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Developing Bottom-up Skills to Attain Spoken Word Recognition through Phonics

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the impact explicit instruction on phonics has on basic English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' ability to recognize the English sounds in order to identify the spoken words. This ability is part of bottom-up listening skills. Listening is the first skill any learner uses in the process of acquiring any language. Participants received instruction on five vowels /æ e ɪ ɒ ʌ/ and the consonants /θ/ and /ð/. The lessons they attended had a structure based on phonemic awareness and phonics instruction routines.

Other studies have focused on "Phonics" but they have mostly explored its implications on reading skills. The present study recognizes "listening" as the skill that first opens the door to foreign language learning and as well as positiviely impacting the acquisition of other language skills and systems. Therefore, this study focuses on listening and the results suggest that phonics is an effective method for assisting EFL learners to comprehend the aural input. By the end of the implementation, all the participants had significant improvement in their ability to recognize English spoken words. Other effects of this type of instruction were the gradual improvement of participants' pronunciation and spelling skills.

Keywords: listening, bottom-up processing, word recognition, comprehensible input, phonemic awareness, and phonics.

Resumen

El propósito de esta investigación cualitativa era analizar el impacto que la instrucción explícita en "Phonics" tiene sobre el reconocimieto de los sonidos del inglés en aprendices básicos de este como lengua extranjera y así poder identificar la palabra oral. Esta destreza hace parte de las habilidades de escucha bajo el enfoque ascendente. Los participantes recibieron instrucción en cinco sonidos vocalicos /æ e ɪ ɒ ʌ/ y dos consonánticos /θ/ y /ð/ a través de lecciones estructuradas bajo los parámetros de las rutinas que desarrollan la conciencia fonémica e instrucción en "Phonics". Otros estudios que han trabajado "phonics" se han enfocado en sus implicaciones sobre la habilidad lectora principalmente. Otros estudios se han enfocado en el uso de phonics en el aprendizaje de la lengua nativa y extranjera, sin embargo, se han dedicado a explorar sus implicaciones sobre la habilidad lectora. El presente estudio reconoce la habilidad de la escucha como la primera que abre las puertas al aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera y como la responsable de irradiar positivamente a las demás habilidades y sistemas de la lengua. Por tanto, este estudio se concentra en la habilidad de la escucha y sus resultados sugieren que la instrucción en "Phonics" es un método efectivo que ayuda a los estudiantes básicos del inglés como lengua extranjera a acceder a su forma oral ya que para el término de la implementación, la mayoría de los participantes en este estudio experimentaron una mejoría significativa en su habilidad para reconocer las palabras del inglés que escuchaban . Otros efectos de este tipo de instrucción fueron la mejora gradual de los participantes pronunciación y escritura (ortografía).

Palabras claves: Habilidad de escucha, procesamiento ascendente, reconocimiento de palabras, comprehensible input, conciencia fonémica, y "phonics".

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction to the study

Humans perceive the world through their senses. Of the senses, sight and hearing are the most used by language learners. However, hearing and listening are different (Rost, 2002). Hearing is the perception of sound and listening goes beyond the mere perception and incorporates attention and intention (Hinkel, 2011; Rost, 1994; Rost, 2005; Rost, 2002). In addition, listening is a skill, while hearing is a sense (Beck & Flexer, 2011). The purpose of this research project was to move from hearing to listening in the language learning process.

Listening is an endless source of information and due to its spontaneous and real time nature (Buck, 2001) it is not as time consuming as reading. This skill was the means by which traditions were collected and remembered before writing came into being and even today it is by listening that you receive most of the information you have access to (Emanuel et al., 2008 p. 26). It is also the first skill a learner uses when learning a language (Rost, 2005).

There is no doubt that listening is a highly complex process (Buck, 2001; Vandergrift, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). It requires different skills depending on the purpose the listener has (Moore, 1953). This may be evidence that listening requires explicit instruction when it is about learning a foreign language along with the fact that learners need to know what they are doing and what is the purpose for doing it (cognitive clarity) (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002; Downing, 1979).

