearer guideline on how to teach the

language and guide students through the awareness, analysis, reflection, and creation of

media texts.

Regarding the Criteria to analyze the CML process, there are 3 levels of

consciousness according to Freire (2005). The lowest level is called intransitive, in which

the subject believes that he cannot change anything that happens in his life, that the inequity

is based on destiny, God or luck. The second level, the intermediate one, is the semi-

transitive, in which the subject can change things, but can only deal with problems one at a

time. The subject understands and is aware of the problems but does not relate them to the

external world, considering them accidents. The last level is critical consciousness, in

which subjects focus on structural and institutional explanations for issues. In this stage the

subject establishes connections between the issues and the social context and analyzes

reality.

Concerning the concept of writing production, for this action research, it is

portrayed as a Social Situated Practice that links language with what individuals and

communities are doing (Lillis, 2001). Therefore, writing relates us to our socio-cultural

contexts. Chala and Chapetón (2013) argued that "writing as situated practice takes place at

a specific moment in time and history and at a specific place in society; it makes up part of

the world and acquires meaning within the context where it occurs" (p.27). The production

of written texts goes beyond producing accurate written texts, social and cultural issues also

play a role in successful writing (Lombana, 2009). As claimed by Lillis (2001) writing can

be seen as an opportunity to learn and enhance the literacy practices, thus fostering changes

in the language classroom and in society. "Writing skills can be developed when the

learners' interests are recognized and when they are exposed to situations where they can

produce authentic pieces of writing" (Ahmed, 2011, p. 73). As reported by Chala and

Chapetón (2013) some key elements of writing as Social Situated Practice are the writer's

subjectivity, the writing process, the purpose and audience, the text as a product, and the

written genre power.

As for the language form, according to Nunan (2003) "writing is the mental work of

inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements

and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader" (p. 88). Besides, the CEFR (2020) establishes

three communicative language competences: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic, but

the object of attention for this research was only in two: linguistic and pragmatic

competences. The linguistic competence deals with general linguistic range, vocabulary

range, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary control, phonological control, and orthographic

control. The pragmatic competence deals with language usage, resources, and knowledge

(CEFR, 2020). Finally, Derewianka and Jones (2016) proposed a 5-stage teaching-learning

cycle, building knowledge of the field, supported reading, modeling, joint construction and

independent construction.

To conclude, according to Thoman and Jolls (2005) student production is a key element in CML because it allows students to apply theoretical concepts in the 'real world', thus providing students with meaningful opportunities for written language use and production by engaging their experiences in today's media culture. Furthermore, as Thoman and Jolls (2005) argue, CML allows students to learn and practice skills such as analysis, evaluation, and creation, which as stated by Westwood (2008) are fundamental in the writing process.

Research Question

What opportunities and challenges can the use of Critical Media Literacy bring to 9th grade students' written production as Social Situated Practice at a public institution in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia?

Objectives

General Objective

To analyze the opportunities and challenges that the use of Critical Media Literacy can bring to 9th grade students' written production as Social Situated Practice

Specific Objectives
1. To diagnose students' writing skills before using CML.
2. To identify how the use of the Empowerment Spiral, together with the 5-stage teaching-learning cycle, can help students use the language to become more aware of, analyze, reflect about and create media messages.

3. To examine students' improvements in writing skills when using Critical Media Literacy.

Action plan

This action plan lasted 11 weeks and it was based on the four-step Empowerment Spiral model suggested by Thoman and Jolls (2005) and the five-stage teaching-learning cycle proposed by Derewianka and Jones (2016). To address both frameworks, seven main actions were proposed, in which students collaborated in teams to accomplish these actions. The first action involved conducting awareness activities, such as classification of images, justification of ideas, jigsaw text, and posters, to build background knowledge and trigger critical inquiry. The second action was the implementation of supported reading, which included strategies like skimming, scanning, and making connections, to expand students' understanding of the issue. The third action included the application of analysis activities, like treasure hunt, hot potato, and group writing, these to uncover how and what led to the issue. The fourth action involved modeling through a labeling activity, which aimed at deepening knowledge of a text by focusing on its purpose, social function, and language features. The fifth action was 'Joint construction' which focused on specific language features and text structures through a paragraph writing activity. The sixth action was a reflection activity, The Mirror, Microscope, and Binoculars, which aimed to understand the implications or necessary actions for the issue. The seventh, and last, action, was 'Independent construction' that involved paragraph writing and media creation. This last action represented the stage of the empowerment spiral intended to empower participants to

create practical ideas and engage in hands-on learning. In this case producing their own written pieces on the issue.

