



Promoting Visual Literacy Awareness through Reading Advertisements

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Abstract

Visual literacy is a relevant topic in education because people communicate through images daily; thus, educational settings should consider this topic in class. This paper presents the results of a pedagogical intervention aimed at creating awareness about the importance of visual literacy in a group of English pre-service teachers. The researcher applied a pedagogical intervention to promote awareness among students about (VL) through the reading of advertisements. Advertisements are visual tools, which reach the attention of the audience through rhetorical figures. Likewise, advertisements might have hidden ideologies, which influence people's behaviors. The participants were able to read some advertisements through the spiral method. The teacher collected data from the pedagogical intervention using students' diaries, surveys, interviews, and artifacts elaborated by the students. The results reveal that students at the beginning of the intervention considered they knew how to read images; however, their mindsets changed about reading an image; students recognized that reading images, especially advertisements, takes time and they need to question what they are observing to reveal the hidden messages on them. The recommendations indicate that advertisements offer deep content; therefore, they could be a good tool to foster visual literacy in the field of TEFL.

Keywords: advertisements, awareness, visual literacy, literacy, visual metaphors.

Promoción de la conciencia sobre la literacidad visual por medio de la lectura de anuncios publicitarios

Resumen

La alfabetización visual es un tema relevante en la educación porque las personas se comunican a través de imágenes diariamente; por lo tanto, los entornos educativos deben considerar este tema en clases. Este artículo presenta los resultados de una intervención pedagógica destinada a crear conciencia sobre la importancia de la alfabetización visual en un grupo de estudiantes que serán profesores de lenguas. La investigadora aplicó una intervención pedagógica para promover el conocimiento de los estudiantes sobre la literacidad visual a través de la lectura de anuncios publicitarios. Los anuncios publicitarios son dispositivos visuales que logran atrapar la atención de la audiencia a través de figuras retóricas. Asimismo, los anuncios pueden tener ideologías ocultas que influyen en el comportamiento de las personas. Los participantes de este estudio pudieron leer algunos anuncios mediante el método espiral. La docente recolectó datos de la intervención pedagógica utilizando diarios de estudiantes, encuestas, entrevistas y productos elaborados por los estudiantes. Los resultados revelan que los estudiantes al inicio de la intervención consideraban que sabían leer imágenes; sin embargo, su forma de pensar cambió acerca de leer una imagen; los estudiantes reconocieron que leer imágenes, especialmente anuncios, lleva tiempo y necesitan cuestionar lo que están observando para revelar los mensajes ocultos en los anuncios publicitarios. Las recomendaciones indican que los anuncios ofrecen contenido profundo; por lo tanto, podrían ser una buena herramienta para fomentar la alfabetización visual en el campo de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: anuncios publicitarios, conciencia, literacidad, literacidad visual, metáforas visuales.

Promotion de la sensibilisation à la littératie visuelle par la lecture d'annonces publicitaires.

Résumé:

La littératie visuelle est un sujet pertinent dans le domaine de l'éducation, car les gens communiquent quotidiennement par le biais d'images ; par conséquent, les établissements d'enseignement devraient l'intégrer à leurs programmes. Cet article présente les résultats d'une intervention pédagogique visant à sensibiliser à l'importance de l'alphabétisation visuelle auprès d'un groupe d'étudiants qui deviendront professeurs de langues. La chercheuse a appliqué une intervention pédagogique visant à promouvoir les connaissances des étudiants en la matière, par le biais de la lecture de publicités. Les publicités sont des dispositifs visuels qui parviennent à attirer l'attention du public grâce à des figures rhétoriques. Les publicités peuvent également contenir des idéologies cachées qui influencent le comportement des gens. Les participants à cette étude ont pu lire quelques publicités en utilisant la méthode en spirale. L'enseignante a recueilli des données sur l'intervention pédagogique à l'aide de journaux d'élèves, d'enquêtes, d'entretiens et de travaux réalisés par les élèves. Les résultats révèlent qu'au début de l'intervention, les élèves considéraient qu'ils savaient lire les images ; cependant, leur façon de penser a changé lorsqu'il a été question d'en lire une différente. Les élèves ont reconnu que la lecture d'images, en particulier de publicités, prenait du temps et qu'ils devaient s'interroger sur ce qu'ils regardaient, pour révéler les messages cachés dans les publicités. Les recommandations indiquent que les publicités offrent un contenu profond ; elles pourraient donc être un bon outil pour promouvoir la littératie visuelle dans le domaine de l'enseignement de l'anglais en tant que langue étrangère.

