

Fostering Talk as Performance in an EFL Class Through the Critical Analysis of YouTubers' Content

Fomento del desempeño oral en público en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera mediante el análisis crítico del contenido de *YouTubers*

Yesika Aristizábal-Jiménez


Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia

This paper reports an action-research study aimed at exploring the benefits of the critical analysis of YouTubers' content through the empowerment spiral model to foster students' talk as performance. Twenty 11th-grade students shared alternative messages related to social issues based on content analysis and reflections. Data were collected via preservice teachers' journals, students' written and multimedia artifacts, and voice recordings, whose analysis was done through processes of codification and categorization. The results showed that the implementation of critical media literacy helped students become aware of the content they were consuming and improve their English oral performance by means of specific oral activities. Therefore, this study has a balance between English as a foreign language learning and the use of critical approaches.

Keywords: cooperative learning, critical media literacy, empowerment spiral model, English as a foreign language, project-based learning, talk as performance

Este documento muestra los resultados de una investigación-acción orientada a identificar las ventajas del análisis crítico del contenido de los *YouTubers* —mediante el modelo “la espiral de empoderamiento”—, para mejorar el desempeño oral de los estudiantes de inglés. Basándose en el análisis del contenido y la reflexión, veinte estudiantes de grado 11 crearon y compartieron mensajes alternativos sobre temas sociales. Los datos se obtuvieron de diarios de la profesora practicante, trabajos escritos y de multimedia de los estudiantes, al igual que grabaciones de voz. El análisis se fundamentó en procesos de codificación y categorización. Se encontró que la implementación de perspectivas críticas ayudó a los estudiantes a ser más conscientes del contenido que consumen y a mejorar su desempeño oral en público, mediante actividades orales específicas. Así, este estudio muestra un balance entre el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera y el uso de perspectivas críticas.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje basado en proyectos, aprendizaje cooperativo, desempeño oral, espiral de empoderamiento, inglés como lengua extranjera, literacidad crítica de medios masivos de comunicación

Yesika Aristizábal-Jiménez  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9113-0692> · Email: yesika.aristizabal@udea.edu.co

How to cite this article (APA, 7th ed.): Aristizábal-Jiménez, Y. (2020). Fostering talk as performance in an EFL class through the critical analysis of YouTubers' content. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 22(2), 181–195. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v22n2.82510>

This article was received on September 27, 2019 and accepted on April 13, 2020.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons license Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. Consultation is possible at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Introduction

This action-research project had its foundation in my interest in creating meaningful learning experiences through critical perspectives of language learning during my practicum, leaving aside traditional ways of teaching. This interest came from my own experience as an English learner at school, which was not worthwhile because my teachers proposed the same activities all the time and addressed the same topics year after year and did not promote talk as performance (J. C. Richards, 2008) as a way of sharing ideas in English. For this reason, I wanted to change that story and be a better teacher by helping students learn a foreign language from their interests and needs and express their insights orally.

Currently, it is common to observe English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in Colombia where grammatical structures and monotonous activities are the focus instead of the development of oral skills. That is the case of the 11th-grade English class where this study was carried out. The class took place in a Colombian rural public institution in which the cooperating teacher's lesson were based on the suggested curriculum and the basic learning rights for 11th grade framed in the *Colombia Bilingüe* policy.¹ However, although this lesson planning provided oral activities and group projects to foster talk as performance, these kinds of activities were not evident during the time of my observation and students did not use the function of talk performance as the policy expected. Different circumstances seemed to contribute to this as: (a) English instruction was grammar-based and focused mainly on syntax and morphology. (b) Activities were monotonous and did not challenge students to use the language with a meaningful purpose. The students mainly wrote sentences or filled in the blanks to practice grammar structures, leaving aside oral and spontaneous written production. (c) Students' attitude towards the

proposed activities was not positive as they expressed displeasure and unhappiness. Finally, (d) since the start of term the lessons revolved around the same topic: school problems; and this resulted boring for the students.

The abovementioned circumstances are not connected to my beliefs as a teacher. I agree with current teaching methodologies that suggest the creation of meaningful learning experiences through the implementation of critical perspectives, which can offer options to help students go beyond grammar structures and isolated sentences and realize the real sense of using a language—in this case, English—as a way to read and write the world (Freire, 1968/1970). Following this idea, I was interested in giving students opportunities to explore new topics which could help them discover who they were and express themselves without reservations. Thus, I conducted a focus group in which I asked students some questions to identify topics of interest. As a result, I found that students wanted to communicate their thoughts and to address up-to-date topics related to mass media, specifically YouTubers' content. Thus, I realized that they were very comfortable with this material and it could be the foundation for developing critical media literacy (CML) and project-based learning (PBL) to foster oral production, mainly, talk as performance, as I discuss below.