Data was collected over a period of 2 months through a students' diagnosis, research memos, students' artifacts, and focus group. The diagnosis activity aimed at gathering information about students' writing skills at the beginning of the process. The research memos were registered after each lesson to describe students' responses to activities regarding the process development. They were analyzed with rubrics, which allowed me to draw general conclusions about students' overall performance. The focus group was transcribed to examine the effect of media critical analysis on the written production as Social Situated practice and development of students' language learning.

Development of actions

Before starting with the first action, I explained to students two reading comprehension strategies, after that students read an article and applied the two strategies explained. Then, a diagnosis activity was conducted, followed by the first action, which was a combination of 'awareness' and 'building knowledge about the issue'. Different activities were applied, such as a classification activity and class discussion where students brought images of successful people, classified them in groups based on self-chosen criteria and discussed various questions to give reasons to classify the famous people they chose. With this activity students came up with the following issue: the definition of success and the relation with consumerism.

The second action was a combination of 'awareness' and 'supported reading', as students already knew the two reading comprehension strategies, we did a similar exercise

as the one we did at the beginning in which students read a text about the issue and applied

the skimming and scanning strategies to understand the text and make connections to self,

other texts, and the world.

Regarding the third action, 'analysis', students engaged in deconstructing Tik Tok

videos (see video 1 and video 2) as it was the social media platform they most frequently

used. To begin, they completed a treasure hunt activity to explore the five core concepts of

media analysis. Next, they played the hot potato game, where they analyzed the videos

using five key questions about content, purpose, format, audience and author. To facilitate

this activity, the key questions were broken down into simpler exercises to ensure all

students could participate. Following this, a group writing activity was conducted to enable

a more in-depth analysis of the video. During this task, students wrote their ideas on

separate pieces of paper and passed them to their classmates to continue writing.

Consequently, the students discovered significant information about the video's content,

format, purpose, audience, and to a lesser extent, the author.

For the fourth action, 'modeling', students performed a labeling activity in groups,

in which they analyzed an argumentative paragraph in terms of its purpose, social function,

and language features. Moving on to the fifth action, 'Joint Construction', students used the

previous paragraph as a model to write their own, incorporating the ideas they generated

during the analysis activity. They wrote a first draft, revised it, and produced a final version

using proofreading marks to check their work. During the sixth action, 'the Reflection

activity', students used the Mirror, Microscope, and Binoculars approach to reflect on the

issue from different perspectives. They thought about how the issue has made them

question their ideas about life, impacted their friends and community, and affected the world at large.

In the last action, which was a combination of 'independent construction' and 'action', students wrote a paragraph. To start the paragraph writing process, students performed a similar activity to the diagnosis, where they were required to write a paragraph in response to a comment made on one of the Tik Tok videos. Once completed, students revised and edited their paragraphs and shared them with the class.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data followed Burns' five-stage process (2010), which involved collecting, categorizing, comparing, interpreting, and reporting the outcomes. The diagnosis, the focus group and students' artifacts were codified and analyzed using a rubric designed based on Freire's (1998) three stages of consciousness. Research memos were written, and codified weekly. I gathered and organized all the data by creating different categories and codes. Then, I compare the data in Excel chart that accounted for the occurrences' frequency. Finally, I built interpretations and reported the outcomes.

Findings and Interpretation

This study aimed at enhancing students' written production as Social Situated Practice through Critical Media Literacy. The results revealed two opportunities and two challenges. One of the opportunities was that unveiling format elements in media texts analysis boosted text power. The other opportunity was taking action through their writing.