However, teachers rarely explicitly teach how to listen to the foreign language (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). This is something taken for granted. Despite the fact that listening is the key to learning both mother and foreign language (Rost, 2005), it has not

received the attention it deserves (Vandergrift, 2007). Because of its under appreciation, it has even been called "the Cinderella skill" by Nunan (2002). And for many years, listening techniques have been blended as part of a very slow and unfinished evolution (Rost, 2002). Language students are rarely provided with the strategies to succeed in the listening tasks, but they are supposed to decode what they hear in the classroom (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Every class they deal with new and different sounds and they make an effort to understand the message in them. This is when listening produces anxiety (Arnold, 2000; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) and becomes an obstacle to learning a language instead of being a tool to do so.

In light of the previous arguments, this research proposes a strategy for A1 learners to recognize the words they hear and increase the amount of information they can access in the bottom-up processing model of listening.

1.2   Rationale of the study

1.2.1   Needs analysis and problem statement

The participants in this research were 17 seventh graders from I.E.D. Pío XII Técnica en Turismo Guatavita-Colombia. Their listening comprehension problems provided inspiration for this initiative. Empirical evidence and the instruments used during the needs analysis phase (a questionnaire and a listening test) confirmed that they were in level A1 according to Common European Framework. However, Ministerio de Educación Nacional determined that seventh graders should be in A2 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). These learners did not receive appropriate acoustic input during their elementary school years, as language teachers are rarely hired to work at this level in public schools in Colombia. Content teachers are the ones teaching the English classes at this

level. Therefore, most of the contact these learners had had with English had been with written English. This can be one of the reasons why they did not make appropriate connections between the word and its pronunciation. Two possibilities arose. They may know the meaning of the word but they simply do not identify it because the English pronunciation of words is not necessarily associated with their written representations (McCartney, 2006) or they neither know the meaning nor the pronunciation. By the time project implementation started, these learners had been in high school for one year and a half. However, they had not received explicit instruction on listening strategies to solve their listening problems.

The needs analysis showed that most of them were not able to solve tasks related to spoken word recognition. This provided support for the idea that their bottom-up foreign language listening skills were not well-developed and their foreign language lexical knowledge was restrained.

1.2.2   Justification of problem's significance

Previous studies have indicated that listening is one of the keys to successfully learning a foreign language and there are some practical arguments to be made for working on listening skills. To begin with, listening is first in the natural order in the process that humans follow when learning their first and subsequent second languages (Saxton, 2010). It provides indispensable input to the learner (Brown, 2007) and helps to develop other language skills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Secondly, based on the input they received, learners start practicing sounds, then words, and then sentences, which means that the first stages are related to bottom-up processing. The latter is also supported by the general stages of linguistic development (Saxton, 2010). In light of the above, word recognition is

vital to the language learning process when learning a first language and this is also the

basis for foreign language learning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The seventh graders in this study were in the initial stages of the foreing language

learning process. They had not received appropriate and/or sufficient acoustic input but

they had a prior knowledge that could be used to define the semantic relationship between

the written form of a word and its meaning. Therefore, it was necessary to establish new

connections that extended beyond the visual plane and delved into phonetic reference. It

was expected that this group of learners would be able to use not only the teacher's input

but also that offered by the class material as a real means to bridge the gap between their

ability to recognize written words and their ability to establish a connection between the

written words and their pronunciation.

1.2.3   Strategy proposed to address problem

The listening process requires different types of knowledge (Vandergrift & Goh,

2012). Each knowledge type can be applied in two different directions: from the lowest

level to the highest level (bottom-up) or from the highest level to the lowest level (top-

down) (Buck, 2001). For the purpose of this study we are going to concentrate on two of

the three components of the linguistic knowledge: phonological knowledge and, to a lesser

extent, on semantic knowledge.

A large portion of A1 English learners have foreign language listening

comprehension problems. These are caused by cognitive and/or affective factors

(Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). This research study focuses on the cognitive factors (however,

affective factors were not disregarded) that do not allow A1 foreign language learners to

establish a mental association between the written forms of some words and their

pronunciation (word recognition) (Hinkel, 2011). This may be caused by poor linguistic and semantic knowledge, which in turn, can be affected by factors such as L1 interference (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) and not recognizing word boundaries because of the speech rate (Hinkel, 2011). Additional factors include little or no input, and/or a restricted range of vocabulary.

Instruction is considered as a facilitating condition to learning the foreign language and it can make the difference between successful and unsuccessful learners (Saville-Troike, 2006). Therefore, giving formal instruction on phonics may help A1 English learners to recognize the words they hear.

