

Analyzing Ads under Calla in an EFL Classroom. A Case Study with Middle School Students in Colombia *

Análisis de anuncios publicitarios desde el método calla en el aula EFL. Estudio de caso con estudiantes de secundaria en Colombia.

* Original Research Article

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Abstract

The increased access to television, computers, or mobile devices means that children not only have more access to digital information, but they also need to be able to assess or filter it by themselves. The current research proposal seeks to understand how a group of middle school students used critical thinking skills while being exposed to information provided by advertisements. In this qualitative case study, five students analyzed advertisements following lessons planned under the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) model. The instruments for data collection, such as students' artifacts and transcripts of the workshops, were analyzed under a thematic analysis. The main findings revealed how students recalled their previous knowledge and experiences regarding TV ads to face new issues that affect their realities and social context. Similarly, the students identified hidden messages and situations in the visual content. Indeed, the CALLA model unveiled students' critical reflections on the world today.

Keywords: CALLA model, critical thinking skills, TV advertisements and teaching.

Resumen

El elevado acceso a la televisión, computadoras o dispositivos móviles implica que los niños no solo tienen más acceso a la información digital, sino que también necesitan ser capaces de evaluarla o filtrarla por sí mismos. Por tal razón, la propuesta de investigación actual busca entender cómo un grupo de estudiantes de secundaria usaron habilidades de pensamiento crítico mientras estaban expuestos a la información proporcionada por los anuncios. En este estudio de caso cualitativo, cinco estudiantes analizaron anuncios publicitarios siguiendo lecciones planeadas bajo el modelo de Enfoque de Aprendizaje de Lenguaje Académico Cognitivo (CALLA). Los instrumentos para la recolección de datos, como los artefactos de los estudiantes y las transcripciones de los talleres se analizaron bajo un análisis temático. Los principales hallazgos revelaron cómo los estudiantes recordaron sus conocimientos y experiencias anteriores con respecto a los anuncios de televisión para enfrentar nuevos problemas que afectan sus realidades y contexto social. Del mismo modo, los estudiantes identificaron mensajes ocultos y situaciones presentadas en el contenido visual. Sin duda alguna, el modelo CALLA reveló las reflexiones críticas de los estudiantes sobre el mundo de hoy

Palabras clave: Modelo CALLA, habilidades de pensamiento crítico, anuncios de televisión y enseñanza.

Introduction

Today's digital era, where communication and interaction take place, goes beyond the act of having face-to-face conversations. Media platforms, including print, digital, and electronic resources, have become part of daily life (Aybek, 2016); therefore, there is a need to develop skills that contribute to a better understanding of the information they depict, especially when watching advertisements on TV and while surfing the internet.

Thus, implementing new devices and ICT tools in classes demands that teachers update their methodologies. The use of virtual platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft teams, and Google Meet, among others, helped us understand that our educational reality has changed, mainly because the pandemic forced students and teachers to use digital tools. Indeed, exploring the technological field has allowed learners to be in contact with the web and discover the outside world using online tools.

Nonetheless, mass media and social media influence consumers in varied ways, especially through advertisements. Zárate (2016) stated that "values promoted by television are frequently opposed to the teachings that schools and families want to promote" (p. 9). Thus, students are exposed to all kinds of messages in all platforms. In this line of thought, this research study was conducted in a private institution in Tunja, Colombia with sixth graders. Students had easy internet access because virtual classes took place at home using online tools during the COVID-19 emergency. As a foreign language teacher, the need to open spaces for dialogue for students to foster critical thinking skills while analyzing advertisements in English lessons under CALLA was identified.

Chamot and O'Malley (1987) argued that the CALLA model provides opportunities to explore students' previous knowledge in the preparation stage. After, it allows learners to acquire and get familiarized with new information in a meaningful context, in the presentation stage. Next, CALLA enhances students' abilities to practice the target language and participate actively in class through collaborative activities.

Hence, pupils participate in contextualized and situated interactions with others in this practice stage. After that, the CALLA model aims to guide students into an evaluation stage. Gu (2018) explains how this stage works:

Activities that help them evaluate their success in understanding the content, in their awareness of the language being used, and in the usefulness of the strategy they have just practiced. Commonly used activities at this stage include follow-up discussions, learning logs, checklists, and open-ended questionnaires. (p. 4).

After this assessment strategies are employed, in the last stage of this model, an *expansion* activity, is carried out. It provides students with opportunities to expand their worldview. In other words, “The main purpose of this stage is to give students opportunities and encourage them to extend [and use] their learning in contexts beyond the classroom” (Gu, 2018, p.5). Thus, students continually examine the information they gather from media and its implications in their daily life (Kellner & Share, 2009). The current research inquiry seeks to understand how our teaching and learning practices involve students’ critical analysis of the daily information they receive through TV advertisements. In that sense, this study invites teachers to become agents of social change. Indeed, positioning our students as active participants in the teaching and learning practices means fostering prior knowledge to unravel new problems (Chamot and O’Malley, 1987). Accordingly, teen’s voices and experiences are to be considered along the process of analyzing messages in media platforms. The key contribution of this work is the creation of safe spaces that promote dialogues of social construction.

