Phonological Awareness: A Step In English Language Development

Evelyn Endayane Riveros Vega*

Mónica del Pilar Orjuela Vargas**

Abstract

Language development is a crucial part when learning a language since it affects the learners´ communicative process and performance. Limited phonological instruction can negatively impact the learners´ language development since it involves the growth of the required skills to communicate in the target language. The aim of this paper is to explain the effects of a specific phonological training on English to elementary-level learners; and to discuss the results of this training in the language development.

Keywords: Phonological awareness, phonological training, language development, learners´ anxiety.

Resumen

El desarrollo del lenguaje es un parte fundamental en el proceso de aprender una lengua, ya que este desarrollo afecta cualquier proceso comunicativo del aprendiz al igual que su desempeño. Una instrucción fonológica limitada puede afectar dicho desarrollo del lenguaje

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debido a que este implica el crecimiento de las habilidades necesarias para comunicarse en la lengua extranjera. El objetivo de este documento de investigación es explicar los efectos logrados luego de aplicar un entrenamiento fonológico de la lengua extranjera, Inglés a estudiantes de básica primaria, y discutir los resultados de este entrenamiento en el desarrollo de la lengua.

Palabras claves: consciencia fonológica, entrenamiento fonológico, desarrollo del lenguaje, ansiedad del aprendiz.

Introduction

Language development is a crucial part of learning a language as it affects the learner's communicative process as well as performance. Limited phonological instruction can affect learners´ language development since it involves the growth of the required skills to communicate in the foreign language. The aim of this paper is to explain the effects of phonological training in the foreign language, English, to specific population at elementary level and discuss the results of this training in the development of the language. In terms of learning a foreign language, the advantages are also sociocultural: language acquisition brings opportunities for improving as individuals as well as members of a growing society, which participates as "[a] country in the processes of universal communication, the global economy and cultural openness" (M.E.N. 2006, p. 6).

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Learners of English as a foreign language have always had difficulties to develop the production skills of the target language. This issue becomes more difficult when in the classrooms, phonology training has not been given as much attention as is required by the teachers. In the context of Colombia, it has been observed that there is an inclination towards the school of thought that reduces the importance of phonology training, looking for developing in the most accurate form of the English language. As phonology training has diminished, the enhancement of language production skills has been hindered as this area is under developed and so is becoming less comprehensible. The question is, therefore, what does phonological awareness tell us about the development of English as a foreign language at an elementary level in a private school?

These questions arose after researchers observed that even though teachers try to implement general pronunciation practices by group or individual assignments, oral repetition, comparing and contrasting sound, given examples of homophones words and practicing the most common mistakes like the past verb forms and plurals, there was a noticeable shortage of exclusive English phonological training sessions during the six levels of English classes (for 6 semesters) from 2010 to 2012 given in the Bilingual Program at the El Bosque University in Bogota. Based on this information, researchers decided to look for a school under the same training conditions in order to carry out the investigation.

This preliminary study was conducted by applying a questionnaire to five students in three of the six levels of English (Appendix A) and its corresponding teacher (Appendix

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B), to determine to what extent pronunciation is taught and which resources are most often in the teaching of it. During the analysis of the data, researchers found that the participants do not have a clear definition of what pronunciation is. Nevertheless, they agree with the fact that it is of relevance and that there are consequences for the future of English teaching; consequently, a domino effect will be the result of this phenomenon. Some students stated that "When you teach wrong pronunciation of a word of a student and say repeatedly that word, it's difficult "to" change that pronunciation to the student." (Personal communication, February 24, 2013)

During the analysis, was possible solutions to the English pronunciation problem were suggested by some of the students who were interviewed. The necessity of creating a separate course relating to the topic of English phonological training was the students' consensus in the questionnaires applied to them. One student claimed that a possible solution might be to "create a special subject or elective for pronunciation, especially because English sounds are very different from Spanish sounds". (Personal communication, February 24, 2013). In addition, Morley (1998) affirms that English programs for ESL should start establishing long range oral communication goals and objectives that identify pronunciation needs as well as speech functions and the context in which they might occur. Besides, others insist on correct pronunciation as being extremely important to the credibility and quality of future teachers especially in EFL teacher training. That is the case of Gilakjani (2012 a) who affirms:

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"Learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect. Such learners may avoid speaking in English, and experience social isolation, employment difficulties and limited opportunities for further study. We judge people by the way they speak, and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking in knowledge". (p. 583)

With this in mind, the researchers aim is to apply a phonological language training as a path for developing the English language in foreign learners. Thus, the question to be solved is "what does phonological awareness tell us about the development of English as a foreign language at an elementary level in a private school? In this order, the objectives to be achieved are:

- To explore the foreign language development of students through the implementation of phonological awareness activities.