Given the problems I described above, I proposed to address this situation by analyzing how the *empowerment spiral model* of CML (Thoman & Jolls, 2005) applied to YouTubers' content in the EFL classroom can foster talk as performance in a group of 11th-grade students at a Colombian rural school. For this aim, I designed, implemented, and evaluated one project that was carried out in groups under a structured process. This proposal had the following objectives:

- to evaluate how lessons under the PBL approach with critical perspectives can foster oral production,
- to analyze how the implementation of the empowerment spiral (Thoman & Jolls, 2005) applied to YouTubers' content impacts students'

¹ The *Colombia Bilingüe* program has been structured to strengthen the English teaching and learning processes in elementary and secondary education in the Colombian education system (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, n.d.).

development of language learning and talk as performance, and

- to examine how critical perspectives in the language classroom helped students foster talk as performance.

Likewise, the most important aspects were the knowledge students gained and the socialization of the final outcome, in which the improvement of oral production based on a critical perspective was analyzed.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework seeks to define PBL, CML, and oral production and cooperative learning, which were the core concepts that guided this action research.

Project-Based Learning

PBL is an approach to language learning in which students learn autonomously by means of self-discovery and group work to create projects that reveal their insights and findings (Bell, 2010). According to Thomas (2000), those projects entail that students participate in actions related to generating ideas, making decisions, solving problems, and working autonomously to reach feasible outcomes. In a like manner, in PBL students seek solutions to problems or meet a challenge “by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991, p. 371). This fact suggests that PBL fosters the development of productive skills, especially oral production since students are working in groups and are using the target language for communicating among themselves during the process of developing projects (Dooly & Sadler, 2016) and the presentation of the final product.

Stoller (2002) states some features of PBL that illustrates its nature: First, PBL addresses topics of interest to students that also place them in contextualized problem-

solving settings (Blumenfeld et al., 1991); second, teachers offer support and guidance during the process; third, students work cooperatively and necessarily communicate in an oral way; fourth, there is an accurate integration of skills in the development of the project; fifth, there is a final product that should be shared, and finally; sixth, PBL encourages, empowers, and challenges students in their learning process. Likewise, there are seven essential project design elements that help teachers to guide learning experiences through PBL:

- challenging problem or question to be solved or answered
- sustained inquiry processes that take time
- authenticity, which is the connection with the real word
- student voice and choice as main objectives
- reflection about learnings
- critique and revision
- a public product to share with others solutions, answers, or performances (Buck Institute for Education, 2015)

In addition to these features and elements, Brumfit (1984, as cited in Beckett, 2002) states that PBL can also have a positive impact on the development of critical thinking and decision-making skills providing comprehensible output in L2 and fostering accuracy and fluency that emerge “from the communicative needs of students within the framework of the project” (p. 54).

Correspondingly, PBL has the potential to promote skills such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Blumenfeld et al., 1991), which are in concordance with the four-step empowerment spiral model proposed by Thoman and Jolls (2005) for the implementation of the CML approach. This process includes awareness, analysis, reflection, and action.

Critical Media Literacy

CML is an approach that “provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a

variety of forms—from print to video to the Internet” (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 21). Likewise, CML stimulates skills to understand the role of media in society and helps students become able to interpret, in a critical way and through questions, all media forms and the messages disseminated through them (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). Similarly, Kellner and Share (2005) define CML as the ability to interpret the meanings transmitted by media texts, to analyze their repercussion, and to produce alternative media from a critical and social point of view that also allows students to express their own voices. Thus, teachers and students use their previous experiences to comprehend and make connections between their ideas and the messages presented in texts. In addition, they become meaning makers and text critics while they are doing a process of decoding the actual information and their purposes (Luke & Freebody, 1999 as cited in McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

In the same way, Thoman (1993, as cited in Jolls & Wilson, 2014, p. 73) suggests five core concepts of CML.

1. Media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media are primarily businesses driven by a profit motive.
5. Media have embedded values and points of view.

These concepts can be analyzed and studied through a five key questions model, in which teachers provide opportunities for students to reflect on five important elements of media messages including the author, the format, the audience, the content, and the purpose (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 22).

Finally, Thoman and Jolls (2005) also describe a four-step empowerment spiral model, based on the work of Paulo Freire. The model helps learners understand, analyze, and make informed choices concerning media texts. This empowerment spiral includes the phases of

awareness, analysis, reflection, and action, that, in this action research, will be the steps for the development of the project. The awareness phase makes reference to certain critical moments in which students make connections and realize that there is something behind messages that were unknown to them. The analysis is the deconstruction of media texts by means of key questions related to the core concepts mentioned above to have a complete view of the media text. In the reflection step, learners identify the influence media texts have on them and start creating an alternative message, which is materialized in the action phase. In this regard, the main purpose of this final step is to encourage learners to define valuable proposals that allow individuals to “formulate constructive actions that will lead to personal changes in their own media choices and viewing habits as well as working to make changes locally, nationally, or globally” (Thoman, 1993, as cited in Jolls & Wilson, 2014, p. 73).