Many scholars have studied the importance and development of critical thinking (Schwarz & Brown, 2005; Semali, 2000; Šramová, 2013). Hence, it takes place when students participate actively, expressing their points of view, in the classroom. According to Akinlaye et al. (1996), if students feel self-confident dealing with issues

in a world where confrontations emerge every day, they will develop skills, values, and beliefs that promote a better understanding of adult life.

Hereafter, CALLA gives students opportunities to improve their English skills and increase their participation when explaining and solving problems in the current world (Chamot and O'Malley, 1987). Besides that, education must encourage students to go the extra mile when developing skills to analyze and solve current social issues and, correspondingly, to think about the unknown future (Adeyemi, 2012).

Furthermore, Esteban (2020), reflecting on her experience as a teacher advisor, identified a tied orientation to grammar content instruction in the Modern Languages undergraduates' lesson plans in a Colombian public university when joining the Literature and Culture of English-speaking countries seminar. Herein, classes follow a specific sequence of topics and grammar-oriented activities that do not allow the students to explore the world through the lens of reflection and dialogue. Instead, this type of content invites students to memorize or to learn only through repetition.

In the same regard, Ramos- Holguín (2013) explained that English textbooks tend to be hard to understand and do not consider students' backgrounds or needs. The present study encourages society to open spaces, not only at school, but also at home, where there is a significant exchange of ideas about the information displayed on mass media and the hidden messages that affect our behavior and daily actions. This is relevant as children are active media consumers. In this context, discussion forums, whose participants were children aged from 11 to 12, were created to analyze advertising in the EFL classroom.

During the discussions forums, it was possible to see how media has become a familiar and ongoing experience in students' learning process. It was possible to see how media has become a familiar and ongoing experience in students' learning

process. When sharing their opinions in class, students commented that online platforms use announcements to persuade their audience to be active consumers.

In fact, they were able to share their prior experiences and perceptions when analyzing the average TV advertisement shown on different platforms. Zárate (2016) underpinned the need to have students confront the messages spread by the media, as children and teenagers quickly catch the superficial messages that media transmit, but they overlook their accuracy. This can skew their perception of reality and encourage certain behaviors or thoughts. For that reason, EFL teachers must promote safe environments, where EFL learners feel self-confident and empowered while communicating and examining information gathered from their experiences and backgrounds. According to the previous analysis, the following research questions and objective were proposed:

Research Question

What are sixth graders' critical thinking skills when analyzing TV advertisements under the CALL approach in an EFL classroom?

Research Objective

To characterize 6th graders critical thinking in the analysis of TV ads in an EFL lesson designed under CALLA.

1. Theoretical Framework

This section frames the following concepts: Cognitive Academy Language Learning Approach (CALLA), Critical thinking perspectives, Media literacy and TV ads.

1.1 Cognitive Academy Language Learning Approach (CALLA)

CALLA regards students as active participants in the classroom (Chamot and O'Malley, 1987). Thus, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach contemplates students' prior knowledge as necessary when comprehending and retaining new information about real-life situations (Guapacha & Benavidez, 2017).

In other words, the CALLA model identifies mental processes that allow students to reflect on how to increase their learning abilities to make them more efficient.

Following Anderson's words (1983), students' socio-cultural backgrounds contribute to the teaching and learning process. Anderson describes the need to critically understand issues and dilemmas that emerge in our immediate contexts. In this regard, CALLA provides a better understanding of two essential aspects: what to do and how to successfully guide the teaching and learning practice.