Mots-clés: publicités, sensibilisation, alphabétisation, alphabétisation visuelle, métaphores visuelles.

Promover a conscientização da alfabetização visual por meio da leitura de anúncios

Resumo

A alfabetização visual é um tema relevante na educação porque as pessoas se comunicam por meio de imagens diariamente; Portanto, os ambientes educacionais devem considerar essa questão nas aulas. Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma intervenção pedagógica que teve como objetivo conscientizar sobre a importância da alfabetização visual entre um grupo de alunos que serão professores de línguas. A pesquisadora aplicou uma intervenção pedagógica para promover o conhecimento dos alunos sobre alfabetização visual por meio da leitura de anúncios. Os anúncios são dispositivos visuais que captam a atenção do público através de figuras retóricas. Da mesma forma, os anúncios podem ter ideologias ocultas que influenciam o comportamento das pessoas. Os participantes deste estudo conseguiram ler alguns anúncios usando o método espiral. O professor coletou dados da intervenção pedagógica usando diários de alunos, pesquisas, entrevistas e produtos produzidos pelos alunos. Os resultados revelam que no início da intervenção os alunos consideravam que sabiam ler imagens; No entanto, sua maneira de pensar sobre a leitura de uma imagem mudou; Os alunos reconheceram que ler imagens, especialmente anúncios, leva tempo e eles precisam questionar o que estão vendo para revelar as mensagens ocultas nos anúncios. As recomendações indicam que os anúncios oferecem conteúdo aprofundado; Portanto, elas podem ser uma boa ferramenta para promover a alfabetização visual no campo do ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: anúncios, conscientização, alfabetização, alfabetização visual, metáforas visuais

Introduction

Nowadays, huge amounts of images appear every day, including photos, memes, ads, and other types of visual items, due to the new dynamics of interaction through social networks. A person can receive images on his/her cellphone due to personal choices, or as well, a person can receive images that are imposed through advertisements with put-ups on some social networks such as YouTube, and Instagram among others. According to Inman (2024), an adult in a metropolitan area might see 50 to 400 advertisements per day, including ads on TV, billboards, and social media. The advertisements that people see daily might influence human behavior because they have hidden messages with the strength to mold people's thoughts. Teaching people to analyze advertisements might help them become active readers of the visual world, rather than people being passive consumers of media. Educational settings, like schools and universities, should provide learners with guidelines to decode the visual world and this is possible by developing visual literacy skills among students. In fact, visual literacy is a key skill for the 21st century that should be mastered (Burkhardt et al., 2003).

Debes (1969) says that visual literacy

is a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. (p. 26)

Therefore, visual literacy provides learners with lifelong skills so that they will be able to evaluate and decode the images and as a result, take an active stance toward the visual world.

When reviewing some documents about VL in different educational settings, the results indicate that it is starting to be explored and applied around the world. Callow (2020) says that visual literacy has been included in the English curricula in some countries, such as Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Singapore, Canada, and New Zealand. The mentioned countries added visual literacy in parallel with reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

Likewise, some research has been carried out regarding visual literacy around the world, especially in countries where visual literacy has been added to the TEFL curriculum. Some studies mention that students are passive learners of visual media messages who see images as transitory objects, thus they do not consider them relevant to evaluate or analyze (Matusiak et al., 2019). Some other studies declare that EFL teachers need training to guide students in the process of teaching visual literacy skills (Villamizar, 2020). Thereby, visual literacy is an emerging topic that poses challenges for teachers and students; it requires the attention of the educational system, especially in the field of TEFL.

Therefore, some actions must be taken into account to overcome this emerging need. In this sense, the researcher of this article started to explore how the university where she works developed visual literacy. She could see that there were no classes or seminars on the subject based on the course syllabus. Thus, the researcher decided to create a workshop where learners in a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages program could become aware of the importance of visual literacy by reading of advertisements that contained visual metaphors. On the one hand, the researcher's choice of advertisements was because they can have persuasive messages, which can be a challenge for recipients to decipher (Livingstone & Helsper 2006). On the other hand, when advertisements have visual metaphors, they do not present literal meaning to the readers, which might lead them to an exercise of analysis.