Oral Production

Oral production is one of the four language skills that learners develop while they are learning a language. In this action-research project, oral production is focused on the generation of verbal utterances that express meaning in a process of interaction while students are producing, receiving, and processing information (Florez, 1999, as cited in Bailey & Nunan, 2005). To achieve this, Bailey and Nunan (2005) propose some principles for teaching oral production in which they suggest some actions for teachers in the classrooms. These actions include providing an interesting topic to encourage learners to talk about it; generating opportunities for students to cooperate with each other by using group work, fostering motivation and independence; and using the physical space and arrangements to promote speaking practice and interaction.

Oral production also involves different competences that should be considered for effective English-speaking performance. These are the grammatical competence, knowledge of the structure of the language; discourse

competence, which is related to coherence and cohesion while speaking; sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use the language according to a context; and strategic competence, which is the ability needed by learners to make their speech comprehensible to others (Bailey & Nunan, 2005). These competences allow speakers to use and understand the language in a complete way, which contributes to their confidence while speaking (Boonkit, 2010).

Furthermore, oral production emphasizes the importance of some functions of speaking, which, according to J. C. Richards (2008), include talk as interaction, talk as transaction, and talk as performance. In this research, just talk as performance is going to be developed due to the nature of the action research. In that sense, talk as performance refers to a talk that informs an audience about a certain topic through classroom presentations, public announcements, and speeches, among others. Additionally, this function has a specific organization and progression; gives importance to scheme, accuracy, and written language; and maintains the audience engaged (J. C. Richards, 2008). Furthermore, talk as performance is connected with PBL since this teaching strategy allows students to learn autonomously by means of self-discovery and group work to formulate projects that voice their findings and share them (Bell, 2010, p. 39).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is the process in which teachers encourage students to work together to complete learning objectives through projects or tasks by discussing topics, analyzing materials, and understanding and reflecting inquiry requirements (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Moreover, cooperative cases foster students' positive interdependence since they "perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals" (Johnson et al., 1994, p. 8). It also promotes the speaking skill through the inevitable face to face interaction and

motivates individual accountability to contribute to the final outcome and own learnings (Johnson et al., 1994).

According to Oxford (1997), cooperative learning promotes intrinsic motivation and an improvement of self-esteem since all students are active learners and contribute to the task achievement. Finally, cooperative learning in EFL classrooms "is considered likely to facilitate optimum development of a learner's ability to communicate in the target language because it provides increased opportunities for comprehensible input, real-life experience of language use, and positive peer interaction" (Ning, 2011, p. 62).

Method

This research was done under the characteristics of qualitative inquiry. In words of Denzin and Lincoln (2013), it is a set of actions and interpretations that make the "world visible" by studying genuine contexts or phenomena with the help of participants and the insights they have (p. 6). Concerning the type of research, this study followed the principles of action research whose goal is "to address a specific problem in a practice-based setting, such as a classroom, a workplace, a program, or an organization" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 4).

Context

The setting was a Colombian rural school whose mission is to educate children and young people in self-improvement, responsibility, respect, and environmental care. In addition, this institution, as stated in its constitutional documents, promotes meaningful and experiential learning by providing students, under the holistic pedagogical approach, with the necessary knowledge to transform their lives and values.

The participants were twenty 11th-graders whose age ranged from 16 to 19 years and who belonged to low and mid-income households. Based on a questionnaire analysis, most of the students had positive feelings in relation to the English language. For 84% of the respondents (Questionnaire 1, observation process), English was an

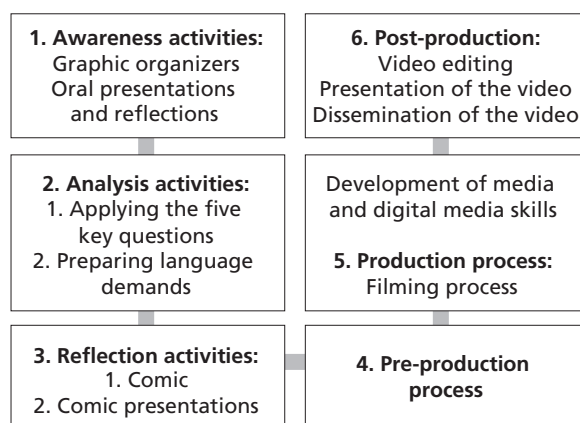
important tool to get to know different cultures and to have better academic and professional opportunities in the future. Nevertheless, the questionnaire also revealed that students' English background was limited. Fifty-two percent of the students affirmed that they were able to give personal information in English and to describe routines and future plans and events. In relation to the four English skills, the one they mastered the most was writing followed by reading, listening, and speaking, in that order. Finally, their main interests were listening to music, surfing the internet, and watching TV.

Another participant was the homeroom teacher (the teacher who traditionally gives the English lessons at the school). Her functions were to support and evaluate the processes in the implementation of the action research made by the preservice teacher who, in this case, is the researcher as well.

