The Foreign Language Classroom as a Space for the development of Visual Literacy and Critical Thinking

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Abstract

Images are part of our daily lives, whether in a professional, personal, or educational context. In the classroom, particularly in the foreign language classroom, their uses are virtually endless and can facilitate the development of visual literacy as well as critical thinking. To this end, teachers must place the image at the centre of their classes and not just use it as a merely decorative element. This article aims to understand how foreign language classes could help in the development of visual literacy and critical thinking. To this end, an action-research project was carried out during the teaching practice of a Master's degree in teaching English and Spanish in the third cycle and secondary education, in which the image was central and provided moments of reflection and criticism by the students during lessons in a secondary school near Lisbon, Portugal. Data was gathered from learners' classwork, and this was analysed using a series of descriptors related to visual literacy and critical thinking. This study shows that most students are visually literate and able to think critically about some topics, even though it is clear there is space for improvement. It is imperative to dedicate time to the analysis and interpretation of a variety of images (film posters, memes, photographs, pictures, and cartoons, among others) and to debate the various ideas and interpretations that may arise from them, bearing in mind learner motivation.

Keywords: visual literacy, critical thinking, pictures, action-research, foreign language teaching.

1. Introduction

Images surround us. We are constantly being bombarded by new images, both in public and private spheres, due to the advances of telecommunications. We see them in advertising, social networks, newspapers, on television and in magazines. Knowing how to find, interpret, evaluate, use and effectively create these images, that is, how to be visually literate (Lundy & Stephens, 2015) is therefore central for any citizen, especially students. They are the ones who are in continuous contact with the digital world, and who are exposed to new information and images full of new messages in an increasingly globalized world, characterized by excessive information, that is, by an infodemic (Martín et al., 2021)

In addition to knowing how to "read" the images we receive and deciphering their various layers, it is also imperative that 21st century students have tools that help them think critically. According to the *Perfil do Aluno à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória* (Direção Geral da Educação, 2017) an essential document for the organisation and articulation of the Portuguese education system, "critical thinking skills require observing, identifying, analysing and making sense of information, experiences and ideas and arguing from different premises and variables" (my translation).

Uniting critical thinking and visual literacy, two areas of particular interest in this article, is a significant strategy in preparing students for an increasingly demanding future and the foreign language classroom is a privileged space to do so, as the student is perceived as a social agent, a citizen with a series of tasks at hand that (s)he needs to accomplish within a particular environment and a concrete space for action (Council of Europe, 2001). Here, the student/citizen is helped by the teacher to reason, interpret, create, question and conceive hypotheses, using both the mother tongue and the foreign language, in order to be prepared for the challenges of the future, and does not act simply as a receiver of information.

Following the methodology of action research, this study intends to answer the question "How can foreign language classes help in the development of visual

literacy and critical thinking?". It begins by clarifying the concepts involved (visual literacy and critical thinking) before explaining and discussing methodology, results and conclusions. Also, why and how these two dimensions should be included in the classroom will be illustrated, providing examples of activities and didactic sequences.

2. Literature review

2.1 Visual Literacy

We often hear the word *literacy* applied to the most diverse contexts. According to Cassany (2015, p. 89), its most traditional definition encompasses, "all knowledge, skills and attitudes and values derived from the widespread, historical, individual and social use of the written code". Thinking of the social context, Cassany and Castellà (2010, p. 354), define it as " a wide range of knowledge, social practices, values and attitudes related to the social use of written texts in each community". However, the evolution of technological media has enhanced the development of this term, as well as its scope, given that new ways of reading, visualising, and searching for information have emerged. Currently, there is talk of digital literacy, media literacy and visual literacy, among others.