The seminar lasted for one and a half months and the participants were students who were studying to become English teachers, they were in their third semester and were at an intermediate level of English. During the seminar, the students could reflect on the importance of visual literacy by analyzing some advertisements through three types of visual metaphors: juxtaposition, fusion, and substitution.

Studies Related to the Pedagogical Intervention

In the following lines, the reader will find some research documents related to visual literacy in the field of TEFL. There will be some international studies and some national studies from Colombia.

For one thing, Domínguez and Bobkina (2021) conducted a qualitative study, in Spain; the project aimed to explore and identify how EFL university students analyze memes. Therefore, the researchers used a rubric to measure the students' ability to evaluate them. The results indicated that participants needed more training to analyze memes; most of the participants could hardly decipher deep messages from the presented memes. In this sense, one of the main findings of this study suggests that universities should provide more training in visual literacy skills to learners. The researchers stressed that visual communication spreads daily; however, students lack the preparation to interpret the visual world.

Matusiak et al. (2019) explored literacy skills at a university in the U. A.; the researchers aimed to explore students' ability to comprehend visual content and how they selected, evaluated, and processed images using consensual qualitative research. There were 15 participants in the study and the data collection was based on: questionnaire responses, student papers, presentations, and interviews. The results indicate that participants did not have instructions about visual literacy. On the one hand, students use images more in presentations than on paper because in presentations they can hold the attention of their audience by using images, but on paper they rarely use images; however, they do not give deep reasons why they do not. On the other hand, students select images from Google for their presentations, but they do not verify the sources.

Students also lack citations for the images they use in their presentations. Therefore, there are ethical issues regarding the use of images. In conclusion, researchers suggest that although we live in a visual world, students need more training in selecting, evaluating, and interpreting visual material. Thus, the studies by Domínguez and Bobkina (2021) and Matusiak et al. (2019) strongly suggest that efforts in visual literacy education at the university level should be intensified.

It is important to emphasize that there have been some studies with positive results about promoting visual literacy in TEFL field. For instance, Suriati (2019) conducted a project in the USA, which goal was to develop visual literacy skills in a group of 15 university students by analyzing a photo of the war in Palestine. The researcher developed visual skills and reflection in the participants through three phases: the exposure phase, where students were able to analyze the image based on some suggested questions; the exploration phase where participants evaluated the photo through a sample written essay; and the engagement phase, where learners created a visual analysis essay task. The last session was called the reflection phase, where participants shared their insights about the project. Finally, the author pointed out that students could develop some visual literacy skills, thus, they could learn about the socio-political aspects of Palestine. Likewise, the author emphasized the visual literacy needs to be included more in the classroom because VL could help people read the world better.

In the context of Australian higher education, Villamizar (2020) initiated an exploratory, descriptive, qualitative research endeavor. The objective of this endeavor was to delve into the conception of visual literacy among English professors. A total of fifteen professors from five universities participated in this study. The researcher employed discussion groups and interviews to observe the participants' insights about visual literacy. The findings indicate that professors employ images in their instructional practice, albeit predominantly to cultivate skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. This suggests that professors primarily utilize images to illustrate concepts rather than to facilitate the development of learners' critical thinking skills through the processes of observation and interpretation. In this sense, the author posits that faculties of education must prioritize the training of future teachers. This is due to the necessity of imparting essential concepts of visual literacy, which may consequently lead to divergent image usage in educational settings.

In short, in the previous international research documents, the authors strongly advise teachers to continue working on giving students the guidance to foster literacy skills. In some cases, learners are not aware of the importance of visual literacy skills, and they barely take time to analyze images in depth, becoming passive consumers of the visual world. However, if teachers take actions and guide learners in visual literacy skills, students will be able to discover the socio-political aspects hidden in some images, which might enhance a change of vision of the world. Likewise, research indicates that teachers need training in visual literacy because in some cases they use it just as a tool to foster

linguistics skills, and it must be mastered concomitantly with other competencies within the domain of TEFL.

Now, bearing in mind the local research in Colombia, the author of this study found some research documents about VL in English classes; yet researchers developed most of the projects in basic education or secondary. In higher education, there are some studies on VL; however, they mainly focus on developing a specific skill such as reading, writing, and speaking, rather than promoting VL skills. For instance, López and Puerta (2019) carried out a research project with a group of university students to foster reading skills through infographics. Caicedo (2006) executed a qualitative study, which focused on promoting reading and writing skills based on photography with a group of students from a private school. The study was conducted grounded on Elwals and Friere's theory, thus it was based on a socio-cultural perspective.