- To start a process of phonological awareness with the children in fifth grade in LPT [1]school.

Considering the ideas illustrated here, phonological training will not only contribute to the population studied, it will also benefit the researchers by providing new cognitive information and strategies for the future teaching of English as a foreign language. This

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[1] L P T corresponds to the initials of the name of the school where the research was carried out. This is done in order to protect the identity of the research subjects.

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creates a chain of positive externalities in which society progresses on its path toward bilingualism (the stated goal of the Colombia Bilingual Education Program).

The researchers hope to contribute primarily to the students at LPT School by enriching their oral skills and knowledge of English as part of their language development making them highly competitive citizens of a potentially bilingual country.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous researchers have studied the teaching and learning of proper pronunciation in foreign language contexts. Throughout this chapter, we explore these intersecting topics related to language development: phonological awareness, phonic training, EFL learners and teachers' attitudes and practices, and integration of English phonological training into the EFL curriculum. These topics are presented from a pedagogical and sociological perspective in order to establish a framework to discuss the focus of the investigation: the creation of strategies to be used by teachers in order to enhance the pronunciation of the students in the EFL class studied.

This literature review explores five dominant topics with the aim to demonstrate that more than having native-like pronunciation, EFL speakers should develop three main characteristics; Burns (2003) suggested these characteristics are Intelligibility, the ability of the speaker to produce sound patterns that are recognizable as English; Comprehensibility, demonstrated when a listener is able to understand the meaning of what is said by an English learner; and Interpretability, seen when the listener is able to understand the purpose of what is said.

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Language Development

Since Language development is a crucial factor in this research, it is important to acknowledge where the concept comes from and the different views and ideas of some researchers who have studied it. The modern study of language development began in the 1960's following the *Chomskyan* revolution in linguistics (Hoff, 2004). Chomsky argues that the study of language development is the study of the developing mind.

Since this time, researchers have viewed language development as a process that takes place in the brain and in fact helps the growth and development of the brain. This is evident not only in the uniqueness of each person, but the same is reflected in the growth and specialization of communication through human evolution. It is essential to understand the areas affecting or affected by language development which are: Biological, in relation with the Development of the brain-neuronal and muscular body systems associated with speech; Social, relating to the use of language as a tool of social communication essential for interaction with the species; Psychological, defined as the organization of new knowledge (including new languages) and adaptability to environment; and, from the Linguistic, understood as the domain of sounds and partnership concepts and meanings. (Kies, 1995) It is through these aspects we can gain an understanding of language development and the learning of a new language. Language is not just a matter of innate abilities, memorizing power, or motor skills. Being affirmed by Harris (2002) that language learning is a complex set of interrelated skills that depends on a diverse set of organs and

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builds abstract, conceptual hierarchies, which result in the ability to communicate in a given language.

With so many moving parts, it is easy for the language learning processes to break down, held up by any one aspect of this complex interplay. For this project, we have focused on the solvable problems that arise in pronunciation, and how these can be addressed through phonological awareness and phonics training.

Phonological awareness and phonic training

Receiving phonological awareness instruction at an early age has been recognized recently as an important issue when it comes to avoiding future problems of language comprehensibility. According to Venkatagiri and Levis (2007) "[phonological] awareness may be an important factor in predicting whether an L2 speaker is likely to be easier or more difficult to understand" (p. 276). Mattingly (1972; as cited in Gillon, 2004) defines phonological awareness as "individual's awareness of the sound structure, or phonological structure, of a spoken word" (p 37); other authors talk about phonological awareness as a "multilevel skill of breaking down words into smaller units" (Hoien, Lundberg, Stanourch & Bjaalid 1995).

In consideration of both definitions, we propose that phonological awareness is the skill developed by learners of any foreign language which focuses on the discrimination of sounds from complex to simple language units. As mentioned above, phonological awareness deals with three different levels of awareness that needs to be achieved during the development of a language. The first level is syllable awareness which requires awareness related to the division of words into syllables; the second level refers to onset-

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rime awareness which is measured during rhyming tasks where words share common ending sounds; finally, phoneme awareness explains that a word can be broken down into individual sounds or phonemes "that are the smallest unit of sound that influence the meaning of a word." (Gillon, 2004)

Regarding the above, it is important to emphasize that having training which includes phonological awareness activities will help a learner to recognize sounds in words and use these sounds correctly in order to manipulate language.