Planning Actions

This action plan lasted 12 weeks which were divided into 12 lessons and it was based on PBL and the four-step empowerment spiral model suggested by Thoman and Jolls (2005). To address all the empowerment spiral phases, six main actions during the implementation of this research were proposed (see Figure 1). The procedure of these six activities is further explained below in the Development of Actions section.

Figure 1. Main Actions in the Implementation



Data Collection Methods

During the process of the proposal definition, one focus group was created with the purpose of validating the problems I observed with the students. To achieve this aim, key questions were asked addressing topics such as the homeroom teacher's methodologies, activities, and classroom atmosphere. Additionally I designed a diagnosis activity to identify the students' existing abilities regarding talk as performance critical media literacy and cooperative learning. In this activity, the participants created groups of four, watched a YouTuber's video of their choice and paid attention to its structure (welcome, development of ideas, and closure). Afterwards, each group created their own short video. What I could observe is that the participants had trouble communicating in English (lack of coherence, unclear ideas, mispronunciation) which made their messages difficult to understand.

Other methods used were preservice teacher's journals, students' artifacts, voice recordings, and a semistructured interview. Journals were registered after each lesson by including students' reactions and performances and some personal reflections that helped me clarify aspects at the moment of data analysis. Students' artifacts such as the graphic organizer, the comic, and the final video evidenced students' work, level of language, improvements, and willingness to learn. They were analyzed with rubrics, which allowed me to reach general conclusions based on students' performance. Five-minute voice recordings of oral activities were transcribed by using selective transcription considering the most relevant information for this study (K. Richards, 2003). The analysis of these recordings showed students' abilities and improvements to perform orally. Finally, a semistructured interview was done with my cooperating teacher at the end of the process, whose protocol included the title of the action research, the research question, the purpose of the interview, and the questions. This interview allowed me to learn the cooperating teacher's opinion concerning the actions

I implemented and improvements she identified in students' talk as performance and some other aspects of the language.

Development of Actions

Following the actions mentioned above, the empowerment spiral model in CML and the PBL, principles of language learning by means of self-discovery, and group work to reveal students' insights and findings (Bell, 2010), I designed my preservice teaching agenda and lesson plans bearing in mind the cyclic process of awareness, analysis, reflection, and action to have a final outcome to share with the school community and to evidence improvements in students' oral performance. During the first week of implementation, I carried out a diagnosis activity as explained above. I made students aware of the structure of a YouTuber's video including an introduction (a greeting, information about the creators of the video, and a general idea about them), a development (instructions or explanations about a topic of interest), and a conclusion (to say goodbye to your followers and include some conclusions). After that, I proposed a grammar review and exercises we developed through a game called "Jeopardy." This game was aimed at remembering and practicing key grammar structures such as the simple present, the present continuous, the simple past and the use of "will" and "be going to"; all this, to facilitate processes during the development of the project in terms of accuracy. In this game, learners had to choose a grammar category (the ones mentioned above) and do the corresponding exercise; if it was good, students won points; if it was not, other students had the opportunity to do the exercise. At the end, the students had clarity about the grammar structures we practiced and were also prepared to use them in the development of future activities related to the empowerment spiral phases.

The first phase of the empowerment spiral model I addressed was the awareness stage, which was also the first step of the project. During the following

two weeks, I proposed different awareness activities that had as a purpose to "provide the 'ah-ha' moments that unlock a spiral of critical inquiry and exploration that is the foundation of media literacy pedagogy" (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 31). To begin with, I suggested students work in a cooperative way to achieve common learning objectives through a project about YouTubers' content. Hence, students formed groups of four and, as a first activity, chose one YouTube video. In order to accomplish oral and CML objectives, the videos were chosen based on the following conditions: (a) the video had to be in English and (b) the video belonged to a well-known YouTuber. Then, students created graphic organizers to identify information such as author, the main idea of the media text (YouTuber's video), purpose, explicit messages, hidden messages, and the audience. To do this, students, in their groups, watched the videos and identified the aspects mentioned before discussing and agreeing on specific ideas. Then, students presented their graphic organizer in a poster session, which was the oral activity to share their findings in this phase of the spiral. For this activity, in one of the lessons I provided some guidance related to the dynamics of a poster session, the material needed to perform it, and the content of the poster through examples.

Regarding the analysis phase and the second step of the project, students deconstructed the media text they chose (some of the media texts were related to make-up tips, challenges, and sports). To do that, they worked in different corners of the classroom answering key questions related to the five core concepts of CML in group discussions that allowed students to use the target language and to "figure out how the construction of any media product influences and contributes to the meaning they make of it" (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 31). As a result, students got important information related to the author, the content, the format, and other concepts of CML that was the basis for the next stage in the spiral model.