In addressing methodologies for cultivating visual literacy, De la Hoz (2020) offers an article in which he expounds upon a systematic functional analysis of cartoons and memes concerning politics. The article elucidates the process of cartoon creation, the context of the texts, and the interplay between the text and its context. This article proposes a methodology for the creation of cartoons, thereby empowering educators to facilitate the interpretation of political cartoons among learners. This approach has the potential to encourage students to engage in critical reflection on economic and political issues, thereby fostering critical thinking skills.

In conclusion, local studies on VL show that this topic has been barely explored at the university level in Colombia, the projects that have been found for this document focus on using VL to master skills to learn English, rather than developing skills to strengthen VL. In regard to how to guide learners in the process of the development of visual literacy skills, De la Hoz (2020), presents an appropriate model, which might be useful for coming interventions in the field of TEFL.

Theoretical Constructs

Visual Literacy and Critical Visual Literacy

Debes (1969) introduced the term visual literacy (VL) in the International Association of Visual Literacy and defined VL as a set of visual skills that allow people to discriminate and interpret visual actions, and symbols that may be natural or human-created, thus, people will be able to enjoy and appreciate visual communication. Nowadays, the literature embraced a variety of concepts related to VL, owing to the surge of interest from diverse academic disciplines, including the arts, psychology, and linguistics, among others. From an educational perspective, VL has evolved, and some scholars have coined a new concept, visual critical literacy. According to Newfield (2011), VL aims at providing meaning to the images; and VCL is oriented to a social and political reading of images. González and García (2022) indicated that VCL is a process of creating meaning by taking into account visual texts. In this project, the terms about visual literacy and

critical visual literacy are relevant and interconnected. For one thing, visual literacy as a group of competencies has the potential to empower the study participants to decode and interpret the visual world. Additionally, the cultivation of critical visual literacy can facilitate the identification of perspectives and ideologies embedded within the analyzed advertisements. In summary, the transition between visual literacy (VL) and visual critical literacy (VCL) may facilitate the participants' exploration of profound socio-cultural dimensions.

Advertisements and Awareness

The overall goal of this project was to raise awareness of visual literacy through reading advertisements. Thus, awareness and advertising were key concepts for this project. Gafoor (2012) pointed out that awareness is an ability to perceive and to be conscious of events, and De Quincey (2006) says that being aware has a connection to being keen on knowing about something or recognizing that something is important.

Tavin (2002), by his part, states that advertisements "can provide representations and resources that help forge our identities, including notions of ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality and citizenship" (p. 832). Therefore, advertisements are not only for selling goods, but they also have hidden ideologies that can change people's perception of the world.

Thus, in this study, inviting the participants to read advertisements was a good opportunity for learners to be reflective and analytical about the landscape of advertisements that were presented in the pedagogical intervention. The learners were aware of the importance of taking time to analyze, so they were able to uncover hidden messages in the advertisements, and as a result, they were able to realize that interpreting advertisements requires time and analytical skills.

Metaphors, Visual Metaphors, and Types of Visual Metaphors

In this study, the participants read some advertisements that have deep information that can be hidden through visual metaphors. Therefore, for the pedagogical intervention in this study, it was appropriate to explain to the participants the meaning of metaphor, visual metaphors, and the types of visual metaphors.

The word metaphor comes from the Greek word *metapherein*, which means to transfer. Boquera (2005) pointed out that sometimes the term metaphor is related to the position of one thing instead of another. This definition is linked to a traditional connotation in which the metaphor is seen as a figure that can substitute one thing for another; in other words, it is a figure that allows a comparison by transferring meaning. The authors Lakoff and Johnson (1995) state that metaphor is a fundamental concept to represent the world, and it is relatively consistent with how we experience it. Thus, metaphors make it possible to represent complex realities in something more concrete, according to the life experience of each person. It is also important to point out that

metaphors cannot be interpreted in general terms, since the perspective from which they are seen depends largely on the context in which they are placed.

Advertisements might have visual metaphors to convey meanings to the readers. Refaie (2003) says that visual metaphors are visual representations of metaphorical thoughts or concepts. Hu (2014) points out the visual metaphor as “showing that one object is like another by comparing two images that may be different” (p. 607). Thus, visual metaphors are connected to the mental representations that we have about the world. Visual metaphors are rhetorical figures that might encode ideologies and beliefs; thus, they can carry messages that influence people’s actions and behaviors.