A topic that it is equally important to discuss is phonetics (including the instruction of proper phonetics, called "phonics"). First of all, phonetics is the linguistic field which studies the sounds made in human speech and involves physical and physiological aspects. According to Lodge (2008), phonetics takes into account three main areas of study; Articulatory phonetics which focuses on articulation and vocal tract; Acoustic Phonetics which studies the physical transmission of speech sounds from the speaker to the listener; and finally, Auditory phonetics that studies the reception and perception of speech sounds by a listener. All three aspects are crucial when it comes to phonological awareness, an aspect of language development whose integration into the EFL curriculum is essential.

Integration of English phonological training into the EFL curriculum

Although pronunciation is a key element in the development of oral skills in a foreign language, the role it plays in English language curriculum, including time, tasks and effort dedicated to it seems to depend on the individual teacher. Making phonological awareness (i.e. pronunciation) a part of the curriculum and classroom activities in programs

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that teach English as a foreign language seems necessary in theory, but difficult to achieve in practice. Studies by Brown (1992), Fraser (2000) and Yates (2001) suggest that teachers in ESL programs face some difficulties meeting the pronunciation learning needs of their students.

Curriculum gaps, poor methodology, lack of teacher preparation and the lack of suitable material all contribute to inadequacies of phonology awareness training in our schools. These deficiencies in English phonology training can be ameliorated by the inclusion of appropriate material into the curriculum or in daily classes. Exemplified by Macdonald (2002) who explored this by interviewing Australian English teachers and asking why they did not focus on teaching pronunciation. Some of the answers he received are as follows: "pronunciation is easy to overlook and there is no push to focus on pronunciation because it can be achieved through competences"; "pronunciation was not easy to ´fit´ into the curriculum and because of this, I found myself not liking it"; "there are so many things to teach, so pronunciation needs to be taught ´through´ those other areas" (p. 6-8). An appropriate conclusion to draw from these teachers' comments would seem to be that while there is a big problem regarding the way English pronunciation is taught, few teachers and researchers are willing to find ways to promote or improve it.

Some teachers instead actively avoid teaching or correcting English pronunciation. This even progresses until the point when students' errors completely prevent the teacher from understanding them. This indicates that such teachers do not view English pronunciation as an integrated and fundamental element of language learning and "it is just attended to when it causes problems that cannot be ignored." (Yates, 2001) Murcia, (2010)

affirmed that teachers need to find effective ways to integrate phonological awareness into the regular English language curriculum as the first step in the English pronunciation correction process.

Integrating English phonological awareness into the curriculum will not just help the development of reading skills, it is also a pathway towards complete foreign language education. Fraser (2000) explains that being able to speak English includes a number of sub-skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and pragmatics, but that of these, "pronunciation is by far the most important." It is also convenient that EFL teachers are provided with courses and materials that allow both teachers and students to increase effectiveness on the teaching and learning of English phonological processes. If teachers address learners' specific needs when creating the lessons, English phonological awareness training will be more effective.

Pronunciation must be incorporated into the materials, classroom activities and assessment tools; teachers must also have a solid training in English pronunciation and phonology pedagogy. These conditions are necessary to change the way EFL is taught in this country, which makes it the responsibility of every stakeholder in the educational system.

English foreign learners' and teachers' attitudes and practices

The learning of a second language depends upon several behaviors that students and teachers perform differently depending upon their perception of the target language. Baker

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(1988) suggests that such behaviors and attitudes are complex constructs; there may be both positive and negative feelings attached to a language situation.

Take into consideration the *Affective Filter Hypothesis,* proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977; cited in Krashen, 1981, p. 21) which states that high levels of motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety are states which translate into more input being available for acquisition and learning. Conversely then, according to this hypothesis, low motivation and self-confidence coupled with high anxiety create a filter where less input is made available for acquisition. Consequently, it is argued that pronunciation in that language is likely to be affected positively or negatively by the aforementioned factors.