At the same time, one of the challenges was teaching and using the foreign language to develop activities involving CML and the other challenge arose from moving beyond surface level descriptions of authorship. In the following paragraphs I provide an in-depth explanation of each finding.

Opportunities

Unveiling Format Elements in Media Texts Analysis Boosted Text Power

Data analysis revealed that the activities, as part of the analysis stage, helped students unveil format elements in media texts and subsequently develop a deeper understanding of how to craft their own writing. Through these activities, students began to comprehend the relationship between form and power. Students acknowledged that format elements were not random but were purposefully selected to grab attention and influence viewers. Acknowledgement of these factors facilitated students in becoming more discerning consumers of media.

During the focus group, students mentioned that the analysis stage activities heightened their awareness and critical approach towards the videos they consumed. They reported paying closer attention to various elements within the videos, engaging in a more discerning analysis and expressed an increased scrutiny towards the messages conveyed.

Student 1: Me llama la atención todo el contexto en un lugar, en los objetos, en la música, en cómo visten, pues mi visión después de las actividades cambiaron un poco, ya que las actividades abrieron mi mente y me hicieron cambiar mi manera de ver las cosas.

Moderator: ¿Cómo te hicieron cambiar?

Student 1: En el hecho de que, pues ya no me enfocó tanto en los lujos y en los objetos, sino en otras cosas.

Student 3: Yo ahora me fijo en su entorno, su vestimenta después de la actividad, mi punto de vista ha cambiado mucho porque ya veo estos videos de otra manera.

Student 4: Yo me fijo en la vestimenta de los creadores y trato de comprender el motivo del video. Cambió mucho mi perspectiva después de hacer la actividad con la profe, ya que trato de ser más analítico.[1] (Focus group, May 4th, 2023)

One of the activities, as part of the analysis stage, was 'hot potato'. In this activity, students were asked to complete statements, answer questions, describe and mention words, about the video they were analyzing. When asked about the things that caught their attention, "students responded that they were attracted to the colors and different objects shown in the videos. The cars, bags, house, songs, famous people, change of camera caught their attention" (Research Memo, April 12th, 14th, 2023).

Students' artifacts demonstrated that by answering questions about what they focused on and why they found the videos appealing, they were able to recognize that there was a language in the media text, i.e. gestures, facial expressions, clothing, the camera, the

---

[1] Student 1: I am struck by the whole context in a place, the objects, the music, the way they dress, because my vision changed a little after the activities, since the activities opened my mind and made me change my way of seeing things.
Moderator: How did they make you change?
Student 1: In the fact that I didn't focus so much on luxuries and objects, but on other things.
Student 3: Now I look at their environment, their clothes, after the activity, my point of view has changed a lot because I see these videos in a different way.
Student 4: I look at the clothes of the creators and try to understand the purpose of the video. My perspective changed a lot after doing the activity with the teacher, because I try to be more analytical. (My translation)

colors and the rooms; as well as an intention of all these elements, which for some students

was to promote a lifestyle and over-consumption of things like cars and handbags. The

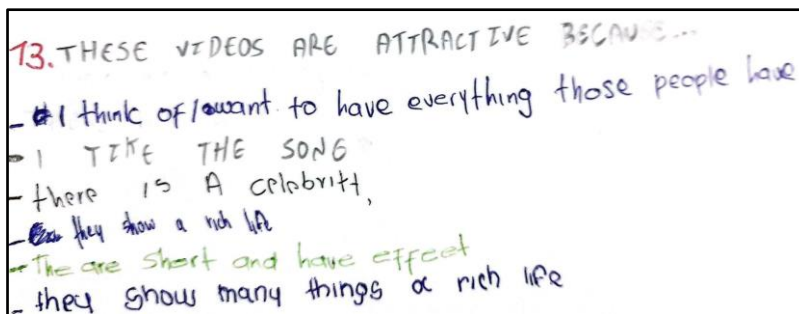following excerpts illustrate this assertion:

Figure 1

Students' Focus in Format Analysis
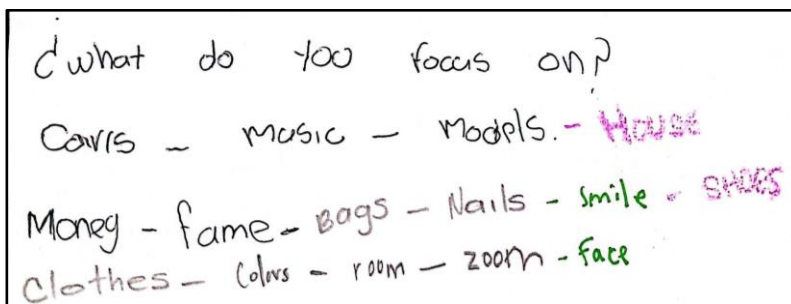
Note. Students' answers to the question in the group writing activity based on the Tik Tok
videos analysis, Students' Artifacts, April 14th, 2023.

Figure 2

Students' Discoveries in Format Analysis

Note. Students' insights on the sentence prompt in the group writing activity based on the
Tik Tok videos analysis, Students' Artifacts, April 14th, 2023.

These artifacts exemplify the students' comprehensive analysis of TikTok videos,

displaying their ability to critically examine their format, elements, and implications. They

managed to unveil how these elements were employed to engage the audience, evoke

emotional responses, and deliver messages effectively, which, in other words, refer to the
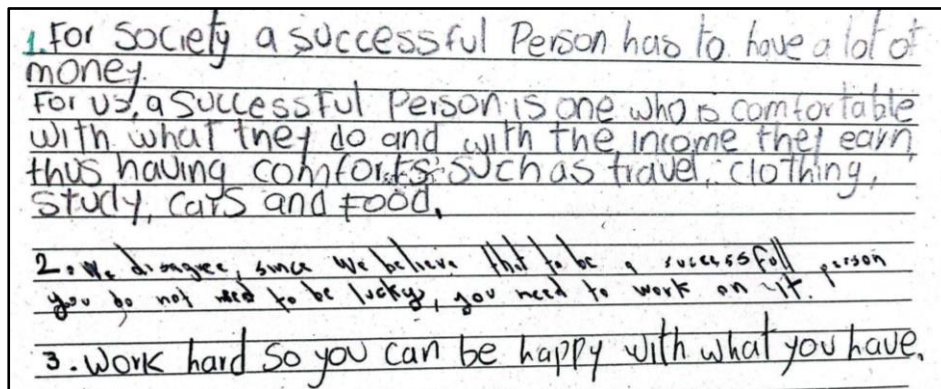
powers of texts.

One possible reason for students to be able to unveil those elements and boost the

recognition of text power could be that during the paragraph activity, in joint construction,

students wrote their ideas based on the analysis of the videos. As students consumed

TikTok videos repeatedly and became familiar with these format elements, they could

easily recognize and understand them. This recognition, in turn, transferred to their

comprehension of other text formats, including written texts. Thoman and Jolls (2005)

emphasize the importance of active engagement, repeated exposure, critical analysis, and

collaborative learning in developing media literacy skills. These skills and activities as part

of the Empowerment Spiral boosted their comprehension of text power, enabling them to

transfer their understanding to other text formats.

Taking Action through Writing

Data analysis attested that Critical Media Literacy empowered students to take

action through their writing while also enhancing their language acquisition skills by

recognizing that they could apply their critical understanding to create arguments and

engage in relevant social issues. Throughout the final activity, students developed critical

thinking regarding societal expectations, challenged conventional definitions of success,