When analyzing advertisements, it is possible to find three types of visual metaphors: juxtaposition, fusion, and replacement. Juxtaposition is like comparing two things side by side; the ad has the product (target) being advertising near what it is being compared to (the source). Fusion metaphors or sometimes called hybrid metaphors, entangle the product (target) being sold with the thing or person being compared (sourced), so that there is only one element (Gestalt). Replacement metaphors refer to the product (target) that is being advertised and it might be absent, or the thing or person that is being compared is likely not present. Sometimes, this type of metaphor requires more context for its interpretation. The previous concepts: metaphors, visual metaphors, and the types of visual metaphors allowed the researcher of this study as well as the participants of this project to have some elements to decode advertisements.

Research Design

Type of Research

This pedagogical intervention was based on qualitative action research. Qualitative research means that it “involves the discovery, understanding, and generalization of new ideas, perceptions, or theories without seeking to generalize findings to other contexts” (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 9). The previous quote is consistent with the purpose of this study, which was to raise awareness of the importance of visual literacy through the reading of advertisements. And action research denotes that teachers improve their practices through actions. According to Smith and Rebolledo (2018), in action research there are three stages. In the first one, the teacher explores the problem detected; in the second stage, the researcher plans the intervention and executes actions, as well as collecting data. Reflection on the collected data is the final stage. This project replicated the previous stages.

Participants

The participants in this pedagogical intervention were students studying to become language teachers. Students’ ages ranged between 19 to 23 years old, and they work during the day to pay for their studies at night. They were at an intermediate level of English, taking ten hours of English class per week, and were in their third semester. There were 21

women and 3 men in the group. The students participated in this pedagogical intervention for one month and a half.

Research Question and Objective

The research question was: How might the usage of visual metaphors in advertisements promote awareness on visual literacy in a group of English pre-service teachers? The general objective was to analyze how the use of visual metaphors in advertisements promotes awareness of visual literacy in a group of pre-service English teachers.

Data Collection

The instruments to collect data during the pedagogical intervention were students' diaries, students' artifacts, surveys, and semi-structured interviews.

Students diary: At the end of each session, students were asked to write about their opinions on the class. There were some guided questions such as: what did you learn today? Do you have suggestions about the class?

Students artifacts: Students developed some workshops where they wrote their understanding of the advertisements. Collecting students artifacts was useful for tracking their progress and possible drawbacks about reading advertisements.

Surveys: Two surveys about reading images were conducted. There was a survey at the beginning of the intervention and one at the end. These surveys were useful to see the students perceptions about reading images before and after the pedagogical intervention.

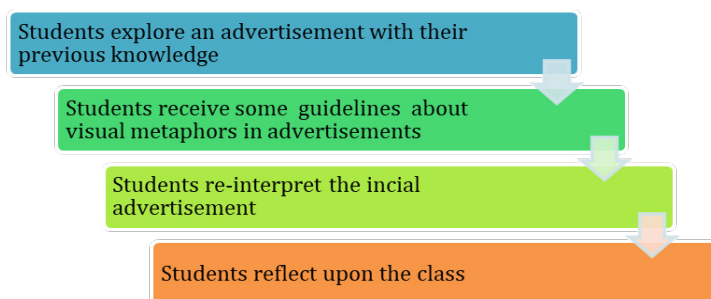
Semi-structured interviews: According to Elliot (1993), interviews are a good tool to know the participants perceptions about a situation. In this study, there were questions such as: what do you think about visual metaphors in advertisements? How was your process for understanding advertisements? What would you recommend for a future intervention?

Pedagogical Intervention

The researcher decided to take actions about VL in the community where she works. There was a workshop that aimed to create awareness about visual literacy in a group of English pre-service teachers. The teacher decided to follow in each class a cycle where students could read the advertisements from their previous knowledge, later, students received some explanations about visual metaphors and questions. Then, students could re-interpret the initial advertisements. Finally, there was a reflection part where students could compare their initial and final interpretations about advertisements. Figure 1 represents the process carried out in each class. The intervention lasted one month and a half. In the first week, the researcher met the students and presented the purpose of the workshop, there were also some questions aimed at knowing the

students' prior knowledge about visual literacy. During weeks two, three, four, and five, the workshops were designed based on the cycle described in Figure 1, in each session, different types of advertisements were presented, such as juxtaposition, substitution and fusion. See Appendix 1 for an example of a workshop. In the last session, the students gave feedback on the workshop.