Bloom (1978; cited in Al-Mansour, 2007) remarks that learners of a second language should go through three stages to overcome any difficulty during their process for learning a language. The stages are: awareness and responding, which relates to realizing and adapting to the new cultural and linguistic changes presented. The second stage valuing, which refers to the student internalizing the importance of the language and its value in their own context. The final stage is understanding and appreciation of the new language. By recognizing and applying these three stages in the learning process, negative attitudes towards language learning can be overcome.

Research Design

In order to develop this research, we as researchers selected the action research method, which is "any systematic inquiry conducted by any stakeholder in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn" Mills (2011, p 5). A process

conducted following the next phases: 1. Questionnaires were applied to students that dealt with the topic of pronunciation and phonics instruction in class; 2. A selection of school personnel and students to work with was made based on the lack of phonetic and phonological instruction; 3. Lesson plans and activities were designed that encourage students to participate actively; 4. Activities were developed in order to obtain the data required for the research; 5. An exhaustive analysis of the obtained data was performed; 6. Descriptions of findings were written, and conclusions drawn. 7. A written report was composed.

As part of the instructional design, a series of ten lesson plans was proposed, each covering a session of two hours per week, as the main strategy to overcome the difficulty present in the population. The lesson plan for the first session explored the most common language errors through an error analysis. Researchers took into account the rules proposed by Glendale College English Lab (2014) to analyze these errors. The second plan contained activities focusing on the training of short vowels sounds. The "long vowels" sound training was part of the third and fourth lesson plans. In the fifth lesson plan, learners were trained in the pronunciation of diphthongs using the facial and mouth movements as the introductory tool for this session. For teaching the difference of voiced and voiceless consonants' pronunciation, the sixth lesson plan focused on comparison activities involving vocal tract usage, followed by the teacher giving examples of consonants' pronunciation. In the seventh and eighth lesson plans, learners also worked with voiced and voiceless consonants emphasizing phrases and word linking. The implementation of the tenth lesson

plan evaluated one final time the level of improvement achieved by the participants in their readings of *The Lion and the Mouse.*

Data analysis

From the perspective of EFL development, phonological awareness and related topics are explored in depth. Moats & Tolman (2009) say that phonological awareness is critical for learning to read any alphabetic writing system; therefore, it is an important factor in the learning development of any language. Phonological and phonics training exercises comprised the core of the activity from which data was collected. These data and the impacts they suggest were explored for patterns of language development; they were classified into four different categories: language interference, teacher's role in language development, anxiety when learning a foreign language and finally visual and auditory acknowledgement.

Language Interference

If improving foreign language development is the goal, then identifying errors in the learning process is the route for doing it. Interference is another name for the phenomenon of constantly occurring errors in the learning and usage of English as a foreign language. Language interference is defined by Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, (1982) cited on Bhela (1999) as "the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language." (p. 22) Lott (1983) defines interference as "errors in the learner's use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue." (p. 256) The researchers aimed to demonstrate that erroneous language transfer can be overcome

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when there is an explicit phonic and phonological training hand-in-hand with a high level

of exposure to the phonological system of the target language.

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Table 1: Error Count of English words with /h/ sound

	Occurrence in Text	Students Tested	Total Word Repetitions	Total Error Count	Error %
Him	9	9	81	72	89%
His	3	9	27	25	92%
Huge	1	9	9	8	89%
Help	1	9	9	7	78%

Based on the above theory and hypothesis, the first phenomenon of interference to be analyzed is the pronunciation of the phoneme /h/ in American English using the Spanish non-sound of /h/. This phenomenon occurred in every individual who participated in the research. The first example of the "h" interference phenomenon is in the words **him**, **his, huge** and **help** (appearing in the text *The Lion and the Little Mouse)*. The chart above (Table 2) shows how the data was analyzed from the first audio recordings of participants reading this story, and takes into account the number of times they fell victims to language interference in each word with the phoneme /h/.

Throughout this phenomenon, the researchers evidenced that the errors in the pronunciation of each word were committed in a range among 70% to 95% of cases in which the word is mentioned in the reading. This indicates that students have generalized the sound of the /h/ phoneme mistakenly using the Spanish phonetic system rather than the American English system. This result confirms empirically that language interference is

happening with the participants who are pronouncing the letter using the only phonetic system they are comfortable in: their mother tongue, Spanish.

The second example of the interference phenomenon was in the pronunciation of the Spanish vowel sounds for their counterparts in American English in words such as **to, do, up, idea, alive** and **by.** The chart below (Table 3) shows how the data was analyzed from the first audio recordings of the participants.