and fostered a genuine comprehension of personal interpretations of success. The following
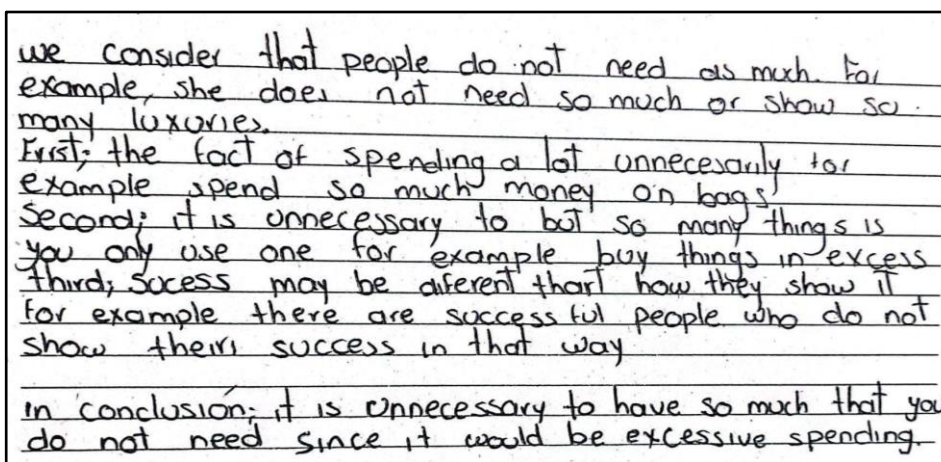
figures illustrate this assertion:

Figure 3

Students' Paragraph about Different Interpretations of Success

> 1. For society a successful Person has to have a lot of money.
> For us, a successful Person is one who is comfortable with what they do and with the income they earn thus having comforts such as travel, clothing, study, cars and food.
>
> 2. We disagree, since we believe that to be a successfull person you do not need to be lucky, you need to work on it.
>
> 3. Work hard so you can be happy with what you have.

Note. The writing process was collaborative with each group member contributing an individual idea as a final product, Students' Artifacts, May 3rd, 2023.

Figure 4

Students' Paragraph about their Personal Interpretation of Success

> We consider that people do not need as much. For example, she does not need so much or show so many luxuries.
> First; the fact of spending a lot unnecesarily for example spend so much money on bags
> Second; it is unnecessary to but so many things is you only use one for example buy things in excess
> third; success may be diferent that how they show it for example there are successful people who do not show their success in that way
>
> in conclusion; it is unnecessary to have so much that you do not need since it would be excessive spending.

Note. The figure showcases students' written arguments discussing their individual definitions of success as a final activity, May 3rd, 2023.

These excerpts proved that with a solid foundation in Critical Media Literacy, students were able to use the language they understood and managed to construct arguments while actively engaging in pertinent social issues. They displayed capacities to analyze media texts, identified some underlying ideologies, and recognized the impact of

format choices. Armed with these capacities, students were able to identify alternative

perspectives to the one portrayed in the media texts they were analyzing.

Moreover, data exposed those students improved their writing skills at a certain

level. At the beginning of the implementation only two groups were able to write between

fifty and sixty words in English. Only three groups were able to use the words properly, but

for five groups there was a lot of interference from Spanish (Diagnosis, March 1st, 2023).

For the final activity, at least 4 out 7 groups were able to write more than 60 words. The

students wrote all their ideas in English (Final Activity, May 3rd, 2023).

Figure 5

Comparison between Diagnosis and Final Activity Regarding Writing Skills
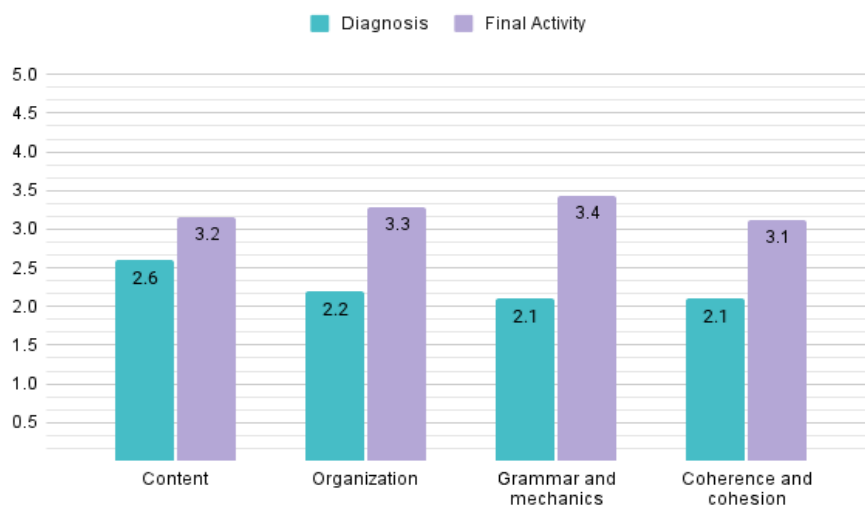
Note. Left axis refers to average grade students got in each one of the language items.