During the reflection phase of the spiral—the third step of the project—students revealed their personal experiences concerning the media texts guided by the following questions: “What are the positive or negative effects that the video and the YouTuber might have on ourselves or others? How has the message from the video influenced my decisions? How do I and others feel when watching the video?” The students then designed a comic strip with the use of a template and started to create their alternative messages having as a point of departure their personal experiences and interpretations of the original video. After that, students presented their comic strip to their classmates including information such as the name of the comic, the characters, the story, and personal reflections.

Finally, in the action phase, students had to do four exercises, which were also the final steps of the project. The first one was to write the script of their own video following a specific format that I provided and explained, in which students used the information from the previous three phases of the spiral to contextualize the audience, to share the analysis of the original video, and to create an alternative message for the school community. Here, my role was to support students in terms of language demands and clarifications about the format. The second activity consisted of the production of their own videos with all that this implied: putting the script into action

with creativity and imagination, the use of camera angles, the number of scenes needed to clearly communicate the content and showing their talk as performance. The third activity was the edition process of the video and finally, in the fourth and final activity, students shared their alternative messages (that is, their fully developed videos) at the school, finishing their projects and leaving a legacy of critical analysis and reflection of YouTubers’ content.

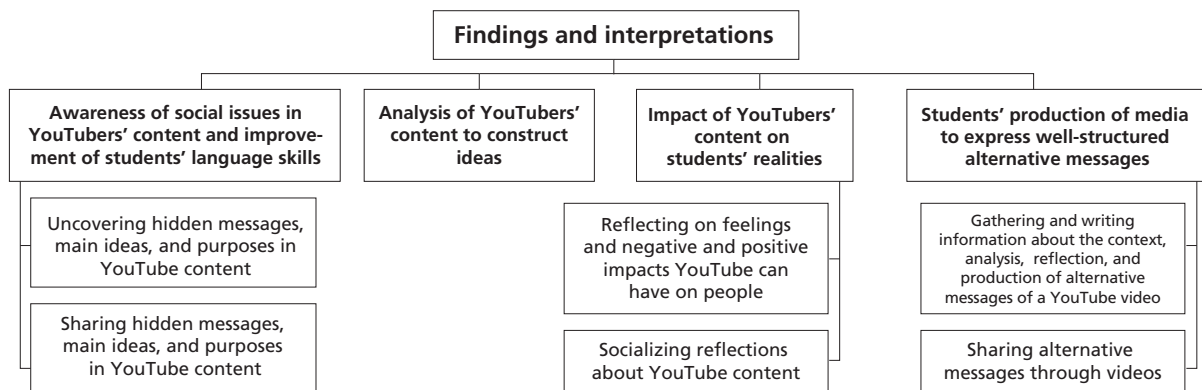
Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I followed the codification and categorization steps suggested by Saldaña (2015). The codification step consisted of organizing the data by using labels according to the needs of the study, which allowed me to identify the salient categories. These categories were defined based on the similarities among codes or the characteristics they shared (Saldaña, 2015). Moreover, I used an Excel file to help me organize the data and filter the most relevant information. At the end of this process, findings and conclusions related to the improvement of talk as performance emerged.

Findings and Interpretations

In accordance with the empowerment spiral model, the findings of this action research are organized according to the categories and subcategories I identified (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Categories and Subcategories Found Based on the Empowerment Spiral Model



Awareness of Social Issues in YouTubers' Content and Improvement of Students' Language Skills

Collected data in the awareness phase of the empowerment spiral evidenced how students became aware of social issues within YouTubers' content while improving language skills. This was possible by means of discussions and a poster presentation. Further explanations related to these activities are provided below.

Uncovering Hidden Messages, Main Ideas, and Purposes in YouTube Content. In the diagnosis stage, some problems regarding syntax and grammar structures were evident. Students used grammar structures but with many mistakes related to word order that made messages difficult to understand: "We advance the right foot and bring the right hand to the chest, the raise the left foot and bring both hands towards the chest and after this, we return" [*sic*] (Participant 1, diagnosis activity, Lesson 2).

In contrast, in the written awareness activity, which was discussing the purpose, main idea and hidden messages, students used grammar structures with occasional mistakes that made the message easy to understand. This may have occurred thanks to the grammar practice done at the beginning of the process and group efforts to make the message comprehensible in their graphic organizers which were part of the awareness phase of the empowerment spiral model. The following fragments are clear examples of this improvement:

Main idea: She tells facts about her life that may be another people want to know.

Shared ideas beyond messages: Motivate people to talk about their lives in public. (Participant 2's graphic organizer, Lesson 3)

Main idea: Ninja made 27 kills with his teammates in a game.

Shared ideas beyond messages: Addiction to video games and obesity. (Participant 3's graphic organizer, Lesson 3)

These pieces of evidence show how the process of completing a graphic organizer format addressing

familiar material (YouTube videos) helped students improve syntax while they were finding information by comparison with the diagnosis activity results. The information was related to YouTube videos' main ideas, purposes, audience, open and hidden messages related to social issues. Thus, as Thoman and Jolls (2005) mention, through projects framed into the CML it is possible for students to develop academic literacies and increase "the ability and proficiency to express and disseminate their thoughts and ideas" (p 40).