Table 2: Error count of English words with vowel sounds

	Occurrence in Text	Students Tested	Total Word Repetitions	Total Error Count	Error %
To	9	9	81	53	65%
Do	1	9	9	7	78%
Up	3	9	27	22	81%
Idea	1	9	9	8	89%
Alive	1	9	9	7	78%
By	1	9	9	7	78%

As this information indicates, as with the phoneme /h/, participants used the Spanish phonetic system to pronounce these words with vowels in them. As the chart shows, the errors committed in the pronunciation of each word occur two thirds to almost nine tenths of the time.

Having implemented the first four lesson plans, the researchers aimed to identify problems with the pronunciation and practice of long vowels, short vowels and diphthongs. At this point, researchers confirmed that the proper identification of sounds was not happening in words learners did not know and use on a daily basis.

The researchers audio recorded for a second time the participants reading the same text as in the first audio recording, hoping to find positive changes (improvements in pronunciation). This new data set was analyzed centering the attention on the phoneme /h/ and the vowel sounds. In the Table 4, the progress experienced by participants after the application of four lesson plans is visible.

Table 4: Second analysis of English words with /h/ sound

	Occurrence in text	Students tested	Total Word repetitions	2nd round Error count	Original error count	% Change
Him	9	9	81	12	72	-83%
His	3	9	27	12	25	-52%
Huge	1	9	9	8	8	0%
Help	1	9	9	3	7	-57%

The data collected and analyzed shows a reduction in mispronunciations of 68.75%, from 112 errors in the first round of audio recordings against 35 errors in the second round of the recordings. This clearly indicates the overwhelmingly positive effect of phonological and phonics training had on this population. In some cases, the improvement was as high as an 83% reduction in mispronunciations.

With regards to the vowel sounds appearing in the words To, Do, Up, etc., the participants also showed a great advance in their identification and pronunciation. In Table 5 this is demonstrated following the same criteria the researchers used previously.

Table 5: Second Analysis of English words with vowel sound

	Occurrence in Text	Students Tested	Total Word Repetitions	2nd Round Error Count	1st Round Error Count	% Change
To	9	9	81	1	53	-98.11%
Do	1	9	9	2	7	-71.43%
Up	3	9	27	8	22	-63.63%
Idea	1	9	9	4	8	-50%
Alive	1	9	9	5	7	-28.57%
By	1	9	9	2	7	-71.43%

The vowel sound phenomenon is the one which shows the most improvement, from 104 total errors in the first audio recording to just 22 in the second one; that is to say the interventions led to a 78.84% reduction in the number of Spanish interference mistakes in the participants' English language performance. This supports the researchers' argument that explicit phonics training yields improved results in pronunciation.

The last day of lesson plan interventions took place on May 5th. In order to establish how necessary or important phonology was, the researcher left a two-month gap period in which students did not receive any practice. On July 11, the last recording of the reading of the text the *Lion and the Little Mouse* took place and was analyzed in the same way as the previous recordings. This occasion showed an increase in the mispronunciation of both the vowel sounds and the /h/ sound. Observe the recorded results in the following table.

Table 6 Third analysis of English words with /h/ sound

	Occurrence in Text	Students Tested	Total Word Repetitions	3rd Round Error Count	2nd round Error Count	1st Round Error Count	% Change
Him	9	9	81	28	12	72	-61.11%
His	3	9	27	17	12	25	-32%
Huge	1	9	9	4	8	8	-50%
Help	1	9	9	7	3	7	100%

Since the third round refers to the last audio-recording, the chart shows a general view of the changes obtained by the phonological training. This time, the percentage of change between the first round and the third one is of 50%, with the participants making 56 total errors in pronunciation, while in the first round there were 112 errors count. One noticeable change in the participants was in relation to the word him, with an increase of errors from the second to the third round, but an overall improvement from the first audio-recording to the last one with a 61.11% of change after the process. This not only happened with the /h/ sound, but with the vowel sound pronunciation as well.