When students immersed themselves in media analysis discussions, they were

required to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and arguments effectively. This process not only

strengthened critical thinking but also could promote their writing skills. The skills fostered

by CML, outlined by Thoman and Jolls (2005): analyzing, evaluating, and creating, are integral to successful writing. By developing these skills, students can employ a wider array of cognitive, linguistic, and psychomotor processes necessary for effective written communication, as emphasized by Westwood (2008).

Challenges

Teaching and Using the Foreign Language to Develop Activities Involving CML

Data analysis showed that limited language proficiency posed a significant challenge during the implementation of the cycles. This limitation hindered students' ability to express their insights and ideas effectively along the process, as they struggled to articulate their analysis and present well-supported arguments due to difficulties in vocabulary selection, sentence structure, and grammar. "Using Critical Media Literacy for the first time was difficult because the students were used to performing mostly cognitive activities, so asking them to express their ideas and opinions in English was demanding for them" (Research Memo, March 3rd, 2023). To exemplify this, in the awareness stage, students faltered with comprehension and understanding of complex media messages.

> Students have trouble writing logical conclusions or making connections by
> requiring the use of a larger vocabulary. In addition, students have difficulty
> assessing a text by requiring a deep understanding of the text. Finally, students have
> difficulty creating new ideas by requiring advanced input (phonology, grammar,
> vocabulary, language use). (Research Memo, March 8th, 2023)

Data revealed that due to their limited language proficiency level, students required extensive scaffolding and support when engaging in the analysis stage. To facilitate their understanding, it was necessary to break down the five key questions of media analysis into simpler exercises that students could comprehend.

Furthermore, data analysis showed that scaffolding techniques were always necessary to support students throughout the different stages. This included providing guided prompts and step-by-step instructions to assist students in the different activities. "Students need sentence starters and vocabulary on the board to express their ideas more effectively using the target language, to begin their writing and construct more coherent and structured paragraphs" (Research Memo, April 19th, 2023). Consequently, limited language proficiency also impacted student ability to express their thoughts and ideas coherently during the different stages. Students found difficulties articulating their insights and providing detailed explanations. This limitation prevented them from fully engaging with the materials and participating actively in class discussions.

> Students did not have a wide range of words and phrases at their disposal, and they struggled to express their thoughts effectively, as a result, they took longer to complete activity. The lack of practical experience contributed to their hesitation when participating in discussions, as they felt uncomfortable with the language use required. (Reflection Activity, April 21st, 2023)

Language may have represented an interference in students' critical analysis of the media given that, although students already had ideas in their minds, lacked the linguistic codes to effectively communicate and express those ideas. Critical analysis entailed

interpreting and expressing thoughts and ideas about media content. Language served as the medium through which interpretation took place. Nonetheless, since students lacked the necessary linguistic tools to elaborate on their ideas, it limited their ability to articulate their thoughts clearly and hindered their exploration of complex media concepts.
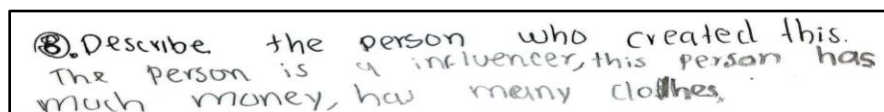
Moving beyond Surface Level Descriptions of Authorship

The data analysis indicated that despite the incorporation of the actions, students did not fully develop a critical consciousness regarding the concept of authorship. Even though students engaged in various activities to analyze this concept, their understanding remained at an intransitive level, as reported in the journal "At the beginning, in the awareness stage, students did not question who was behind the text and the implications of this, they only focused initially on the literal content" (Research Memo, March 1st, 2023).