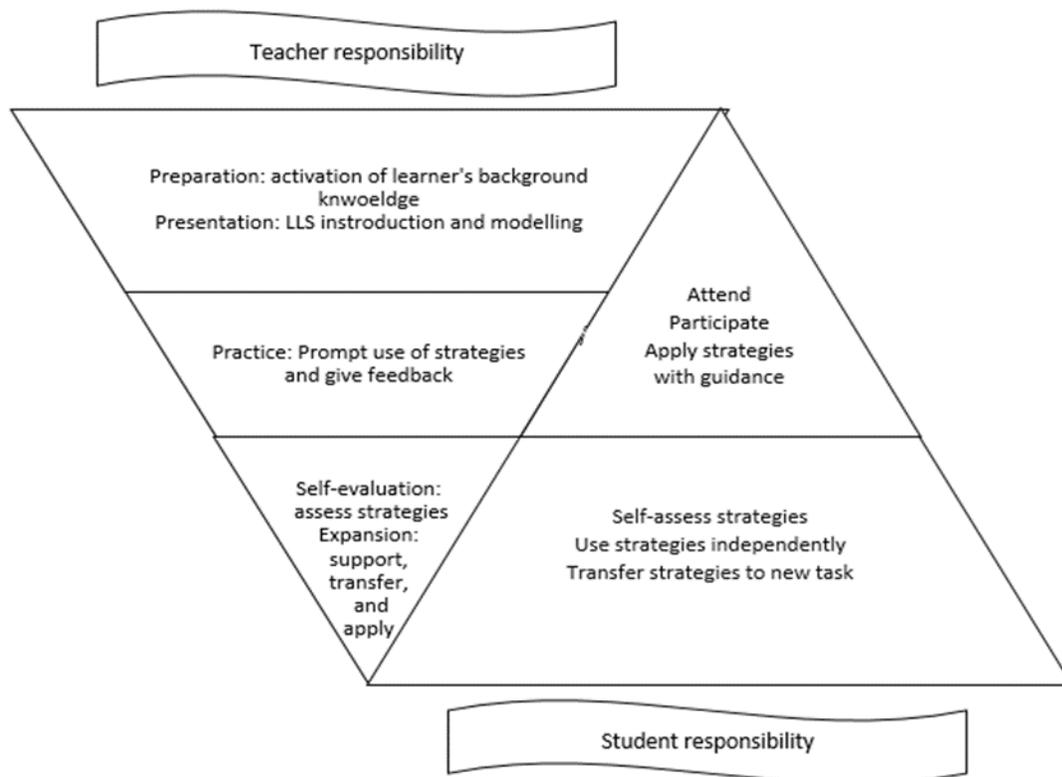
According to Chamot & O'Malley (1996), three components support the CALLA model. The first refers to the content topic. The second connects to how students increase their language development by employing content instruction. Content concerns all subjects (Social studies, Biology, Math, English, Arts). Finally, the third one relates to how explicit instruction increases content and language usage awareness.

The above components provide a better understanding of the CALLA model and its implementation within this study. For the first component, grammar content was taught through real-world events. The second factor relates to the content of linguistic development; thus, students participated in activities aimed at valuing language as a tool for expressing their thoughts and opinions. Lastly, the third strand concerns the teaching of learning strategies. It suggests that students are able to reflect on their learning process. The implementation of this approach extends an invitation for pupils to be autonomous and critical when accessing, analyzing, and evaluating information that appears on media.

Chamot (2009) introduced five (5) stages in the CALLA model. The first one is *preparation*; this stage refers to how students can activate their previous experiences concerning a specific topic. The second is *presentation*, which "helps students understand what is in focus, while the teacher's think-aloud shows vividly how a learning task is tackled successfully" (Gu, 2018, p.4). In other words, it encompasses

different strategies teachers use to create a meaningful context in which students can relate prior knowledge with new information by helping them understand what is in focus. The third stage refers to *practice*; this stage provides the students with opportunities to practice new knowledge or strategies to construct knowledge and support a better understanding of the learning structures. Accordingly, in the fourth stage, in the evaluation stage, students reflect upon their learning through follow-up questions, checklists, and open-ended questions to observe their success when understanding activities, dialogues, and content. The teacher's role during this stage is to be in charge of guiding the students to an in-depth reflection on their learning. Finally, in the expansion phase, students can apply what they have learned concerning content and language in their own lives—becoming autonomous learners (Chamot, 1999). The aforementioned stages are summarized in the following diagram:

Figure 1. CALLA Framework for strategies instruction.



Note: Adapted from (Chamot et al., 1999, p. 36)

1.2 Critical thinking

Bankole (2012) stated that “we now live in a world of problems” (p. 156). Accordingly, dialogues are vital for students to think critically, and they are a valuable tool in both teaching and learning. First and foremost, it is necessary to bear in mind what critical thinking means. Fisher (2001) defined it as the ability to analyze, evaluate and create by thinking. He also stated that critical thinking “involves both criticism and creative thinking, which is particularly concerned with the quality of reasoning and debating, which are presented in support of a belief or a course of action” (p. 2). Thus, critical thinking interprets information on a specific matter to provide insights that lead to the reasoning of a problem, question, or dilemma.

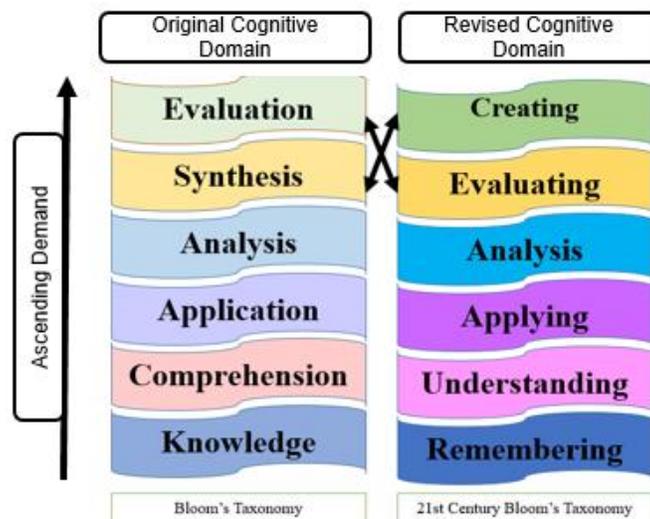
Ur (1996) acknowledged that the central aspect influencing students’ interaction in the EFL classroom is the ability to reflect and perform critically. Likewise, incorporating critical thinking activities in it provides a window of opportunities to increase learners’ communicative skills and autonomy. According to Harizaj & Hajrulla (2017), critical thinking goes beyond the simple understanding of grammar structures or content. It fosters pupils’ comprehension and analysis when facing a situation, issue, concern, or information in natural settings or media resources.