Sharing Hidden Messages, Main Ideas, and Purposes in YouTube Content. In regard to talk as performance, the analysis of the diagnosis activity showed students had important difficulties at the beginning of the process. These difficulties were related to expressing complete ideas, using the characteristics of talk as performance, and pronouncing in an acceptable way. Concerning the expression of complete ideas, the majority of them needed to be better structured as evident in the following excerpt: "This challenge [referring to a challenge the student had observed in a YouTuber's video] consisting [*sic*] of filling a condom with water and throw the head of a friend" [*sic*] (Participant 4, diagnosis activity, Lesson 2).

Regarding talk as performance, the students' videos in the diagnosis activity did not have good audio and there was a lot of background noise. Besides, in some cases, students were not in front of the camera and their talk as performance was not evident. Similarly, the pronunciation in all the videos was poor because students read the words with a Spanish pronunciation, which made messages difficult to understand.

Conversely, during the poster session, students showed some positive changes while presenting their discoveries related to YouTube videos' main ideas, purposes, audience, messages, and hidden messages. Those positive changes were evident in the poster session analysis, in which the majority of ideas were complete, well-structured, and comprehensible during presentations. Moreover, the most important aspects of

students' interventions were acceptably well pronounced and students' talk as performance improved considerably. The following excerpts illustrate the aspects mentioned above:

It is clear the students' interest to do a good presentation with clear ideas and visual aids to engage an audience, which is part of the function of speaking I am addressing in this action research: talk as performance. (Preservice teacher's journal 3)

The poster session was an activity or is a very significant activity, which helped students to improve their oral production, in this case in English. Besides, it also helped students with their expression.² (Homeroom teacher's interview)

Consequently, presenting discoveries about YouTubers' content through a poster session appeared as a tool to encourage students to share complete ideas and to use the function of talk as performance based on their interests which made them realize that they are able to speak and express ideas in English. Additionally, as Dooly and Sadler (2016) suggest, PBL promotes the development of oral production since students are working in groups and sharing ideas in English during the development of projects and in the presentation of outcomes.

Analysis of YouTubers' Content to Construct Ideas

Data revealed how students improved their vocabulary and syntax through the analysis of YouTubers' content by answering key questions about CML core concepts in the analysis phase. Considering the diagnosis activity as baseline data, it is clear that students improved these grammatical aspects (vocabulary and syntax) leaving aside poor results and confusing ideas. This was possible thanks to a specific activity in which students were rotating in different corners or spaces

² All of the excerpts from the homeroom teacher's interview were translated from Spanish for publication purposes.

in the classroom by answering questions related to the author, format, audience, content, and purpose of the YouTube video they had chosen. Likewise, to do this activity, students used dictionaries and were allowed to ask about unknown words and ways to write specific ideas. The following excerpts illustrate these statements:

Students were rotating for all the corners in the classroom and they stayed in each one for 14 minutes. Besides, students were asking questions in relation to vocabulary and grammar structures that allow them to use new words and better-structured sentences. (Preservice teacher's journal 4)

Question 1: What do I think and feel about this video?

Answer: We think that the video is very personal to be published." [sic] (Students' artifact 3, Lesson 5)

Question 2: "What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?" (Thoman & Jolls, 2005, p. 26)

Answer: The values represented in the video are respect, intelligence, responsibility and skill, and the old people are omitted in the video. [sic] (Participant 6, analysis activity, Lesson 5)

As shown above, the analysis of YouTube videos—bearing in mind the five key concepts of CML—was an opportunity for students to get new vocabulary and structure sentences in a correct way. This allowed students to improve their grammatical competence which, as mentioned by Bailey and Nunan (2005), is very important as it is part of both written and oral production.

Impact of YouTubers' Content on Students' Realities

The reflection phase in the empowerment spiral also contributed to the positive results. The analysis of data showed how reflection activities allowed students not only to become aware of the impact YouTubers' content had on them but also of their language skills improvements.

Reflecting on Feelings and Negative and Positive Impacts YouTube Can Have on People. Another activity that facilitated the use of new vocabulary was the creation in groups of a comic strip. In The purpose of this comic strip was to promote students' reflection on the impact YouTubers' content and hidden messages had on them and their realities. In that sense, the activity demanded the use of new and appropriate vocabulary that was in accordance with students' ideas and reflections. In Figure 3, it is possible to observe the use of more English words while creating dialogues in comic strips.