Figure 1. Cycle for each class



In the following lines, the reader will find an explanation of each step the researcher took during each session.

Students Explore Ads with Their Prior Knowledge

Ausubel (1983) states that learning occurs when new cognitive structures are developed. Therefore, prior knowledge is the key to promoting knowledge, because if teachers know their students' prior knowledge, they can help learners rebuild mental structures. According to Ausubel's theory, there is a process of assimilation in the learning process; new knowledge is integrated by anchoring the previous concepts that students already know. In this project, in the first part of each session, activating prior knowledge was useful for the teacher to see the students' preconceptions about advertisements and thus help the learners rebuild mental structures.

Students Receive Some Guidelines about Visual Metaphors

Analyzing advertisements is a process that requires some guidelines for learners. Therefore, in each session, after exploring learners' prior knowledge, students received an explanation of one type of visual metaphor: juxtaposition, substitution, and fusion, based on examples. Exemplifying has some advantages because students can understand abstract concepts through. Besides, students received some questions to guide them in the process of analyzing the advertisements. According to Han (2015), we need to educate the eye, so it is necessary to take pauses; therefore, in this study, a strategy to invite learners to have time to analyze the advertisements was through questions such as: What is the message of this advertisement? Do you see the visual metaphor? What is the purpose of the ad?

Students Re-interpret the Initial Advertisements (Spiral Learning)

Spiral learning is a teaching method that allows students to have the opportunity to revisit a topic or content that has been explored previously, allowing students to expand their knowledge and improve their understanding of a topic (Veladat & Mohammadi, 2011). In this project, the learners could revisit their initial interpretations of the proposed advertisements, which was beneficial for the learners because they were able to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and, likewise, they were able to reflect on their learning process.

Students Reflect on Re-interpreting Ads

At the end of each session, students wrote some reflections about the course. They indicated their strengths and weaknesses in the learning process. It allowed the learners to reflect on their visual literacy skills. Besides, this part was useful for the teacher because she could listen to the students' voices; therefore, she could evaluate the students' learning process of visual literacy, and she could evaluate her teaching practice as well.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by analyzing the students' artifacts, the semi-structured interviews, the surveys administered at the beginning and end of the intervention, and the students' diaries. The teacher transcribed the interviews and organized the instruments to highlight the most persistent patterns in the data. Bergaus (2025) says that color-coding is a process that can make it easier for researchers to find categories; therefore, it can enable the researchers to interpret the information they collect.

Findings

The reader will find the answer to the research questions that guided this pedagogical intervention: How might the use of visual metaphors in advertisements promote awareness on visual literacy in a group of English pre-service teachers? After revising the students' artifacts, the surveys, and the interview conducted to the participants about the pedagogical intervention, the researcher put color to similar patterns and as a result, the following categories emerged:

Table 2. Categories that emerged from the data analysis

Research question	Category
How might the use of visual metaphors in advertisements promote awareness about visual literacy in a group of English pre-service teachers?	1. Changing the mindset: from seeing to reading
	2. Revealing hidden messages in advertisements

Changing the Mindset: from Seeing to Reading

This first category shows the transition of the students where they moved from seeing an image to reading it. In the first session, the researcher was able to know the students' previous insights about images, because there was a questionnaire where the researcher asked the students if they read images with frequency; most of the students considered that they read images. As presented in the following excerpts:

To be honest, I read images with frequency, every day, in my social Networks, TV, and in my work (Participant S.M, March 3rd, 2023)

I would say that most of the days, I read images, because of the social networks, images are always there (Participant A.H, March 3rd, 2023)

I read images daily when checking my social networks (Participant D.A, March 3rd, 2023)

Likewise, during the first interventions, students developed the activities quite fast when they were asked to read some advertisements, for instance, the advert about Nivea, a famous soft cream (Figure.1). Most of the students' reading about the ad was not deep, and many students could not see that the ad had a racist message, as shown in the following examples:

Figure 2. Image taken from Nivea Gendered and Raced Care of the Self.