1.3 Critical thinking skills

Many taxonomies have been proposed to characterize and categorize critical thinking skills. Scholars such as Watson & Glaser (2009) set models and processes considering attitude, knowledge, and skills. Nonetheless, Bloom (1956) had already identified six levels of critical thinking skills according to their complexity. Bloom’s taxonomy followed principles that guided learners from the most direct to the most complex skills. Besides, Bloom’s critical thinking pyramid included cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning. Originally, the six levels of thinking skills were: *knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation*. Bloom’s taxonomy was updated by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001). The revised taxonomy changed the term *Synthesis* for *Create*. This last consideration occurred

because of the necessity of assembling and generating new information at this level. Additionally, the wording for *Knowledge* was replaced by *Remembering*. This new concept, *Remembering*, changes the word *Knowledge* into this action verb in order to refer to the thinking process of checking previous knowledge and new information to provide insights. The following figure represents Bloom's and 21st-century Bloom's taxonomy.

Figure 2. Bloom Taxonomy Model and 21st-Century Bloom's revised Taxonomy Framework.



Note: Adapted from Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

Bloom's taxonomy in the XXI century considers cognitive development categories. Zapalska et al. (2018) explain that the: "process begin[s] with simple tasks, such as memorization and understanding, towards more complex operations that finally lead to effective analysis, evaluation, and creation" (p. 294). In addition, Esteban et al., (2018) mention that critical thinking skills promote students' imagination and interpretation of information. In other words, developing critical thinking skills requires teachers to promote safe spaces of social interaction and conditions so that students embrace their backgrounds and experiences as a roadmap to understanding current issues in our immediate contexts.

To sum up, the above definitions and levels of critical thinking and critical thinking skills played an essential role in the different activities and workshops students took part in to become critical thinkers in this study. Critical thinking skills, as well as CALLA, opened spaces of permanent dialogue where students valued and remembered previous knowledge to identify and (de)construct real-life scenarios to understand and analyze the world around them through advertisement content they were exposed to daily.

1.4 Critical Media Literacy (CML)

Many scholars have stated that we live in a media-saturated world, where new data and information alter how we conceive and see the world. Several scholars such as Kellner & Share (2005), Herrera (2001), and Goodman (2003) have agreed that rapid access to global information became a tool to keep up with the outside world. CML has sought to empower media consumers with the ability and skills to understand social phenomena in their backgrounds, considering the expansion of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). Accordingly, nowadays it is possible to find printed or digital information anywhere, and media is closer to our daily interaction. CML not only copes with the critical observation and evaluation of the different media sources, but it also “focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of critical dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality: incorporating alternative media production, and expanding the textual analysis to include social context, control, resistance, and pleasure” (Kellner & Share, 2009, p. 62). Thence, CML depicts the need to observe, reflect, analyze and discuss about the social phenomena that emerge on the daily basis. In other words, to read the world through the lens of social reflection, dialogue and resilience.

In this vein, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased people’s interactions through means that are used in our daily worldwide connections. Magazines, photographs, videos, audio, and, generally speaking, media resources provide new information or knowledge about any topic. Herrera (2001) stated that critical media literacy (CML)

is a roadmap to delve deeper into the media narrative through the *Empowerment Spiral*. Scholars such as Hye (2013), Thoman & Jolls (2011), and Debra (2004) proposed a spiral organized into four stages: Awareness, analysis, reflection, and action. The stages start with *awareness*, where students reflect upon the media they browse in their immediate context. The second phase entails the ability to (de)construct any media product that individuals receive. The third stage is reflection. It portrays activities that consider the influence of ethical, philosophical, and contextual principles. Finally, in the last stage (*action*), students are given opportunities to devise an action plan to raise awareness of how media influence our social backgrounds. From my experience as an elementary teacher, I have evinced that children and young people usually take little time to analyze and evaluate the information they continuously receive on their mobile phones or screens. Therefore, there is a need to shift from superficial aspects of media news to deeper ones to become aware and integrate critical thinking criteria while being exposed to media content. As a result, participants will critically examine the recurring television ads in their daily media interactions. Similarly, ongoing and deep dialogue is needed to recognize misunderstandings and genre stereotypes in the information displayed.