Table 7: Third Analysis of English words with vowel sounds

	Occurrence in Text	Students Tested	Total Word Repetitions	3rd Round Error Count	2nd Round Error Count	1st Round Error Count	% Change
To	9	9	81	41	1	53	-22.64%
Do	1	9	9	8	2	7	14.2%
Up	3	9	27	16	8	22	-27.27%
Idea	1	9	9	5	4	8	-37.5%
Alive	1	9	9	5	5	7	-28.57
By	1	9	9	8	2	7	14.2%

Similar to the previous situation, the vowel sound errors decreased in 20% after the training, exposing the effects of a two month gap without practice. This stark and serious result indicated to researchers a clue about the importance of constant training and practice required for participants to continue performing at their highest level of potential. With all of this information available, it was clear to the researchers that both exposure to, and continuous training in, phonetics is necessary to yield sustained improvement in the pronunciation of English as a foreign language by Spanish-speaking learners.

Based on an analysis of the data collected, it was possible to conclude that yes, there were gaps in the learners' pronunciation of the target language, and that these could be successfully addressed with effective and continuous phonics lessons.

Teachers' role in learners' language development

The assumption that teachers of English need to be able to speak and understand the language they are teaching must be complemented with idea that they must also understand the way the language is actually used. Along this line of reasoning, English teachers must develop a language awareness that includes "a sensitivity to a conscious awareness of the

nature of language and its role in human life." (Donmal, 1985; p. 6) That is to say, teachers must have knowledge of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach it effectively. In addition to this, the role of the language in everyday life as well as the cultural, attitudinal and pedagogical aspects of language need to be considered in the process of building language awareness. All these elements play an integral part in making a human being into someone who can rightly be called an English teacher.

Moscowitz (1976) observes that in a survey of the opinions of former foreign language learners, a majority considered that a teacher must be defined by his/her outstanding knowledge of subject matter. With respect to this, the interviewed students tended to agree. They also agreed with Wright and Bolitho (1993) who stated that awareness or knowledge of the subject matter was not sufficient, and must be accompanied by the didactics that allow the good development of a teaching-learning process to flow from that knowledge—especially in the case of elementary students. Under this perspective, students were asked to give their opinions about their English language experiences from the previous year (2013) and the teacher who taught them the subject to give their opinions about what was happening in the present year (2014), the answers showed a variation in their learning processes between both years.

In regards to the question that focuses on the consciousness that participants have of what is happening around them in regards to their learning process, they consider that it is not mandatory for a teacher to use a book in all classes every day to teach effectively. On the contrary, for language learners it is a richer experience when the teacher uses and gives them a lot of varied resources to learn. A factor that sometimes interferes with effective

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instruction is a lack of pedagogical training (preparation). Menken & Antunez (2001) mention that EFL teachers are often "[un]prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse children due to their pre-service teacher preparation." A conclusion taken from the words of the participants in relation to context, part of having an effective teaching-learning process is considering the needs and context of the learners. One such element worthy of consideration is the age of the learners.

Behaviors that can be seen to have positive effects on learners in their language development, as mentioned by Jerome (2009), include the relationships built with students and the effective management of available resources by the teacher. Effective behaviors also include the inclusion of the students in the selection and use of the materials and in the design of activities to enhance the language development of the target language.

The answers to some questions, let the researchers evidenced that even among nine or ten year-old students, there is an awareness that it is not enough that a teacher performs the language in a natural way; they must also use pedagogical resources well in order to be effective teachers and to help the learners to develop the language for themselves. An English teacher must find a balance between the knowledge of the subject matter and the way this can be transmitted to the learners to develop an effective teaching process.

Anxiety when learning a foreign language

Experiencing anxiety when learning a foreign Language is another key aspect of the learning process that visibly affects the students at LPT School. The innate emotions felt toward objects or situations are common in childhood. They comprise part of human development since they work as "protective barriers for those stimuli that are not

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understandable nor uncontrollable" (Brown & Yule, 1999). When learning a language, the most common of these emotions is anxiety, defined as "the feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced by non-native speakers when learning or using a second or foreign language" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Among the participants in this research, there were a series of factors which were disrupting the development of a foreign language was anxiety specifically, the fear of being laughed at when committing errors while using the foreign language.

One of the first sensations that comes to children's minds is that of being attacked by their peers, of being bullied. In some cases, this fear is sufficient to cause the students to avoid using English in front of their partners. Participants in this research express this fear when mentioning that they do not like to speak in English because their classmates always laugh at them. It is common for most foreign language learners to feel fear when required to speak in the language. In the case of children, this fear is not felt only because students doubt their language abilities, it is also felt because classmates can show negative attitudes towards the performer; they can, in fact, bully the learner.