When mentioning this last term, we can say that currently visual literacy is the set of skills that allows the individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use and create images or any other means of visual communication (Lundy & Stephens, 2015), a definition that will be the basis of this study. That is, the literate citizen, in addition to knowing how to read and write, is able to ask him/herself about the messages (s)he receives, regardless of how they are communicated to him/her (Goldstein, 2016). In addition to being a receiver and consumer (Lundy & Stephens, 2015), the literate individual is also, in the words of the aforementioned authors, "a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture", the objective of which is, as has already been mentioned, to deconstruct the various meanings of what is presented to him. It is important to mention that the difficulties in "reading"

actively and critically the messages that come to us are a reality, not only for young people, but also adults (Bulger & Davidson, 2018), highlighting the importance of this competence in the classroom. In fact, it is essential to highlight that, although they were born in a digital age, the vast majority of adolescents do not have in their possession the tools necessary to identify the multiple meanings in images, largely due to the difficulties they have in determining the veracity of the information collected (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013, as cited in Kahne & Bowyer, 2019).

2.2 Critical Thinking

The concept of *critical thinking*, which is intrinsically linked to the previously discussed concept has been described by Scriven and Paul (1987) as:

> the intellectual process of actively conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. in its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. (Scriven & Paul, 1987, as cited by Xu, 2011, p.136)

Within the sphere of education, it is impossible not to relate the concept under analysis to the words of Bloom (1956, p.38), who describes critical thinking as "intellectual abilities and skills the student has or should have to choose and use the most appropriate tools and techniques to deal with new problems and situations that arise. According to the author, critical thinking involves 6 levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and, finally, evaluation), and learners should be able to use all these levels to gain knowledge in different spheres of their life (Bloom, 1956).

It is also important to highlight the concept of critical pedagogy, initially developed by Paulo Freire, which changed how society perceived teaching and the student's role. For Freire, the objective was to make the student aware of his/her own reality, in order to convert him/her into an agent of change and cultural production (Freire, 1967; 1970, as cited by Lacorte & Atienza, 2019). It is therefore essential that students deliberate (this is, critically think) on the relationship between a particular language and politics, ideology, culture, race, ethnicity or gender (Jiménez, 2017).

3.Methodology

This research was developed as an action research (AR) project, which can be defined as being "related to the ideas of 'reflective practice' and 'the teacher as researcher'. AR involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts" (Burns, 2010, p.2). It also involves problematizing, questioning and inquiring (Ramos-Méndez & Sánchez-Quintana, 2018), in order to improve or learn more about a particular aspect that the teacher considers problematic, or that arouses his/her curiosity.

Thus, following the indications of theses authors, a cyclic process was followed in order to answer the research question "How can foreign language classes help in the development of students' visual literacy and critical thinking?". A possible issue to improve was identified and after a preliminary investigation, a specific intervention was planned. After implementing this in the classroom, data was recorded and analysed and finally, conclusions were drawn.

3.1 Context and data collection

The current study took place at the public school near Lisbon, Portugal, with four groups from the 10th grade, even though the results here will focus on only of

the classes, namely 10ºC. This group had 26 students (16 boys and 10 girls), mostly at B1/B2 level doing a Science and Technology course.

For data collection, various classroom activities such as project work, worksheets, debates, and exercises around the creation of images were used. The first activity, a project, was part of the 10th grade students' semestral assessment. Learners worked in small groups to complete an activity involving reading, critical analysis, and artistic creation. Each group read a text related to the theme of technology, analysed it together, created a meme in which they presented one or several topics referred to in the text in question and, finally, included a short comment explaining the reasons they had chosen that particular image.

The intention of this project was for learners to analyse a text, determine what was said, make some logical inferences, identify themes or central ideas and summarize the key points. Learners were required to create a meme, using images and appropriate words, as well as to strategically handle the digital tools to complete the project. Here, it was the students themselves who created their own images, their own memes, selecting the most appropriate images, as well as the most convenient words or phrases, for each text and the message they intended to convey. As explained earlier, being visually literate is not only associated with the skill to interpret and evaluate images, but also with being able to find, use and create them (Lundy, 2015).