1.5 TV Advertisements

TV advertisements are marketing strategies companies use to promote their products to the audience. According to Goaltly (2000), publicity strategies tend to manipulate and persuade consumers. A research study by Hameed (2014) explains that children are bombarded with more than 20.000 TV commercials daily. TV announcements use specific topics to catch their attention. For example, they may depict content on high-calorie and sweet products such as breakfast, food, fast food, among others.

According to Zárata (2006), TV ads and announcements influence students' decisions. Nonetheless, children's perception of reality is influenced by advertisers when they are permanently exposed to visual content. Therefore, Boske &

McCormack (2011) suggest including activities and spaces in which students can analyze, interpret, examine and evaluate, and make decisions about the information they receive constantly.

2. Instructional Design

The purpose of this section is to present the instructional design used to answer the previously stated research question. Additionally, this chapter explains the instructional phases that were carried out to characterize 6th graders' critical thinking when analyzing TV advertisements in the EFL classroom under CALLA.

2.1 Instructional phases

According to Harizaj & Hajrulla, (2017), the promotion of critical thinking skills in EFL classes aims to engage students in self-confident reflections about their backgrounds in social and educational settings. In this vein, CALLA model provided a roadmap when designing the workshops for this study. Huzairin & Yufrizal (2019) explain that the CALLA model embraces students' opportunities to interact with the language itself, allowing learners to value, honor, and relativize their experiences and knowledge.

Two workshops were implemented following the five (5) phases proposed by Chamot and O'Malley (1987). The workshops aimed at analyzing television commercials due to their influence in the way students think and behave. Zárate (2016) explains that TV commercials display a fabricated version of reality. In that sense, it is necessary to provide students with spaces to analyze and critically interpret the information they gather from all media platforms.

Based on the CALLA and critical thinking skills, the first workshop was named *Who is behind advertising?* Furthermore, the second one was entitled *Reflecting upon ads I watch*. The main reasons to conduct these workshops was because of the need there is to listen to teenagers' voices and reflections about what they watch,

listen and follow in the media. As mentioned above, children are influenced positively or negatively by external factors at home, school, or events when they walk down the street. The workshops explained in Table 1 provide a clear framework of the lessons implemented throughout this journey. Later on, in the following section, the methodology used for data processing, collection, and analysis will be explained.

3. Research Design

This current project was carried out under a qualitative approach to better understand what the implementation of the CALLA model can tell us about sixth graders' critical thinking skills while analyzing TV ads. Creswell (2013) stated the steps for conducting a qualitative study. First, qualitative research begins with interpretation to address a social or human problem. Then, it is necessary to collect data in the natural setting where the study is being conducted. The result involves the analysis of participants' voices when interpreting the presented issues. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to the literature and develop critical dialogue spaces in the scholar community, especially in the participants' immediate context.

This research project is a case study. A case study "is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a 'real-life'" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). Thus, this case study aimed to explore a phenomenon under natural conditions (Merriam, 2009). This project took place at a prestigious private school in Tunja, and it was implemented in 6th grade English classes. Students' ages ranged from 11 to 12. Five pupils were chosen to obtain a sample. They were selected considering their willingness and participation in the workshops. In addition, participants received pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Table 1. Pedagogical Intervention

| Workshop | Phases | Description |
|--|--------------|--|
| Who is behind TV commercials/ advertising? | Preparation | <p>The students answered some questions to recall their local experiences, life stories, and knowledge of the topic. Some of the questions were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How often do you watch advertisements?</i> • <i>Do you like watching them (advertisements)?</i> • <i>Do you watch the whole advertisement or do you prefer to skip it?</i> • <i>How do you interpret the information displayed on it?</i> |
| | Presentation | <p>The participants were split out into small groups using the Zoom tool <i>breakout rooms</i>- to interact with other classmates about the messages, graphics, music, and advertising instruments that were used in their favourite TV advertising.</p> |
| | Practice | <p>Students watched some TV advertisements about food, drinks, sweets, and mobile telephone, their task was to infer the intention and message displayed in the visual resources. Then, they had to create their own TV commercial and think about how their own TV commercials hid messages and information using marketing strategies, such as music, movies, famous people, or even the deconstruction of reality.</p> |
| | Evaluation | <p>The students thought about their TV ads, and, working in small groups, they identified the concepts and reflected on their learning after creating the TV announcement.</p> |
| | Expansion | <p>Finally, the students had to reflect upon what they had done in class and how this critical exercise could be applied in their learning and living contexts. As a result, students received a new activity for the next class where they had to observe, analyze, reflect and discuss with their parents a recurring advertisement that they watched in their everyday life.</p> |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Reflecting upon what I watch | Preparation | <p>In the beginning, students answered open-ended questions to check their previous experiences when analyzing the information displayed in TV advertisements. Some of the questions were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do you track a new product?</i> • <i>What aspects are important in any product advertisement?</i> • <i>What advertisement do you remember? Which characteristics do you find interesting?</i> |
| | Presentation | <p>Different sentences that were highly connected to the introduction of the topic were written on the board. Students were asked about those lines and what they represented to them; for example, “If you were at the beach, what TV advertisement would you remember to buy a product?” One of the participants said <i>Frutiño, a sugary drink brand</i>.</p> |
| | Practice | <p>Students watched the TV announcement: <i>Frutiño, sabor a mora dulce</i> and then the class discussion started. Students were asked to identify the line of events and messages behind each scene. In addition, students were invited to analyze how music in advertising can induce consumers to obtain a product. The conversation opened new paths until students expressed their opinion about whether the commercial had been effective or not.</p> |
| | Evaluation | <p>The discussion turned into a debate because the message that student’s unveiled while conversing and reflecting upon the content was controversial as it displayed genre stereotypes and the use of music to perpetuate control mechanisms to manipulate women, among others.</p> |
| | Expansion | <p>Students reflected on whether they would recommend this product or not. Immediately, most of the students reacted by supporting their arguments with their prior experiences. Each student found out different interpretations. During closure, they discussed and compare their personal insights with their classmates’ opinions.</p> |