Another issue that makes learners feel anxiety is based on their previous beliefs that they cannot achieve goals when they are feeling scared. Indeed, it can be said that most people self-limit. Many learners do not achieve their goals because they are not confident in what they are able to do, and what they know.

A third factor that makes learners feel anxiety is their fear of expressing their knowledge in front of the teacher. The idea that (s)he is the one that knows everything may overwhelm many kids when performing any activity—not just language. Learners of any

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age tend to think that when the teacher corrects an error, it is because (s)he is laughing at them. The role of the language teacher is to guide students and help make them comfortable when using the language.

The same students reflect their preoccupations when it is the time to use the foreign language. As Scovel (1978) mentions, this reaction to facing an unknown situation is a mix of feelings that includes "uneasiness, frustration, self.-doubt, apprehension, and worry" (p. 134). Some participants express that sometimes, even they do not know what they feel when performing in the foreign language. Others say that even though they have knowledge of the language, there is something that stops them from progressing in their language development. A few said that even though they did not know anything about the language, they did not care about what their partners or teacher said because they were in the class to learn new things. However, there are students that do not feel relaxed and care too much about everything that can negatively affect their learning process as the chart below shows.

Through interviews, the researchers were able to learn the psychological dispositions of the participants during the phonological training time. Concluding with the main factors affecting whether students progress or regress in their language development are the classroom environment, their own comfort level, and the teaching skill of the teacher. Teachers can and should create mechanisms for class management in order to overcome or stimulate the learning process by mitigating fear, discouraging bullying, increasing students' comfort level, promoting goal-setting behavior, and by creating interesting and engaging opportunities for students to learn that are appropriate for their particular context.

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Visual and auditory acknowledgement

For the purpose of understanding where English pronunciation issues come from, it is necessary to know what pronunciation is about. On one hand, pronunciation is "the ability to use the correct stress, rhythm and intonation of a word in a spoken language" (Beech, J., Harding, L., & Hilton-Jones, D 1993, p. 55). On the other hand, according to Horobin (2011), English pronunciation is related to spelling due to the phonographic written system belonging to the language, where each symbol represents a phonetic or phonological element with no reference to a proper meaning. This association of sounds with symbols must be developed by a language learner in order to be able to write and or read the sounds in a writing system.

However, we have noticed that English pronunciation is an inconsistent example of a phonemic writing system since just one sound or sound sequence may often be written in a number of different ways, and one letter or letter combinations may often be pronounced in a number of different ways as well. A language learner may not acquire these sets of foreign sounds and their pronunciations the same as they did in their mother tongue. This process is based on samples and experiences that allow the development and the re-arrangement of the speaking organs to create specific, new sounds (Tomková, 2005). A foreign language speaker needs to rearrange some articulatory settings; adapt to new mouth movements and integrate new tongue movements.

Learners of a foreign language face all kinds of challenges while learning the target language. Perceiving new speech sounds is one of the new circumstances with which they must cope. Sekiyama, Burnham, Tam and Erdener (2003) stated that speech perception is

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an auditory-visual phenomenon and that it is crucial in the learning of a second or foreign language. This category of our analysis aims to show how auditory and visual tools in the phonological training of the participants are key to overcoming pronunciation difficulties in foreign language learning processes.

Every word or written letter has its own equivalent sound inside its own language system, therefore. Based on this, the first situation analyzed by the researchers within this category is the lack of knowledge of sounds made by each letter in the alphabet, which leads to spelling errors and future mispronunciations.

The first exercise was a spelling quiz in which the researcher spelled a word and students have to write its associating sounds with their written symbols. Of 9 participants, 3 of them correctly did so, and the other 6 students did not know which letters to associate with which sounds and grew frustrated. In other words, 66% of the population did not have sufficient control or knowledge of the sounds belonging to letters.

Table 8: Analysis of spelling activity

	First Round		Second Round	
	Successes	Mistakes	Successes	Mistakes
Clapping	2	7	6	3
Level	6	3	2	7
Quinto	9	0	9	0
Next	3	6	6	3
Time	7	2	7	2

Based on this, the researchers started to give each session a spelling quiz. For the second control exercise, the students showed improvements in some words. In the word clapping there was an improvement from 2 correct answers to 6; in the word level, however, there was a regression from 2 mistakes to 7.

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The researchers also observed that after all the sound and letter practices, the participants were able to associate letters in words that shared the same first consonant using images alone. The chart below shows the amount of guesses vs. correct matches of the same initial-sound words.