The final products were evaluated and analysed according to a rubric elaborated jointly by the student-teacher and the cooperating teacher, the school-based mentor, who supervised the trainee teacher throughout the teaching practice. This data-collection tool centred on the following parameters: creativity (20%), relationship between the text and the meme (35%), design of the meme (20%), inclusion of a short comment (15%) and, finally, accuracy of grammar and spelling, and appropriacy of vocabulary for the comment and meme (10%). Each meme was then assessed for each parameter. Within each of the parameters related to critical thinking and visual literacy, several descriptors were established, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptors for the parameter "Relationship between text and meme"

Relation between the text and the meme 35%	70	56	42	28	14
	Students show they have fully understood the text, explicitly and/or implicitly. There is a clear and strong relation between the meme and the text.	Students show they have understood the text. There is a relation between the text and the meme.	Students show they have had some difficulties understanding the text. There is a small relation between the text and the meme.	Students show they haven't understood the text. The relation between the text and the meme is minimal.	The meme doesn't show any relation with the text.

plus weighting.

In the second classroom activity, learners had to analyse some cartoons related to some topics of the school curriculum. It was intended that students deliberated on a fundamental topic today, journalism and information sharing, and also developed oral interaction and discussion of their ideas, always keeping mutual respect in mind. Data was collected through worksheets with the questions *1) Describe the cartoon: what catches your attention first? What can you see? "Here I can see... / There is/are....", 2) Describe Every Contrast. Do you recognise sarcasm or Irony? Explain it. 3) What Issue or problem is depicted in the cartoon? 4) Do you agree with the cartoon? Why/ Why not?* In small groups, students analysed and discussed several cartoons. Here, the main objectives were two. One aim was to understand the extent to which students were able to a) describe an image, highlighting the aspects that made it ironic and sarcastic, b) associate a particular problem or

criticism to the image and c) reflect on it. On the other hand, it was crucial that students deliberated on some problems related to journalism and, consequently, its importance nowadays. Then, the students' answers were analysed through a set of descriptors referring to analytical and critical thinking skills and knowledge and critical understanding of the world based on the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018), presented in Table 5 in section 4.2.

The third classroom activity developed was based on Valentine's Day and Teen Dating Violence. The lesson started with a video (DayOneNY, 2018) where the love story between a young boy and a girl, both students, is portrayed. After the joy of the starting of the relationship, violence begins. The whole story is accompanied by the song "Walking on Sunshine", released by the group Katrina and the Waves in 1983, which is characterized by a cheerful rhythm and the presence of a message of happiness and love. It was precisely this duality of feelings that aroused students' attention to the video.

After an introduction where the group talked a little about Valentine's Day and what we usually associate with this day, the whole video was shown to the class so that the 21 students could complete an online worksheet individually on their mobile phones. The objective of this worksheet was to assess both the understanding of the video and its visual symbols. For that, the questions referred not only to the story portrayed in the video, to understand if the students had understood it, but also to the interpretation of the images and their symbolism, particularly the last two questions.

Finally, students carried out an activity to promote creativity, creating a post for the social network Instagram, to alert the school community and draw attention to the subject. To evaluate this work the descriptors for the use of telecommunications available in the *Companion volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) and Bowen's rubric for visual literacy competence (2017) were taken into account. The descriptors for using the phone and internet-based apps (Council of Europe, 2020), which can be seen in Table 2, proved to be important, since it was through

these two resources that this activity was carried out and disclosed. Therefore, it was essential to evaluate at what level (A2, B1, B2, etc.) students used these tools to reach the main objective: to create and share a picture.

Table 2: Descriptors for the use of telecommunications.