3.1 Instruments for data collection

To trace a methodological roadmap in this study, students' artifacts and transcripts of the workshops were analyzed as data collection instruments. For this research study, student's interests and thinking processes when participating in workshops planned under the CALLA model were observed.

3.2 Students' artifacts

Artifacts are students' documents that provide insight into the students' reflections on written activities (Cardenas, 2005). Correspondingly, students' artifacts encompass a set of activities and strategies such as "lesson plans, workshops, projects, presentations, or anything else assigned in session class; It will likely include videos to analyze the result of the workshops or the lesson planning" (Arias, 2017, p. 101). In this study, students participated in oral and written activities where they analyzed TV ads. To collect digital written evidence, the written workshop was uploaded on the school platform and forums were created. Students were in charge of completing the activities online.

3.3 Transcripts

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms for handling teaching and learning instruction have become helpful in our daily life. In that sense, lessons to collect students' voices and assumptions when participating in the English lessons were recorded. According to Cardenas (2005), gathering data from recorded audio or videos support students' understanding and performance. These verbal interactions allowed students to create a safe and inclusive place for participating. To summarize this section, the chart below includes the research question, objective, approach, participants, sample, context, and instruments.

Table 2 .Summary of the research design.

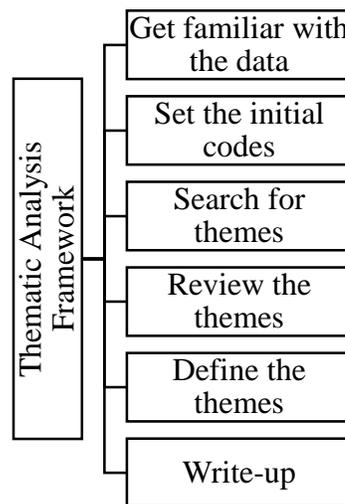
| Research question | General objective | Approach | Type of study | Participants | Sample | Context | Instruments |
|--|--|----------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| What can the implementation of the CALLA model tell us about sixth graders' Critical Thinking Skills when analyzing TV advertisements in an EFL classroom? | To characterize 6th graders' critical thinking in the analysis of TV ads in an EFL lesson under CALLA. | Qualitative approach | Case Study | 5 students from 6 th grade | Daniela, Valeria, David, Manuel and Mafe | Private institution from Tunja* | Students' artifacts & transcripts |

4. Data Analysis and findings

The thematic analysis approach based on the students' interpretations and assumptions was employed to identify, compare and find similarities in a specific phenomenon (Alhojailan, 2012). A thematic analysis provides a better understanding of common patterns in the collected data. This approach determines the relationships between the concepts and the student's interpretations (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2013). Therefore, this research study considered the six steps to the researcher's prior knowledge of the topic. The first step invites the researcher to become familiar with the data. The second step is when the researcher sets the initial codes, which means organizing the data systematically and meaningfully. Subsequently, on the third step, the themes are identified and brought together.

On the fourth step, themes are reviewed. In the thematic map, on the fifth step, themes identified in the analysis are explained. The last step is the *final analysis*, which encompasses a detailed examination of the final finding. These stages provide a coherent, accurate, and clear understanding of the data analysis. Figure 4 summarizes the thematic analysis framework. The previous ideas were considered to obtain the following categories to answer the research question.

Figure 3. The six steps of thematic analysis.