Table 9: information collected through visual and auditory activities.

	Guesses	Failures
Words beginning with B	74	26
Words beginning with T	86	14
Words beginning with D	88	12
Words beginning with P	84	16
Words beginning with G	100	0
Words beginning with C	50	50

It is evident from the record above that participants had more guesses and correct matches than failures. This demonstrates background knowledge in the association of letters and sounds.

Another exercise looked at the identification of diphthongs and digraphs with the correct vowel or vowels' sound and its/their corresponding written letter(s). (See Table 10)

Table 10. Digraph identification through visual exercises.

	Occurrence in Text	Students Tested	Total Word Repetitions	Total Error Count
ai	4	9	36	10
au	5	9	45	18
ei	6	9	54	36
ue	4	9	36	0
eu	4	9	36	9
ea	2	9	18	1
ci	1	9	9	1
ia	2	9	18	4

At this point, the data collected showed that the recognition and association of sounds with letters was a major difficulty for participants because they had no background

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knowledge in the topic, and had not practiced it in their English classes. Instead, their performance in the association of digraphs and their corresponding vowels included a total of 79 errors and 252 correct associations: in other words 76.13% correct, and 23.87% incorrect after only two sessions on this topic.

To conclude, these types of exercises associating the English writing system with its phonetic system demonstrated the importance of constant practice in order to construct a solid foundation upon which the learners may have the opportunity build more native-like English language use.

Conclusions

Phonological training as a topic of pedagogical intervention has shown a great deal of potential to improve the development of the target language by language learners. Seen from four different perspectives, this research revealed how native language patterns interfere with the performance of the L2. Participants also expressed that feelings of anxiety when performing the target language also affected their performance, as did the teachers' effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) in playing their role, and the type and quality of feedback they provided.

Emphasizing the linguistic factors, it is evident that there is a domination of mother tongue over target language structures in EFL students. The first approach of English learners is to take the competences they have in their native language (including the decoding of phonological symbols—letters) and make a transference into the target language. The development of this research project into phonological training led the researchers to demonstrate how the transferences were made by participants in the use of

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different phonemes, among them, the pronunciation of the letter "H" and the pronunciation of English language vowels. In these cases, the participants took the phonological system of their native language, Spanish, and used it when performing in the target language, English. Through the application of this research, learners became conscious of their misuse of the phonemes mentioned and improved in their performance with respect to these mistakes; however, much of these gains were lost after simply going a few weeks without phonological training. Without regular, ongoing phonetics training, learners seemed to forget the consciousness they had already developed with respect to phonemic awareness.

The interference of students' development of the target language was not just intellectual; there was also an emotional aspect capable of disrupting it. This component is anxiety. Any learner that starts a learning process faces, by and large, an emotional experience. Students participating in this research project were no exception, and demonstrated fears of negative experiences during the learning process. Their most common fears were: ridicule by peers, fear of facing new things, and fear of performing in the target language in front of the teacher.

Here, analysis of the data shows another obstacle facing learners: teachers. While instructors play the role of guide, learners can nevertheless be negatively affected by teachers' attitudes, comments or pedagogical approaches, sometimes to such a degree that the students forget altogether the idea of learning the subject they are taught. It is not enough for teachers to have a grasp of the subject matter; this subject-area knowledge needs to be accompanied by sound pedagogical practices that facilitate learning—in both teacher and student—by creating a comfortable environment that permits good behavior and

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learning in harmony. We also demonstrated that students' attitudes and performance improve when there is ongoing training in a topic, and when they are given a variety of activities appropriate for their age and context.

Considering all these aspects, this research supported the idea that including phonological awareness training in the development of a target foreign language may be a crucial factor for determining the communicative success of language learners. It affects all aspects of language, notably, pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, etc. Moreover, this phonological training and awareness intervention benefitted not only the target population, but also helped us to advance our own understanding of the topic, to contribute to the body of pedagogical and academic knowledge available to Colombia to help us all reach the goal of being a truly bilingual country.

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About the authors:

Evelyn Endayane Riveros Vega has a degree on Bilingual Education from El Bosque University and is working at the moment for the Liceo Santa Paula. She is interested in applied linguistics.

Mónica del Pilar Orjuela Vargas has a degree on Bilingual Education from El Bosque University and is working at the moment for the Liceo Alta Blanca. Her research interests are in neurolinguistics and language disabilities.

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