	Using telecommunications
C2	Can use telecommunications confidently and effectively for both personal and professional purposes, even if there is some interference or the caller has a less familiar accent.
C1	Can use telecommunications effectively for most professional or personal purposes.
B2	Can use telecommunications for a variety of personal and professional purposes, provided they can ask for clarification if the accent or terminology is unfamiliar. Can participate in extended casual conversation over the phone with a known person on a variety of topics.
B1	Can use telecommunications for everyday personal or professional purposes, provided they can ask for clarification from time to time. Can give important details over the (video) phone concerning an unexpected incident
	Can use telecommunications to have relatively simple but extended conversations with people they know personally. Can use telecommunications for routine messages and to obtain basic services.
A2	Can use telecommunications with their friends to exchange simple news, make plans and arrange to meet.
	Can, given repetition and clarifications, participate in a short, simple phone conversation with a known person on a predictable topic, e.g., arrival times, arrangements to meet. Can understand a simple message, confirm details of the message and pass it on by phone to other people concerned.
A1/ Pre-A1	No descriptors available.

Regarding visual literacy, the rubric developed by Bowen (2017) was chosen, since the visual literacy competency rubric (VLC), which can be analysed in Table 3, is very flexible and oriented, not only for the interpretation and critical analysis of

images, as well as for the use and creation of visual texts in solving different problems, that is, tasks, in different contexts (Bowen, 2017). The lower level is related to recognising representations of objects, things, people, etc. and the higher level goes deeper and concerns the capacity to understand and apply different visual rhetorical concepts. With these two sets of descriptors, it was possible to perceive the students' level of performance in both aspects.

VLC (Visual Literacy Competency)	Competency description
Capacity of recognition of representations	Aware that images represent objects, things, creatures, people, places and events in the world and that they may have assigned verbal identifiers.
Capacity of identification and narration	Understands that images can be used to illustrate a story about a particular moment, event, activity, sequence of events, or incidences or interactions.
Capacity of reading images	Understands how we read images to gain different perspectives of seeing the world. Recognizes how we bring our own ideas to images to make meaning.
Capacity to reuse, recreate, redistribute and to understand affective implications.	Can understand that the image projects a particular perspective with multiple meanings. Can critically interpret the image for information about context and its meaning. Can appropriate and reuse images to create own narratives and retell stories from a different perspective. Basic application of rhetorical concepts. Co-constructs meaning within the context.
Capacity to understand and apply visual rhetorical concepts	Can identify inter-textual references and interpret rhetorical concepts used to persuade the viewer. Can create new perspectives and new meanings. Can articulate and rationalize decisions about image selection and manipulation.

Table 3: Visual Literacy Competency rubric based on Bowen (2017)

4. Results

4.1 Project work – "Hey, have you seen this meme?"

For this activity, students had to create a meme based on the analysis of a previously chosen text. After the stipulated time, the students' final work was evaluated according to a rubric with several parameters (Table 4): Creativity, relationship between the text and the meme, design of the meme, whether a short

comment was included and, finally, assessment of the grammar, vocabulary, and spelling of both the comment and meme. Below is an example of an assessment table, in which the score assigned in the "Teacher" column corresponds to assessment of each parameter by the teacher. That is, for creativity, the teachers considered that this group's work was "Good", according to each descriptor. After the analysis of all student-generated materials, it was possible to conclude that learners achieved the proposed objectives and practically all obtained very satisfactory results.

Table 4: Example of 10ºC work evaluation

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Weak	Very Weak	Teacher
Creativity (20%)	50	45	35	25	15	45
Relation between the text and the meme (35%)	70	56	42	28	14	56
Design of the meme (20%)	50	45	35	25	15	45
Short comment included (15%)	20	18	14	12	6	20
Grammar, voc. and spelling (10%)	10	8	6	4	2	8
					Total Score	**174/200**

This project-work was guided mainly by two considerations: on the one hand, the text analysis, that is, the development of critical thinking, through the questioning (what is the intention of the author? What are the possible messages of the text?) and on the other, the creation of a meme, that is, the promotion of visual literacy, to the extent that there was the need to research, analyse, select and use the most appropriate image to transmit the intended message, meeting the previously mentioned definition of visual literacy. The students were able to fulfil these two major objectives, interpreting the selected texts and transmitting their messages through images, as exemplified in the following meme, developed by one of the groups.

Image 1: Example of one of the memes developed by the students.