Note. Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006)

4.1 Linking prior experiences to my learning process

In this study, students considered their prior knowledge when facing new challenges and issues linked to their realities and social backgrounds. The proposed activities provided the opportunity to engage students in a conversation about their experiences, interests, and thoughts. The discussion above shows a conversation between two students who recalled their previous experiences when answering about the recurring apps they use to listen to music:

Daniela: *Usually in YouTube, because when I want to listen to a song, always there are TV commercials. [sic]*

Valeria: *It is horrible because you do not see the video complete because you are interrupted by an announce. [sic] (Daniela & Valeria, personal communication, May 10th, 2021. [Students artifacts] #2)*

To reflect upon Daniela and Valeria's insights, it is necessary to identify different situations in their daily practices as they expressed their feelings on how the persuasive content makes them feel. In this first activity, I noticed that the class discussions led students to carry out mental processes where they set relationships between their learning and the language itself. Participants could even connect their previous experiences and expertise when conveying new concepts and data. In this same line, Mafe illustrated a profound interpretation of the words that were presented on the white board, these were highly connected to advertising such as necessity, TV commercial, influence, publicity, and message:

“Teacher, I think those words are related because we use TV programs and that is publicity. Publicity has a message and this message has an influence and after you say “Oh, I need this”, and that is like a necessity.” [sic] (Mafe, (2021, May 10th) Personal communication. [Transcript] #2)

The above example shows how a participant followed a sequential line to relate her ideas. First, the student remembered her previous experiences to find a complete definition using keywords such as TV programs, publicity, and messages. Then, she used those previous experiences to understand and provide clear examples of how media has the power to influence the audience. Mafe's insight was supported by a more in-depth analysis and evaluation of the marketing strategies used by the media sponsors to improve the effectiveness of advertising through repeated commercials in a broadcast (Jenni, 2012). The student actually reflected on her immediate background and how the media impacted her decision-making. In this matter, Chamot (2009) explained the importance of creating significant spaces for students to analyze, interpret, and discuss information.

In our class conversation and written activities, students reflected upon the visual strategies that marketers use to catch consumers' attention. Here, pupils could evaluate the content and express their opinions on television commercials. Valeria found out that several announcements draw a perfect reality:

“If you do not have Direct TV in your life, bad things can happen, and, well, in real life that does not happen.” (Valeria, (2021, May 3rd) Personal communication. [Student's artifacts] #1)

Similarly, David pondered on the possible message this commercial wanted to transmit to the audience:

“This TV commercial wants to convince people that their lives are worse without TV ads, commercials.” (David, personal communication, May 3rd, 2021. [Student's artifacts] #1)

The previous extracts illustrate what Hameed (2014) stated about the possible consequences of overexposing children to TV advertising: young audiences can adopt vulnerable and violent behavior when they persuade their parents to purchase a product. Valeria and David critically evaluated the consequences and potential situations in their analysis of television advertisements. From this perspective, both participants were aware of how television advertisements represent an over-commercialization culture from an early age as a guideline to influence people's behavior. Valeria and David also showed their concern when delving into this culture. Thence, students were asked to analyze a TV advertisement produced by an American multinational fast-food chain. Daniela expressed that the announcement influenced kids to eat its products using movies to catch consumers' attention when she stated that

“MacDonald's and the movie producers are behind the announcement. The ad makes me want to go buy a happy meal, and it shows me toys to further

encourage me. It also encourages me to watch the movie so it's just promotional ads" (Daniela, personal communication, May 3rd, 2021. [Student's artifact])

The previous excerpt is connected to another meaningful moment that happened in the lesson. Manuel linked the analysis of the multinational fast-food chain with a national product which is a fruit-flavored drink called *Frutiño*. Manuel expressed

It has too many artificial flavors, and we don't know if Frutiño uses real fruits or if it refreshes or not. (Manuel, personal communication, May 3rd, 2021. [Transcription])

Participants expressed their concern about the accuracy of the information they received daily. Indeed, students deserve to know if they are provided accurate information and strategies to analyze the information they receive on a daily basis (Fisher,2001). Integrating permanent and profound spaces of dialogue to reflect, examine, and evaluate any event in our daily social interaction is a real claim in our teaching and learning practices. As a reflection, educational agendas should include students' voices as they echo unique and valuable experiences to go beyond homogenous reasoning to heterogenous and critical thinking.

4.2 TV advertisements as a means of disturbing reality

This theme responds to the way students analyze, examine and interpret information from TV ads in the classroom. Participants' previous knowledge and experiences played a meaningful role when interpreting the hidden messages behind each TV commercial. According to Hameed (2014), TV advertisements affect students' behavior as they transmit messages that can influence children's decision-making. Thereby, students compared the messages that are usually displayed on TV and other platforms such as YouTube with their own realities and social environment. In this theme, students realized that TV commercials could transmit disturbing

messages that skew their perception of reality. Valeria analyzed an ad belonging to a national flavored drink, which she regarded as distasteful:

“I don’t like this T.V. commercial because I think that they don’t have to show kids in it because it is so disturbing.” (Valeria, personal communication, May 3rd, 2021. [Student’s artifacts])

Exploring students’ critical thinking skills unveiled deeper perceptions about the way they received, analyzed, interpreted and evaluated TV commercials (Hye, 2013). All participants expressed their concern when observing how the music and the fictional backgrounds used in the video tried to use kids to transmit sexual messages on how boys can pursue and convince little girls to make them fall in love. Mafe also shared her dismay:

“I don’t like it... because it says wrong things like ... the blackberry makes someone fall in love and that is NOT true. They are telling lies.” (Mafe, personal communication, May 10th, 2021. [Transcripts])