Source: <https://blogs.reed.edu/anth344-spring2018-group03/>

Students' first interpretation of the ad:

The publication is racist, but it is a good idea for your skin (Students' artifacts: Participants D.P and D.PO., March 10th, 2023)

It demonstrates the beauty and care of women as it is seen in the image (Students' artifacts: Participants J.C. and N.P., March 10th, 2023)

Nivea compares the skin of this woman with the cream, which helps people with dark skin. (Students' artifacts: Participants S.G. and C.M., March 10th, 2023)

Probably, when students read for the first time the Figure 1, they considered that seeing was a synonym for reading. The Macmillan dictionary defines the word seeing as "to be able to use your eyes to notice and recognize things". Most people do this when they open their cell phones and check messages on their social networks. People recognize things, however, they do not take pauses to reflect on the visual information they are receiving. These days, people consume a significant amount of information and images, yet, we rarely take the time to analyze what our eyes are receiving. Han (2015) states that we are in a society where our daily activities make us hyperactive, and as a result, we begin to mechanize some actions and we end up forgetting the human capacity to contemplate.

In education, it is advisable to pause, in some cases, we are surprised by the benefits of technology and we are eager to become digital experts in the use of ICT and technological devices, but we rarely pause to analyze what our eyes are putting into the brain. Thus, if we do not read carefully, we might be passive consumers of digital media and as a result, we become manipulated by the visual world. For this reason, one of the main steps to overcome this need is to create awareness about the importance of reading images. Raising awareness makes people conscious of a situation. Therefore, some actions must be taken into consideration to foster awareness about visual literacy; for instance, in the pedagogical intervention of this project through the spiral method, students could move back and forward to go deeper in the reading of advertisements. In the spiral method, students can revisit the same topic several times, but each time they must reformulate their mental schema because they can integrate their previous knowledge into the new one (Veladat & Mohammadi, 2011).

In this study, learners were able to view and analyze the advertisements twice in each encounter; at the beginning of the class and after some explanations on visual metaphors and some guided questions. This allowed students to compare and reflect on their process, as well as increase the complexity of interpreting the proposed advertisements by reinforcing their previous learning. The following excerpts show the change in the thinking of some students after reflecting for the second time on the advertisement of Nivea:

We think it can be taken as racist; because the way we interpret the message is that it would not be ok to have dark skin (Students' artifacts: Participants J.C. and N.P., March 10th, 2023)

We think it is racist because they are promoting a clearing cream, and her skin is dark. (Students' artifacts: Participants K. C. and V. M., March 10th, 2023)

At the end of the same session, the researcher asked students the following: What did you learn today?

I learned that it is important to observe to read well, because behind each image there is a message that it is not simple to decode (Students' diary: K. J., March 10th 2023)

It was interesting, before I just looked at the ad, now I understand, it is more important to analyze an ad (Students' diary: K. J.; March 10th, 2023)

At the end of the pedagogical intervention, there was an interview with the participants. The following is an excerpt from a participant's response to this question: What do you think of the workshops on advertising?

The topic of visual metaphors is new for me, it was amazing. Before, I did not question images; now I ask myself: Am I looking? or will I read or analyze? Well, we can be aware of seeing and analyzing, thus, it is what the exercises in the workshop have done. We start questioning, is it true or a lie? This workshop is quite interesting because if people could apply this type of exercise, they would not accept any type of image (Semi-structured Interview Participant: L.G., April 12th, 2023)

In the previous excerpts, the participant indicated that looking at an ad is different from reading it. It was a process in which the participants took time to question the images and to reflect on what was in front of their eyes. Therefore, students were able to change the way they think about reading images, which could be beneficial for them, because they can be more critical of the visual world.

Revealing Hidden Messages of Advertisements

Williamson (1978) stated that advertisements are “ubiquitous, an inevitable part of everyone's lives, even if you do not read a newspaper or watch television the images posted over our urban surroundings are inescapable” (p. 11). Despite the fact the previous quote was written some years ago, it is still updated in this time. Advertisements are constantly appearing in our daily lives and somehow they are more common due to the dynamics that emerge in social networks; however, most of the time we are not aware of the deep messages they might transmit.

According to Wells (2003), advertisements could influence people's perceptions of reality because of the messages they convey through symbolism. Moreover, advertisements might have a dominant discourse because, in our daily lives, we are surrounded by advertisements that have persuasive messages that might influence people's behavior. Similarly, Moreno and Arbaiza (2020) stressed that advertisements can create relationships of dominance because they can play with the desires of the audience. In this sense, advertisements not only have messages for selling goods but they also have socio-emotional discourses. Advertising can shape people's identities as they can feel connected

to the images they see; as a result, they want to get the item or be the person who is shown in the image; thus, people can be manipulated by advertising.