4.2 Unit "The importance of journalism"

This unit focused mainly on the analysis of some cartoons with the help of some worksheets. At the end of the lesson, the trainee teacher collected the worksheets as well as the students' answers, and evaluated them according to a set of descriptors based on the scale of analysis and criticism of creative texts available in the *Companion volume* (Council of Europe, 2018). The results of the evaluation mentioned can be seen in detail in table 5.

Taking into consideration the descriptors and the analysis of the students' work, it is possible to conclude that the class had little difficulty interpreting an image. As shown in Table 5, students were either at an Intermediate or Advanced level. Regarding the description of the images, it is suggested that the lack of further details (referring to colours, shapes, expressions, etc.) was not a matter of inability, but a lack of effort. Concerning the identification of elements that convey irony and sarcasm, about 60% of the students in the class were able to recognize

various symbols that conveyed both. The remaining 40% corresponds to groups that developed their responses a little more and were able to not only identify the elements that conveyed these two characteristics, but also explain how the cartoon was sarcastic or ironic.

For example, one of the groups answered question 2 by saying "We recognise the man looking at the newspaper, while having no eyes, to be a symbol of irony, because a man with no eyes can't read".

The point at which the class stood out most was in the connection between the image and the problem/s represented, as well as its explanation. As shown in Table 5, about 90% of the students were able not only to associate the cartoon with one or more issues related to journalism, but also to explain this problem. For example, in answer to another ("What issue or problem is depicted in the cartoon?"), the students answered, "The issue described is that some people see journalism as something negative, because it allows people to know what is truly happening around the world".

Table 5: Results from the analysis of the 10ºC students' answers to the questions on the worksheets

10ºC – Unit "The importance of journalism" - cartoons		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Can describe the cartoon, by identifying some of its elements.	**Basic**							
Can relate the cartoon to a general topic.								
Can describe the cartoon, by identifying every element.	**Intermediate**	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Can identify some elements that portray irony and sarcasm.			x	x		x	x	x
Can associate the cartoon to one or more specific problems.								
Can describe the cartoon in detail, identifying its elements, forms, colours, etc.	**Advanced**							x
Can associate the cartoon to a specific problem and may be able to explain it.			x	x	x	x	x	x
Can reflect critically on the problem represented by the cartoon.		x						
Can explain how the cartoon is ironical and satirical.		x			x	x		

4.3 Unit "Am I really walking on sunshine" – Teen Dating Violence

Regarding the activity centred around the analysis of a video without dialogue and the creation of an Instagram post, it is possible to state that the class did not show great difficulties in the completion of the worksheet. Question 10 ("What elements represent their toxic relationship? Select two options") was where more students failed, but only because they did not select the two required options. In addition, it is important to explain that question 7 ("According to the video, the girl felt like she was…") raised a very interesting discussion. While the trainee teacher had considered the answer "drowning" to be correct, students argued that either answer was right, taking into account the entire video. That is, at the beginning of the relationship, the girl would feel as if she were "Walking on Sunshine", but as the story progresses, she will experience other emotions, such as feeling lost (as the labyrinth implies) and suffocated.

Analysing the overall performance of the students, most of the class showed some ability to "read" the images presented to them and relate them to the story told, as can be seen through the right answers in table 6, which are underlined. However, it is important to mention that this is only a small online exercise and that, although they were asked to do it individually, it is possible that one or another student completed it with help, either because they did not have a mobile phone, or due to difficulties with English.