Phonics instruction can also lead to increased learner autonomy. They will become less dependent on the teacher as they will be able to better decode aural input and not have to rely on the teacher for it. This would lead to increased listening comprehension as well as increased speaking skills (pronunciation and fluency).

1.3 Research question and objective

The objective of this study is to determine how phonics can help A1 (CEFR) English learners to recognize the sounds of spoken English. The analysis of the problem previously described led to the following question: to what extent can the A1 (CEFR) learners' bottom-up listening skill of spoken word recognition be affected by using explicit phonics instruction?

1.4 Conclusion

As pointed out throughout this chapter, being able to understand oral input is an important factor when learning a foreign language (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). It is mainly by listening that all of us learnt our mother tongue and it is through listening that we receive input in order to strengthen the foreign language learning process (Krashen, 1982).

The understanding of the topic will help us to tackle the problem in a more effective and efficient way. Therefore the second chapter will explore in detail the basic constructs this study required (listening, bottom-up processing, word recognition, comprehensible input, phonemic awareness, and phonics).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1   Introduction

The previous chapter referred to the description of the problem at hand. The most relevant constructs to the present research will be discussed in this chapter. Listening, bottom-up processing, word recognition, comprehensible input, phonemic awareness, and, in order to consolidate them, phonics will be further analysed as the theoretical basis for this research.

2.2   Definitions

2.2.1   Listening

Listening is such a complex process (Buck, 2001) which requires other processes to take place before comprehension can be achieved. Rost (2002) presents four processes that have to occur for complete listening comprehension to take place: the neurological, linguistic, pragmatic, and psycholinguistic processes.

The neurological component is related to the auditory system's optimal functioning that allows humans to hear. The linguistic component is related to the perception of speech in which the frequency, tone, duration and intensity help listeners to categorize and make sense of them all while the listener integrates other verbal and non-verbal clues as well. Pragmatic processing deals with the intentions of the speaker and their contexts and culture (pragmatics). Finally, the psycholinguistic component is related to the mental processes that results in comprehension of the aural input where schemas and memory are activated (Rost, 2002).

These processes can only occur when there is a linguistic environment conducive to providing the listener with input (Krashen, 1982; Rost, 2002). In the case of foreign

language learning, this linguistic environment has to be recreated mostly, but not exclusively, in the language classrooms. The more exposure a learner has to a foreign language, the better their listening performance will be. Aditionally, as comprehension is the end goal of listening, learners will see an increase in their overall listening comprehension. Comprehension is essential to learn the foreign language (Rost, 2002) and it is a sign of a complete process that went beyond the physiological level (hearing) and reached the cognitive level (listening) (Rost, 2002).

Listening for perception and listening for comprehension (Ur, 1984) are two dimensions in which listening skills can be explored in language classrooms. "Listening for perception" is the dimension that this research study focuses on. It deserves special attention as it may be the factor that permits listeners to recognize and then make sense of what they hear. In order to delve into the perception stage, it is required to address the linguistic processing where the central process is word recognition (Rost, 2002).

Rost (1994) drew up a list of skills for listening and the first two he included were discriminating between sounds and recognizing words (p.142). These can be said to form the base of the pyramid, so to speak, of listening comprehension. These skills are part of bottom-up listening skills, which is one of the two views (top-down and bottom-up processing) of listening (Nunan, 2002).

2.2.2   Bottom-up Processing

The bottom-up processing model considers the listening decoding process to start at the smallest unit level and to move to the complete text (Nunan, 2002; Nunan, 1999). Therefore, decoding starts with phonemes, phonemic units, words, phrases, utterances, and texts. (Nunan, 2002). In this type of processing, the listener constructs meaning by linking

small units such as phonemes, words, clauses and sentences (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Listeners access and analyze those small units in a herarchical and consecutive organization until it results in comprehension (Richards, 2008). This analysis, of course, involves decoding (Vandergrift, 2011). In the end the listener constructs meaning by accretion (Vandergrift, 2011).

Rost (2002) claims that the most difficult issue about listening is being able to recognize a word, which is part of bottom-up listening skills. When students recognize just a very small percentage of the words in a foreign language speech, they can feel like they are listening to "gobbledygook." They only recognize very few words, though they are not enough to make clear inferences or to use a compensatory strategy for understanding. This is why bottom-up processes are key in the acquisition of effective top-down processes (Paul, 1996). How to teach these types of text processing in the most effective way, is still something research has to deal with. There are very few studies on this issue and there are even fewer in Colombia (Martínez, 2011; Valbuena, 2014).