Figure 3, with the use of words such as influence, accept, brand, products, advertise, and self-esteem, illustrates students' interest to communicate their thoughts in English. The image also supports the ideas of Brumfit (1984, as cited in Beckett, 2002) who stated that project work, in this case the third step of the project in which students created alternative messages, provides students with opportunities for comprehensible output fostering the use of precise words that arise "from the communicative needs of students within the framework of the project" (p. 54). In a like manner, it is also evident that the cooperative work helped students complete learning objectives; in this case they gained new vocabulary by reflecting on inquiry requirements (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

Socializing Reflections About YouTube Content. Presenting the comic strip with their classmates as

audience fostered students' use of the function of talk as performance. Regarding this point, data revealed that 80% of the students were able to present their comics talking about the title of the comic, its characters, and the alternative messages they proposed without significant problems. Additionally, the stories and drawings were very creative and they transmitted students' ideas in a varied way. In sum, their presentations were opportunities to perform orally and share their creations. As evidence of these statements, I present the following excerpt taken from a voice recording:

Hello, the characters of the comic are the son and the mother
 Boy: Oh nooo!!, I am killed.
 Mother: What's wrong?
 Boy: I am angry.
 Mother: Keep calm, You see what video games do.
 Boy: Yes. I' m sorry for getting mad only for one play.
 Mother: ok.
 Boy: the best that I will do is do homework; I will control more the video games. [sic] (Voice recording 2)

To achieve this, it was relevant to follow one of the principles for teaching oral production proposed by Bailey and Nunan (2005), which suggests providing an interesting topic to encourage learners to talk about; in this case, students' reflections on the impact YouTubers' content had on them and their realities.

Figure 3. Participant 7's Artifact: Comic Strip, Lesson 7



Students' Production of Media to Express Well-Structured Alternative Messages

The final steps of the project, while students developed the action phase of the empowerment spiral, also provided some results. Data showed that the production of videos encouraged students to organize different ideas in a complete text as a guide to perform orally.

Gathering and Writing Information About the Context, Analysis, Reflection, and Production of Alternative Messages of a YouTube Video. Students found writing a script for the video, after I had given participants some instructions, was favorable for them in order to organize different ideas in a complete text. It means that students were involved in a process in which they had to collect all the information from the previous phases of the empowerment spiral for the final outcome of the project. That script became the foundation for oral performance in the video, as shown in the following excerpt:

The reason to created the video, is to show the love they feel through this small details that they gave at Christmas. What we liked was, teach many values, give messages of motivation and some of the gifts were very useful because they were necessary for them. Something that we didn't like is that this kind of videos can influence people to expensive obsesions and the things of brand. Some hidden messages: of give unnecessary things. [*sic*] (Participant 8's script, Lesson 9)

As is evident, students were able to write coherent ideas in a complete text. This may also have been due to the fact that they worked cooperatively and took advantage of some clarifications I provided (related to word order, use of appropriate words, new vocabulary) in order for them to improve their pieces of writings. These characteristics are connected to some of the ones mentioned by Stoller (2002), in which the main features are that students work cooperatively, there is an accurate integration of skills in the development of

the project, and teachers offer support and guidance during the process until the presentation of the final product. In addition, as Oxford (1997) mentions, the cooperative work allowed students to become active learners to contribute to the task achievement, as was evident in the scripts.

Sharing Alternative Messages Through Videos.

Creating videos and sharing them were activities that evidenced students' talk as performance. Hence, students made great efforts to introduce the original content, contextualizing the audience, expressing thoughts and feelings, and sharing alternative messages based on updated and interesting topics including bullying, self-esteem, and self-improvement. The following excerpt shows students' performance and the final outcome of their project:

The messages it shares are inspiration, new goals, fellowship, teamwork, dedication.

The purpose of the video is create a trend, increase followers, increase visits, motivate players, show his playing skills. Moreover, show new records. However, he also has negative messages the obesity, addiction to video games, violence, and weapons. [*sic*] (Participant 9's video, Lesson 11)

Similarly, and thanks to this project, it is noticeable that PBL motivated students to identify hidden messages and propose alternative ones. This was possible by asking and answering questions, "debating ideas, designing plans, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, and creating artifacts" (Blumenfeld et al., 1991, p. 371), which, in this implementation, were videos as final outcomes. Those videos also became the instruments to show students' talk as performance, specifically one of its characteristics, that, in words of J. C. Richards (2008), allow people to inform an audience about a certain topic through classroom presentations, public announcements, and speeches, among others.

Conclusions and Implications

This study had as its purpose to explore how the implementation of the empowerment spiral model (Thoman & Jolls, 2005) applied in YouTubers' content could foster talk as performance in a group of 11th-grade students in the EFL classroom. After the data analysis, I can conclude that the activities based on the empowerment spiral model and the development of a project helped students improve their use of some mechanical aspects of the language and their oral skills through the critical analysis of very familiar material.