Table 6: Questions and students' answers to the worksheet

Item	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
	At school	**At college**	**In the street**	**At a party**
1 – In the video you've just watched, the girl and boy met …	19	1	0	0
	Shy and Quiet	**Confident and nice**	**Violent and aggressive**	**Nice and shy**
2 – The boy seemed…	0	18	2	0
	A cup of coffee	**A ring**	**A box of chocolates**	**A bouquet of flowers**
3 – One of the first presents the boy gave the girl was…	1	0	0	19

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	True	**False**		
4-The boy respected all the girl's decisions	0	20		
	True	**False**		
5-At first, the boy sent her a text message with happy and loving emojis. However, as their relationship worsened, emojis became happier and happier.	0	20		
	A bouquet of flowers	**An apology**	**A teddy bear**	**Nothing**
6-What did he offer her after their fight?	16	0	0	4
	Walking on Sunshine	**Drowning**	**Suffocating**	**Lost**
7-According to the video, the girl felt like she was…	5	14	1	0
	A piece of jewellery	**Two tickets to a concert;**	**A bouquet of flowers**	**A smile**
8-In the last scene, the boy has…	0	0	19	1
	In the song lyrics	**In their clothes**	**In the first 30 seconds of it**	
9- Where is the irony of this video?	19	0	1	
	The octopus and its tentacles, dark and aggressive colours and angry emojis	**Their facial expressions, the maze, the colours and the happy emojis**	**The boy's arms, their facial expressions, long stairs and the maze**	**The octopus and its tentacles, the light colours and the long stairs**
10- What elements represent their toxic relationship? (you must select two options)	11+8	0	11+1	0

Finally, the class was asked to create a motto against Teen Dating Violence, as well as an Instagram post with the slogan previously created, which would later be shared online. The objectives of this last activity were related to the development of students' creativity, as well as to raise the awareness of this type of violence among the entire school community.

The results were analysed considering two criteria: the descriptors for the use of telecommunications, presented in the *Companion volume* (Council of Europe, 2018) and the rubric for the assessment of visual literacy proposed by

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Bowen (2017). Thus, on the one hand, students were able to effectively handle new technologies in order to search for certain words, find images and create their final works, thus falling into level C1. On the other hand, students reused images in order to create their own narratives and retell their stories from a different perspective (Bowen, 2017), in this case in order to convey the same message, as is the case of image 2, where the background image is entirely linked to the message conveyed by the text, although in a somewhat simplified and generalized view of the situation (the "being" inside the cage in image 2 is a woman, but could also be a man). Thus, it is possible that students are visually literate when they have some time to deliberate on the subjects. However, it is also visible that they lack a little criticality, as they did not question the presence of the female figure. Are only women victims of violence? Why do we tend to forget the male figure in these types of discussions? It would have been interesting to debate these issues as well and lead students to question their own beliefs and realities.

Image 2: Instagram post about Teen Dating Violence

Almost all learners were able to articulate the decisions made about the selection and manipulation of the image, and the positioning of the remaining textual elements (Bowen, 2017). Below, some examples are shown (example *a* and

b) where this parameter was not met and the choice of the background image (an image of a couple who is happy and in love) was not the most appropriate taking into account the text and the message to be transmitted (referring to dating violence). Here, students were not critical in choosing their materials, emphasizing their difficulties in visual literacy and critical thinking. They would have benefited from a little more support and guidance from the teacher. Perhaps then the students would have realized their shortcomings and opted for other images.

Image 3: Examples *a)* and *b)*
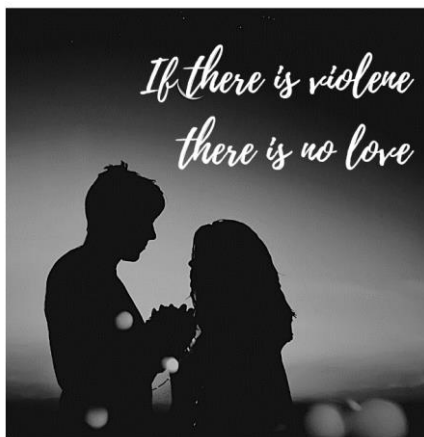
Finally, it should be noted that students were able to identify intertextual references and interpret rhetorical concepts used to persuade the viewer or construct a certain argument, as well as to create visual representations through an alternative perspective and new meanings (Bowen, 2017). Here, example *c)* stands out, as it portrays two characters from the series Euphoria, in which an abusive relationship is represented, to convey its message.