2.2.3   Word recognition

The neurological, the linguistic, the pragmatic and, the psycholinguistic are different processes that are involved in the complex listening process in order to fully complete it (Rost, 2002) (See Listening). Under the linguistic processing, there is a central process: word recognition, which is considered by Rost (2002) as basis for aural text comprehension.

Buck (2001) and Rost (2002) agree that listeners can understand a word by completing two tasks: recognizing or identifying the word and after that, understanding its meaning. The first of these two tasks is highly complex (Rost, 2002; Weber & Cutler,

2004) because second or foreign language listeners have to deal with the characteristics of

the spoken text. Aspects such as speech rate, pauses, hesitations, fillers, and reduced forms

pose a challenge for the learner (Richards, 2008). It can also be challenging due to the fact

that learners' phoneme perception is innacurate and because phonemic categories are

difficult to acquire once learners have left their childhood years behind (McCartney, 2006;

Weber & Cutler, 2004).

Some authors have been interested in the word recognition process and they have

proposed models that explain this process. Rost (2002) and Massaro (1994) summarize

them:

- Logogen model: there is a unit in the model which is the "logogen". It is a
  device that accumulates linguistic and contextual information in order to
  produce a response (Morton, 1969).

- Cohort model: word recognition progresses phoneme by phoneme and each
  one of them act as an exclusion parameter for candidate words (cohorts)
  (Marslen-Wilson, 1987).

- TRACE model: it uses units organized in phonetic features, phonemes and
  words. "Features activate phonemes which activate words" (Massaro,
  1994). In this model the bottom-up process is the basis (McClelland &
  Elman, 1986).

- Fuzzy logic model: words go through three operations (feature evaluation,
  feature integration, and decision) that help listeners to achieve word
  recognition (Massaro, 1994).

Regardless of the model, three processes are part of word recognition: finding a candidate, calculating its meaning, and locating a reference in the context (Rost, 1994). During the first of these processes, listeners have an initial lexical contact (Frauenfelder & Tyler, 1987) in which they access the speech wave and it generates representations in their minds. Phonemes are the units that allow listeners to access the speech (Pisoni & Luce, 1987) and later, to identify word boundaries. This allows listeners to activate a word candidate (Rost, 2005). All in all, word recognition is a means to reach comprehension (Hall, 2006).

2.2.4   Comprehensible input

The more that learners are exposed to foreign language, the better results they are going to have in their learning process. Rost (1994) states that listening provides input for the learner. This, along with the fact that listening is a major source of language input, makes listening a skill that really deserves more attention in language classrooms.

Rost explains in detail the role of listening in foreign language acquisition in his work, "Teaching and researching listening" (2002). He states that to understand the messages of aural texts, listeners have to access spoken foreign language. It may be argued that reading also offers input but the frequency and the amount of input is another aspect to consider as listening can offer a great amount of exposure to language, even more than reading since we listen much more than we read. But neither the amount of input nor the frequency can guarantee to have a major effect on learning the foreign language if that input does not have an essential characteristic: it must be comprehensible.

Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" (Krashen, 1982) states that the learners must be provided with "comprehensible input", which is language that is just a little bit above their

level (*i*+1). By doing this, they can understand input but at the same time they can learn something from it. However, decoding the sounds is the primary process in order to access comprehensible input. This affirmation is made based on the processes Rost (2002) presents for listening comprehension to occur. This means that listeners have to develop phonemic awareness so that they can achieve comprehension of aural texts.

2.2.5   Phonological awareness

Trehearne (2003) defines phonological awareness as "the area of oral language that relates to the ability to think about the sounds in a word rather than just the meaning of a word" (p. 117). Foreign language learners with phonological awareness need to be conscious about the way spoken English is composed (words, syllables, sounds) (Trehearne et al., 2003). Rhyme awareness, syllable awareness, word awareness, and sound awareness are components of the phonological awareness (Trehearne et al., 2003). This research study focuses on the last component, also known as phonemic awareness. It is related to the knowledge about words and how to blend and segment phonemes (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002; Trehearne et al., 2003).