Along with our lessons, the following extract illustrates the conversation students held when analyzing the same TV announcement that Mafe previously commented on. They recalled the following when going deeper into the topic:

Valeria: *“I think it is just an ad, you don’t have to use it. It is just imagination or fiction.” [sic]*

Manuel: *“I think they should be studying, instead of thinking on how to win their hearts.”*

Daniela: *“Teacher, I don’t agree this is just imagination because boys are going to imitate those scenes when thinking about girls.”*

David: *Yeah, I think it is bad that Frutiño production uses kids for promoting the product. (Valeria, Manuel, Daniel, and David, personal communication, May 3rd, 2021. [Transcripts])*

The previous excerpts show how students recall their previous knowledge and experiences. Images came to their minds when they sat in front of the screen. As the analysis carried on, they were able to understand the hidden messages behind television advertisements and their mercantile strategies such as the use of music and actors, among other factors. In fact, spaces for dialogue were opened, and different debates took place. Students supported their stances, and they nourished their comments with their own life experiences and personal viewpoints. Finally, participants created feasible situations where they predicted possible human behaviors that children may replicate in the future.

All participants were reading, inferring and deducing each situation from the commercials. In a study conducted by Kim, et al. (2004), the misinterpretation of TV ads can encourage students to change their beliefs or even the way they express themselves in society. David shared his reflections on how TV advertisements make him feel and their connection to daily life choices:

“They want to convince me and the public to buy their product because they use products that attract us and always use happiness and perfection when we purchase the product.” (David, (2021, May 3rd) Personal communication. [Student’s artifacts])

Moreover, there is a strong relationship between TV ads and bad eating habits in children. Hameed (2014) reflects on the consequences that sweet and high-calorie food can have on children’s health. Mafe defended this argument by explaining that:

“I wouldn’t recommend this TV ad or product because it has many artificial preservatives, and I think the TV ad is not appropriate for children.” [sic] (Mafe, personal communication, May 10th, 2021. [Transcription]).

Mafe’s insights unveil a critical perspective on media content. She argues that some TV ads are not suitable for kids. Indeed, it can be said that students went beyond

the mere understanding of grammar and structural language content: they moved to a comprehensible analysis of real situations and issues that permeate their behavior, and socio-cultural background.

Based on the previous analysis, students felt motivated when participating in the workshops. They enhanced their learning in different daily situations. Indeed, they positioned themselves as critical consumers. They were able to recall their prior knowledge to strengthen their understanding and analyze new data. Thus, not only did they pay attention to the superficial aspects of TV ads, but they also interpreted, exemplified, inferred, compared and explained their points of view to face an imaginary reality that impacts people's lives with a real social issue or situation.

Conclusion

This research study was carried out to analyze how implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) enhanced students' critical thinking skills in analyzing TV advertisements. Nowadays, new marketing strategies seize social media platforms such as YouTube and TV programs to bombard children and teenagers with content that affects their behavior and distorts their perception of reality (Goaltly, 2000). Thus, this study invited pupils to participate actively in the EFL classroom by partaking in workshops and profound reflections on social issues through the analysis of TV ads. Listening to our students' voices can nourish the teaching and learning practices with valuable ingredients that contribute to a critical learning experience.

This study illustrates how implementing the CALLA model provided a window of opportunities for recalling prior knowledge as a strategy to get new information on a specific topic. Along with the same line, this approach allowed students to remember, understand, analyze, evaluate, and create in-depth reflections about the hidden messages displayed by TV advertisements. From the previous thesis, students could use language not only as an instrument of communication, but also as a means for

social transformation (Kellner & Share, 2005). They created scenarios of dialogue where everyone had the chance to listen and to be listened to. Students moved from identifying superficial features to profound conversations where they contrasted and evaluated different viewpoints about hidden messages displayed in TV announcements.

In this regard, students could use critical thinking skills while being exposed to information provided by advertisements in order to support their ideas with arguments. Even though there was no specific guideline on how to interpret data, participants chose how to interact and analyze their information considering their prior knowledge, honoring their life experiences, and relating them to new topics.

According to Schwarz and Brown (2005), media content analysis helps students to be critical thinkers and active participants in their social and political backgrounds. Indeed, they were critical thinkers who perceived hidden messages that depicted severe social issues, such as traditional paradigms from a patriarchal culture. The presented research study highlights the necessity of providing students with meaningful and contextualized interaction spaces. Therefore, as teacher-researchers, we are called to innovate our teaching practices. Implementing the CALLA model provides a roadmap for guiding students to be critical thinkers and approach issues in a world where challenges emerge every day. In that sense, students must be regarded as potential critical thinkers (Watson & Glaser, 2009). Finally, our role as teacher-researchers needs to go beyond language teaching: it is necessary to empower our students in social transformations. From this perspective, lessons turn into active debates and conversations where students read between the lines when watching ads to make real-life decisions.

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