Data showed that, during the analysis step students could not move beyond surface-level descriptions and delve deeper into understanding authorship either. They did not critically examine the author's intentions, the origin of their ideas, and the complex interplay of factors that shape their work. By answering the questions about the author's intention, describing what they were like and what they showed were not enough for the students to identify what was behind the author's purpose and the origin of these ideas.

Figure 6

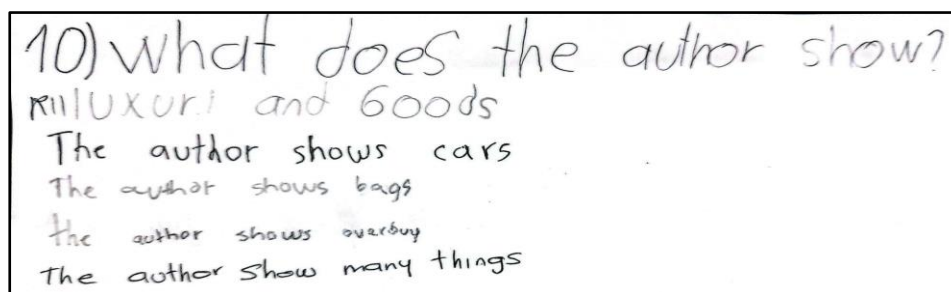*Students' Descriptions of the Video's Author*

Note. Students' ideas in the group writing activity based on the Tik Tok videos analysis, Students' Artifacts, April 14th, 2023

Figure 7

Students' Description of the Videos' Content

Note. Students' viewpoints on the themes, narratives, and elements portrayed in the TikTok videos as part of their collaborative writing exercise, Students' Artifacts, April 14th, 2023.

These excerpts illustrate that students were able to describe the author's characteristics, such as their background or style, but they did not fully grasp the underlying motives, ideologies, or cultural and historical contexts that shape the author's work. They were not able to discern the broader implications of the author's choices or identify the origin of the ideas being presented.

The media texts that students analyze were multi-layered and incorporated various elements such as visuals, audio, language, and interactivity. This focus on the captivating aspects of media could overshadow students' consideration of authorship. Analyzing authorship required students to delve into various aspects, such as the author's background, motivations, biases, and how these elements shaped the content. However, students could not know where to begin or which questions to ask to explore these dimensions. Without

extended guidance and prompting, students found it challenging to further their analysis and they missed important aspects of authorship altogether.

Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed at analyzing what challenges and opportunities the use of Critical Media Literacy could bring to 9th grade writing as Social Situated practice in an EFL classroom in Colombia. It could be concluded that the implementation of the Empowerment Spiral model together with the 5-stage Teaching Learning Cycle could help students to enhance some elements of Writing as Social Situated Practice. Moreover, unveiling format elements in media texts analysis boosted students' text power. Additionally, taking action through writing provided students with an opportunity to express their opinions, engage with social issues, and contribute to their language development. There were also challenges faced during the implementation of the project, two of them were teaching and using the foreign language to develop activities involving CML and moving beyond surface level descriptions concerning authorship.

This action research involves certain pedagogical implications for future practices. To begin with, it is necessary that teachers assess the language proficiency levels of their students before integrating CML activities. Adapting the concepts and activities to match students' linguistic abilities may ensure that they can fully engage with the CML process. This could enable students to develop their writing skills while simultaneously fostering their critical thinking and media literacy competencies. Another implication is finding a balance between language learning objectives and the use of critical approaches. While the primary goal may be to integrate critical thinking and media analysis, it is equally

important to enhance students' language learning. Teachers should strive to implement

activities where language learning and critical approaches reinforce each other.

Additionally, teachers should consider scaffolding techniques to support students in their

language and critical analysis development, by providing explicit instruction on CML

concepts, guiding students through the process of analyzing media texts, and offering

samples and models. The last implication refers to how to foster written production, it is

necessary to use a framework for teaching writing. By providing students with a structured

framework, they can gain a better understanding of the expectations and conventions

associated with various writing activities. In that sense, students may feel confident and

take more risks in their writing thanks to the support that the step-by-step work provides.