In this study, students begin to realize that advertisements may have hidden messages that could reveal intentions of the producers (Figure 2), and the participants' response:

Figure 3. Image from the Sofia Vergara and David Beckham Commercial.



Source: <https://www.trendhunter.com/trends/skinny-pepsi-ad>

The woman's image was manipulated for this advertisement, she is too skinny. (Participants, J.P. and M. D., March 20th, 2023)

She is compared to a light beverage, making us think about drinking soda and not gaining weight. (Participants, N.O.P. and L. D., March 20th, 2023)

Likewise, participants started to identify that advertisements could have social messages or hidden intentions, as it is presented in the following excerpts:

We need to improve our interpretation of images and go beyond what our eyes can perceive. (Students' diary, Participants L.G. and B.R., March 13th, 2023)

We learned to give a deeper meaning to an ad by using juxtaposition and the importance to identify the hidden message (Students' diary, participants A. H., S. M., and T. M., March 20th, 2023)

I learned that we should look beyond more images; I learned to read the images, and to analyze our context and to know that things depend on the context (Students' diary, Participant S.M., April 12th, 2023)

We learn how advertising can show us an intention about problems in our society (Students' diary, Participants A.H, SM. March 20th, 2023)

As a result, students began to realize that they needed to improve their interpretation of advertisements. Some advertisements do not show literal messages, as we tend to think of them. To interpret advertisements it is necessary to understand how they work, in other words, we need to understand where they are positioned.

Learning to interpret advertisements can be a powerful tool to avoid being manipulated. Many advertisements encourage us to buy something by providing untrue information. Sometimes, when the information is true, advertisements lead us to buy things that we hardly need. Therefore, it is advisable to openly criticize advertisements, so that students will be able to find the hidden messages that they convey; besides, they will be able to state a critical point of view about them.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

Nowadays, society is surrounded by images that emerge from the new dynamics of interaction of this century. Daily, we consume images that might have hidden ideologies that shape our behavior. Therefore, teachers should help learners decode the visual world. Perhaps if we, as educators, provide learners with some strategies, they will be able to interpret the landscape of images and be more analytical. Hence, as educators, we can play an important role in helping students develop visual literacy skills. By focusing on enhancing the visual learning style, we enable students to effectively analyze and evaluate visual information. This empowers them to make informed and autonomous decisions in their educational journey.

The pedagogical intervention that was implemented in this project could help the participants to change their mindset about reading an advertisement and they started to reveal some hidden messages from them. In this study, the spiral method was useful to activate students' cognitive schemas, by allowing students to re-interpret the suggested advertisements. At the beginning and the end of each session, the students were able to see for themselves the importance of looking beyond the image, and they were able to see that they needed to be more careful with the advertisements because they have hidden messages. Likewise, the spiral method allowed the teacher to visualize the students' progress in analyzing advertisements, but as well, she could also see that students needed more strategies to analyze images. For instance, learners need guidance in interpreting advertisements as tools that are socially situated; therefore, they might improve their visual literacy skills.

In addition, critical visual literacy should be more integrated into the field of TEFL, as it helps learners to develop communicative skills while promoting critical thinking, which is essential in today's world. Moreover, emphasizing critical visual literacy in English classes enables both learners and teachers to recognize that images serve a purpose beyond mere decoration or description. They can unveil a realm of hidden messages that

encompass profound discourses, influencing our thinking patterns. Therefore, it is crucial to make some adjustments to the syllabus and curriculum in TEFL, incorporating visual literacy skills and fostering their development through a structured process.

Finally, the researcher developed this pedagogical intervention for just one month and a half. Students indicated that they liked the workshop, but felt that they needed more time to master visual literacy skills. They suggested to the researcher that the workshop needed to be expanded, and that a course on visual literacy needed to be created that would enhance and foster visual literacy skills.

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Appendix 1

Workshop on Advertisements (Ads)

Aims: To interpret visual metaphors in ads. To apply fusion in ads.

1. Your interpretation



How do you interpret the previous ad?

2. After explaining the fusion

Please re-interpret the previous ad.

Bear in mind the following questions:

What is the message of this ad? What is the creative part about this ad? Who do you think the target audience is? Do you see fusion?

What is your interpretation of the commercial after the explanation of fusion in metaphors?

3. What did you learn?

What did you learn today?

What was difficult for you to understand about the ads?

Do you have any suggestions?