In order to manipulate phonemes (blending and segmenting), it is important that learners have knowledge about the relations between phonemes and graphemes. This is even more important for Spanish speakers who are learning English as a foreign language due to the different nature of these languages' orthographies.

English and Spanish have different levels of transparency between the correlation of graphemes and phonemes. Spanish orthography has a one-to-one correlation while English does not have this type of correlation. This phenomenon is called "orthography depth," which is the straightforward connection between the phonology of a language and its

writing system (Frost & Katz, 1989). As Spanish speakers are used to a transparent link between these two aspects, the complexity of the English orthography (Farmer, Ellis, & Smith, 2006; Hall, 2006) may pose a challenge when learning the language. English has a deep orthography as one letter can represent different phonemes and one phoneme can be represented by different graphemes (Dombey, 2006; Frost, 1994). Having this information and receiving instruction on it would increase the cognitive clarity (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002) Spanish speaking EFL learners have regarding this aspect of the language. In order to decode the spoken word, it is essential to recognize its sound and to establish a mental connection between its graphic representation, its sound and its meaning. This may guarantee the comprehension of the aural English at the word-level (bottom-up listening skills).

In order to accomplish aural comprehension, it is necessary to develop "phonological awareness" in the foreign language learners. They have to be able to recognize the words when listening to them but they also should be able to employ them (Trehearne et al., 2003; Wagner et al., 1997).

2.2.6   Phonics

Cove (2006) summarizes the history of phonics starting from the alphabetic method, which was used to teach reading by instructing learners to recognize the letters of the alphabet, both the upper and lower case letter forms. In 1450 the "hornbook" appeared in England and it was the harbinger of a change from alphabetic instruction to phonics instruction. During the mid-nineteenth century, phonics instruction started to replace the alphabetic method. Phonics placed an emphasis on the sounds of isolated letters, family words and on silent reading. Then, phonics used the word as a basic learning unit. It was

not until the first half of the twentieth century that phonics was integrated with meaningful reading instead of just doing practice drills.

After all this evolution, phonics became the teaching of sounds of a language and its connection to graphemes (Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006). Phonics works with letters or groups of letters and their corresponding sound. These relations are taught to children when they are learning how to read. Phonics also has to do with phonemes, which are the smallest meaningful units of sound in a language. They are predictably related to graphemes. Phonics instruction has been used to improve reading and writing skills and several studies have demonstrated its efficacy for these purposes (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001).

There are different types of phonics instruction: synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, embedded phonics, analogy phonics, onset-rime phonics, and phonics through spelling (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000).

- Synthetic phonics instruction teaches children to change graphemes into phonemes and to blend them to shape new words.

- Analytic phonics teaches children to analyze the relationships between letter sounds in a word they have already identified.

- Embedded phonics uses the context clues integrated with the phoneme-grapheme correspondences to identify words.

- Analogy phonics uses parts of words learners already know to teach them new words.

- Onset-rime phonics teaches children to break words into onsets (consonants that precede the vowel or the initial consonants in a word i.e. "spl" in split) and rimes

(the vowel and the consonants that follow it i.e. "it" in split) (National Institute of

Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000) . This type of instruction

allows them to blend those parts to say a particular word.

All in all, the purpose of phonics instruction is to provide learners with sufficient

alphabetic knowledge in order for them to progress in their reading process and the

comprehension of the written language (National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development (NICHD), 2000).

2.3   State of the art

Listening has captured the attention of several researchers; some of them have

condensed their findings into products the purpose of which, is to improve the strategies to

teach English as a second or foreign language (Buck, 2001; Rost, 1994; Rost, 2002; Ur,

1984).

With regard to the use of phonics, several studies have analyzed the use of this

method for teaching reading skills. The National Reading Panel (2000) includes 38 studies,

all of them focused on evaluating the impact of phonics on the reading process. A strategy

emerged in order to solve the issues about understanding the language at the word level.

The phonemic awareness studies started to show that giving formal instruction on phonics

had a positive impact on reading and writing (spelling) (Ehri et al., 2001; Perfetti, C. A.,

Beck, I., Bell, L. C., & Hughes, C., 1987; Trehearne et al., 2003). Other authors that have

done research on phonics instruction are Denton, Anthony, Parker, and Hasbrouck (2004),

Farokhbakht and Nejadansari (2015), Johnston and Watson (2004) Johnston, McGeown,

and Watson (2012), Noltemeyer, Joseph, and Kunesh (2013).