While this research provides valuable insights and opens possibilities for future

actions, there are still avenues for further exploration that can strengthen the current results,

such as the use of CML in diverse EFL contexts with various participants. For instance,

conducting an analysis of new media texts, live streaming of events or performances on

platforms such as Twitch and podcasts could provide students with opportunities to delve

into different narratives, themes, and representations, as well as contribute to improve their

language skills. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of implementing

CML in the EFL classroom and its impact on students' language learning.

Reflection

Engaging in a research project has been a remarkable journey. From formulating the

research question to gathering data, each step has been a valuable learning experience.

Along the way, I have encountered unexpected challenges, learned to work with a

methodology I had not tried before: Critical Media Literacy, and gained a deeper understanding of my field of study. In spite of that, what has truly made this journey rewarding is the impact it has had on the students. They expressed that they develop a critical eye and a different mindset. The research has sparked a transformation in their perspectives and engagement with the media.

Being a pre-service teacher has profoundly impacted me. Even though theory and classroom observations provided some insight, the lack of hands-on teaching made it difficult to face the realities of being in front of a class. Navigating through student apathy, disciplinary issues, and the challenges of adapting to individual learning needs has been a demanding yet invaluable opportunity. To face these challenges, I involved myself in an ongoing process of assessment and reflection, which was crucial for my development as a pre-service teacher. While it was not without its difficulties, the personal growth that stemmed from this experience has made it meaningful.

During my university years, I went through a significant period that had a profound impact on both my personal and professional development. Engaging in rigorous coursework, interacting with diverse student communities, and learning from the expertise of the teachers opened my mind to different perspectives and expanded my worldview. I learned to embrace failures as opportunities for growth, to persevere through setbacks, and to find joy in even the smallest accomplishments. Although university was challenging at times, this period laid a strong foundation for my future endeavors. Looking back, I deeply appreciate the lessons I learned and the experiences I had, which continue to shape me and guide me as I navigate my path forward.

References

Ahmed, S. A. (2011). Exploring students' perceptions of ESL writing. *English Language Teaching, 4*(2), 7383. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n2p73

Aliakbari, M. & Faraji, E. (2011). Basic Principles of Critical Pedagogy. 2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR, *(17)*, 78-85. http://www.ipedr.com/vol17/14-CHHSS%202011-H00057

Burns, A. (2010). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Chala, R., & Chapetón, C. (2013). Undertaking the act of writing as a situated social practice: Going beyond the linguistic and the textual. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, 15*(1), 25-42. https://doi.org/10.14483/udistrital.jour.calj.2013.1.a0

Chappell, P., Gutiérrez, M. I., Hadland, T., Langton, A., Lane, A., Rincón, L., Rico, L.T., & Urueña, P. (2021). *English, Please! Student's Book* (2nd ed.). Richmond

Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* – Companion volume. Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg.

Derewianka, B., & Jones, P. (2016). *Teaching Language in Context* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Freire, P. (1983). The Importance of the Act of Reading (L. Slover, Trans.). *Journal of Education, 165*(1), 5–11.

Institución Educativa Santa Maria. (2014). Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI). El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia: Santa María.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2005). Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 26*(3), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200169

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). *Critical Media Literacy, Democracy, and the Reconstruction of Education.* Media Literacy: A Reader.

Lillis, T. M. (2001). *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire.* New York: Routledge.

Lombana, C. (2009). Some issues for the teaching of writing. *PROFILE: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *3*(1), 44-51. https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/11314

Mirra, N., Morrell, E. & Filipiak, D. (2018). From Digital Consumption to Digital Invention: Toward a New Critical Theory and Practice of Multiliteracies. *Theory Into Practice, 57*(1), 12-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1390336

Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English Language Teaching*. International Edition, McGraw-Hill, Singapore.

Sholihah, E., Suprihadi, S., & Nuraeningsih N. (2021). Relationship between Higher-order Thinking Skills (hots) and English Achievement. *Prominent Journal 4*(1), 45-53

Thoman, E., & Jolls, T. (2005). Literacy for the 21st century: An overview and orientation

   guide to media literacy education. Center for Media Literacy

Westwood, P. (2008). *What teachers need to know about reading and writing difficulties.*

   Camberwell: Acer Press.