Image 4: example *c)*

With this lesson, it was possible to perceive the enthusiasm and dedication that students show when it comes to activities with visible consequences for them and for the community in which they live, demonstrating a link between motivation and the learners' performance. Many of these groups produced more than one publication or created more than one slogan and quickly sent them to the two teachers. After the required authorizations, students' creations were then posted on the Students' Association Instagram page.

By the end of these activities, it can be said that both visual literacy and critical thinking were developed. On the one hand, the reading of images was used as the central focus of the tasks, guiding the reasoning of the students and questioning their ideas. On the other hand, it also involved the significant creation of images with a certain purpose, and in agreement with the text that they should follow. Above all, there was time and willingness to analyse and discuss images, without these being just the starting point or an additional element. In these didactic sequences, the focus was placed on the image.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this study, most of the activities developed focused on visual literacy and critical thinking, since the main aim of this article was to understand how foreign language classes could help in the development of these two aspects. Using photographs, pictures or memes, students had the opportunity to creatively

develop their abilities to "read" the images and to think critically on the most varied subjects.

The results of the various activities indicate, above all, a close relationship between students' motivation and their performance in accomplishing the visual literacy and critical thinking tasks proposed. When the students' demotivation towards the language and the topics addressed was perceived, manifested either by their body language and attitudes in the classroom (with their head lying on the table, for example), or by obvious comments, the results of the activities tended to be below the capacities of the students. In these cases, the students did not fully justify their answers, answering monosyllabically, focusing only on a general description, instead of looking for and noticing the details, and failing to accomplish the artistic creation activities proposed. Despite their intellectual abilities, the most demotivated and disinterested students ended up demonstrating few tools linked to visual literacy and critical thinking. As a teacher, this question is essential, since the choice of current and interesting topics, as well as unusual and dynamic activities, will most likely influence the performance of students.

Another factor that can influence students' motivation is their own perception of an ideal "I" (Arnold, 2019). If they consider that their ideal "I" does not include communication in the foreign language, students are less motivated to try to express themselves in the language they are learning. On the other hand, "if the learner of a language imagines speaking the language well to interact, this can provide the impetus to act and achieve what he wants." (Arnold, 2019, p. 32)

On the other hand, when students showed interest and motivation in the topics addressed, the results of the various activities were satisfactory. In the analysis and interpretation of cartoons, the students were at an intermediate/advanced level, providing several details, suggesting hypotheses in relation to the possible readings of the images, stating their opinions and making relationships between symbols and inferring meanings. Regarding textual interpretation and communication of information through the creation of images

(in this case, memes), most learners achieved the requested objectives and were able to effectively create a meme that would convey the necessary message. The same happened with the creation of an Instagram post, within the scope of Teen Dating Violence. Students were able to evaluate and choose the most appropriate image for the message they intended to convey, fulfilling the objectives of the activity based on the very definition of visual literacy. As stated by Arnold (2019, pp. 32-33), when it comes to "learning, more transcendental than the student's aptitude is the motivation to learn and this is particularly meaningful for the teachers because contrary to aptitude, motivation is something we can help improve."

Another significant conclusion of this action research is the need to focus on both visual literacy and critical thinking in the classroom. Despite being attracted by the image, students need space where they can deliberate and question the various messages that an image can transmit, with the support and guidance of the teacher. This process will be extremely useful to them in an increasingly demanding future. This study showed that there are numerous ways to work with an image and, at the same time, develop critical thinking.

Finally, it is important to mention the two major limitations of this research. First, and in order to gain the students' interest and attract their attention, perhaps it would have been beneficial to opt for other themes, more closely related to the students and their realities. Asking learners directly at the beginning of the school year what topics they would like to address or using a survey could be a good solution in the classroom.

Secondly, the study could have been improved using self-assessment tools, such as questionnaires, in order to understand how students assess their own abilities of visual literacy and critical thinking. In addition, it would have been interesting to evaluate their perceptions before and at the end of the school year, to understand their development.

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