In Colombia there is a scarcity of research studies dealing with phonics. Martinez

(2011) studied the use of phonics instruction on EFL learners' literacy skills. Valbuena

(2014) is also interested in the phonics instruction and how it affects learners' phonemic awareness.

Li, Chen and Kirby's study (Li, Cheng, & Kirby, 2012) had the purpose to investigate the relationship between learners' phonological awareness and their listening skills.

All the studies mentioned, included certain components that this research covers. However, they use them with different purposes, different populations, or in different contexts. The phonemic awareness and phonics instruction have only been applied to the reading skill, except for Li, Chen and Kirby's study with Chinese English immersion students (Li et al., 2012). Therefore, there is still room to discover the real effect of using phonics as a way to raise PA, in order to develop word recognition in A1 level English as a foreign language learners. The effects of formal instruction on this aspect have not been examined in a Colombian context.

2.4   Conclusion

The listening skill provides a lot of support to the foreign language learning process, but it should be explored further, especially the main components of this research: bottom-up listening skills, phonemic awareness and phonics. In this chapter I have presented the main constructs of this research and some studies related to the present one. In the next chapter, some of the main characteristics of this study will be explored.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1   Introduction

Having summed up the background of the main constructs relevant for the present

research study, it has become clear that there is much more to explore about the

development of the listening skill. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore the

impact of phonics at the bottom-up processing level on the recognition of spoken words. In

this chapter the participants, the instruments, and the procedures are described in detail.

3.2   Type of study

This study has its foundations in the principles of action research (Blaxter, Hughes,

& Tight, 2010; Burns, 2010; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; McNiff, Lomax, &

Whitehead, 1996) . Therefore, it arises from reflecting on a problem in the teaching

practice. The intervention uses a systematic process and it seeks solutions or improvements

for the problem the researcher is addressing without ignoring the theoretical bases to

support the creation, the design, and the implementation of the study (Burns, 2010; Tomal,

2010). This study focused on developing new and effective ways to deal with the

difficulties participants in this study had with recognizing spoken words. This group of

learners had not developed their phonological awareness of the English language due to the

amount and the quality of the exposure to English. It did not emphasize on training them to

notice the features of oral language input (English phonemes). The researcher used formal

phonics instruction as a way to train A1 EFL learners to effectively use their bottom-up

listening skills with the purpose of recognizing the spoken words (Verhelst, Van Avermaet,

Takala, Figueras, & North, 2009).

3.3   Context and participants

The participants in this research study were 17 seventh graders from I.E.D. Pío XII Técnica en Turismo Guatavita-Colombia. This is a public school that offers 3 English classes a week for this grade. These students received English language instruction during elementary school. However, none of the teachers who delivered the English class spoke English or was trained as a language teacher. Some of them simply had a relatively low knowledge of the language. They merely had some familiarity with vocabulary or grammatical structures. Consequently, the participants in this research were exposed to very little or no aural input before they moved on to the secondary school where they had access to English instruction delivered by language teachers.

3.3.1   Ethical considerations

The researcher explained the purpose of this research project to the principal of I.E.D. Pío XII Técnica en Turismo. After explaining the key aspects about the voluntary nature of the students' participation in the project such as the fact that participants could withdraw from the project without any penalty and the possible positive effects of the implementation on participant's English language performance, the principal approved the implementation of this research study (See Appendix A).

Once the project was approved by the principal, participants' parents were contacted in order to explain all the conditions for their children's participation in the study and they had the opportunity to ask for clarification about any point of the project at any time of implementation. Aspects such as privacy, anonymity, confidentiality of the personal, and academic data collected (Blaxter et al., 2010) received special attention and clarification.

After all conditions were clarified, parents received a consent letter (See Appendix A) and this agreement was returned, signed by them as proof of their consent.

3.3.2   Role of the researcher

Researchers normally do not have the major role in a research project as they are tipically external observers. In action research, the researcher has a double role: participant and observer. This is why the nature of his/her decisions is more complex. The researcher has to find a balance between his/her roles as there is no clear-cut boundary between the teacher and the researcher. However, sometimes the researcher has to be detached from his/her teacher role during the analysis of the data stage and, some other times, it is necessary to overlap these roles in order to achieve introspection due to the fact that this type of study requires the researcher to be personally involved (Tomal, 2010).