The mechanical aspects of the language were improved thanks to cooperative work and the different written activities I proposed during the empowerment spiral cycle. Throughout the process, improvements related to vocabulary were evident, as well as the expression of complete ideas and the mastery of grammar structure and meaning, which facilitated not only the critical analysis but also students' talk as performance at the end of the project (Thoman & Jolls, 2005). In relation to students' talk as performance, the proposed oral activities fostered students' oral skills when they faced an audience. In that sense, students managed to talk about an interesting topic with confidence, used formats to share their messages—such as posters, PowerPoint presentations, and videos—and had a specific audience in mind (J. C. Richards, 2008).

Furthermore, this study showed that learners can face challenging activities. In my case, I could see that through my proposed activities, students were able to state nonpredetermined answers to questions they were not used to reflecting about and develop important analyses related to social issues in media. This was also one expected result that guided my actions and proposed activities during my practicum.

Additionally, the implementation of this action research entails certain pedagogical implications for future practices. To begin with, it is necessary that teachers consider foreign language teaching and learning processes as opportunities to address media and the

hidden messages behind that media while students develop language skills. Another implication is that teachers should develop a critical view of the content they teach in order to permeate lesson planning and the activities used in class to guide students in the process of analysis of media texts. It is also important to address updated and interesting topics for students in order to encourage them to use the language while doing critical activities. In that way, teachers can find a balance between language learning and the use of critical approaches. Furthermore, to foster oral production, it is necessary to give importance to writing processes because texts are the foundations for students to speak and share ideas. In that sense, students may feel confident and could take more risks thanks to the support that their texts offer.

Similarly, as principles in teaching practices, it is important to take into account students' interests in order to engage them in their own learning process. In that sense, students may be more willing to develop activities and actively participate in class discussions while they are improving their language skills. Moreover, cooperative work allows students to participate during all the process and reach the learning goals with the support of their peers (Johnson et al., 1994). This is important since students gain motivation and feel part of the project. Likewise, providing clear instructions, presenting appropriate examples, and having a final outcome framed into a project help students throughout the process, promote autonomous work, and facilitate the teacher's role.

Another key point is that this project could be the starting point for future actions that may strengthen current results. Thus, future actions could be the use of a different media text in a different EFL context and with different participants. For example, the critical analysis of advertisement of toys for kids to evidence their reflections and language improvements. Moreover, it could be possible to register possible changes in other language skills such as writing, reading, and listening. Hence, further research may include not only the analysis

of improvement regarding language skills but also a critical stance towards and production of media based on CML core concepts.

Finally, there was a limitation in the study that should be considered in future research: time. Since the study was developed over four months, it was not possible to have an in-depth view of the improvements of each participant. That means that data were analyzed in a general way and results showed general ideas regarding students' critical analysis and talk as performance.

References

- Bailey, K., & Nunan, D. (2005). *Practical English language teaching: Speaking*. McGraw-Hill.
- Beckett, G. H. (2002). Teacher and student evaluations of project-based instruction. *TESL Canada Journal*, 19(2), 52–66. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v19i2.929>
- Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 83(2), 39–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650903505415>
- Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3–4), 369–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.1991.9653139>
- Boonkit, K. (2010). Enhancing the development of speaking skills for non-native speakers of English. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 1305–1309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.191>
- Buck Institute for Education. (2015). Gold standard PBL: Essential project design elements. *MyPBLworks*. <https://bit.ly/3aJhIRh>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Dooley, M., & Sadler, R. (2016). Becoming little scientists: Technologically-enhanced project-based language learning. *Language Learning & Technology*, 20(1), 54–78.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published 1968)
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(2), 67–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849909543834>
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Johnson Holubec, E. (1994). *The new circles of learning: Cooperation in the classroom and school*. ASCD.
- Jolls, T., & Wilson, C. (2014). The core concepts: Fundamental to media literacy yesterday, today and tomorrow. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 6(2), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2016-06-02-6>
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2005). Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26(3), 369–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200169>
- McLaughlin, M., & DeVoogd, G. (2004). Critical literacy as comprehension: Expanding reader response. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(1), 52–62. <https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.48.1.5>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (n.d.). Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo. *Colombia aprende: La red del conocimiento*. <https://aprende.colombiaaprende.edu.co/es/colombiabilingue/86689>
- Ning, H. (2011). Adapting cooperative learning in tertiary ELT. *ELT Journal*, 65(1), 60–70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq021>
- Oxford, R. L. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81(4), 443–456. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1997.tb05510.x>
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.

- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Stoller, F. L. (2002). Project work: A means to promote language and content. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 107–119). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190.016>
- Thoman, E., & Jolls, T. (2005). *Literacy for the 21st century: An overview and orientation guide to media literacy education*. Center for Media Literacy.
- Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A review of research on project-based learning*. Autodesk Foundation.

About the Author

Yesika Aristizábal-Jiménez is a foreign language teacher graduated from Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia). Her research interest is critical media literacy in EFL contexts. Currently, she is an English teacher in different institutions in the Eastern region of Antioquia. She has teaching experience from preschool to higher education.