The researcher has to fit the nature of the action research, that is why he/she has to be reflective, resourceful, organized and skillful because qualitative research requires analysis. It uses different sets of methods or practices and it implies systematic processes (Burns, 1999; Burns, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This was the case for this particular study.

The researcher's tasks in this reseach study ranged from identifying the problematic situation to drawing of conclusions and anticipating the opportunities the research project offers for further research.

3.4   Data collection instruments

This study used three non-observational instruments in order to collect data (Burns, 1999). The instruments were: a questionnaire, listening tests, and a follow-up interview. They were piloted in a group with very similar characteristics to the participants in this

research study in order to verify the clarity and effectiveness of the questions created to

collect data. Based on this piloting it was necessary to refine the instruments to redirect the

data collection process gathering data regarding spoken word recognition.

3.4.1   Questionnaire

Questionnaires are effective and quick means for gathering data (J. D. Brown, 2001;

Burns, 1999) and they are suitable for different participants and topics. However,

respondents tend to not answer all the questions in this type of instrument (Dörnyei &

Taguchi, 2010).

The questionnaire used in this study had to go through a series of modifications in

order to respond to the needs of the research process. It was necessary to do three types of

adjustments: a) to broaden some response options because the way they were designed was

not based on the Linkert's scale (See Appendix B), b) some other questions were excluded

because the data they were going to gather was not relevant for the purposes of the study

and c) other questions were refined because they were not relevant to the focus of this

research.

The questionnaire administered had three purposes: to explore their perceptions on

how competent they were at identifying and then writing out spoken words (questions 1,5,

and 6) to ascertain whether these learners had a strategy they used for completing listening

tasks in the foreign language (English) (questions 3, 4, 7, and 8), and to detect the major

difficulties affecting their ablity to understand spoken English (questions 2 and 9) (See

Appendix B).

3.4.2   Listening tests

For the purposes of this study, the researcher needed to measure participants ability to recognize spoken words and/or write them. Therefore, the test administered to the group was an aptitude test (Tomal, 2010). Tests used in this research project can also be classified as criterion-referenced tests (Cohen et al., 2007) because they provided information about what learners could or could not do. The listening test included questions that were designed for the purpose of establishing their bottom-up listening skills (See Appendix C). This instrument placed an emphasis on phonemes and words.

Tests covered the identification of phonemes and their graphemes (questions 1 and 3) (See Appendix C). Some other questions were aimed at evaluating and developing learners' ability to classify isolated words according to their short vowel sound (question 3) (See Appendix C) or according to the type of interdental fricative phoneme (voiced or voiceless) of the word. Finally, tests were designed in order to evaluate learner's ability to recognize spoken words in context and establish a relationship with the graphemes (questions 4-7) (See Appendix C).

3.4.3   Follow-up interviews

Interviews are the appropriate instrument to expand on the most relevant aspects that the other instruments found or about those aspects that the test and the questionnaire did not find (Tomal, 2010). Interviews are flexible instruments where interpretation of the context around the interviewee arises (Cohen et al., 2007). Since guided or semi-structured interviews allow the researcher probe deeply and follow up on any new discovery or interesting response made by the participants (Burns, 2010), this study used such an instrument.

Interviews administered in the present research study had questions about participants' perceptions of the value of the listening instruction and the support that they had received and most importantly about the listening process that they carried out in order to achieve the proposed tasks (spoken word recognition).

3.5   Conclusion

The appropriate instruments for gathering data within the framework of the action research premise set the proper conditions for a sound implementation of the research study. The analysis of the context and the participants provides extra support to the problematic situation the researcher identified and shows a more detailed picture of the problematic situation and the possible effectiveness of the strategy to solve it. The following chapter will discuss the researcher's reflection upon the study and compliance to the appropriate ethical research standards.

Chapter 4: Pedagogical Intervention and Implementation

4.1   Introduction

This chapter describes the pedagogical intervention, the purpose of which was to analyze the effect of phonics on the recognition of the spoken words as part of A1 (CEFR) language learners bottom-up listening skills. During implementation, the participants dealt with the short vowel sounds, voiceless interdental fricative, as well as voiced interdental fricative. The timeline and the body of the lessons is also described in this chapter where the learners were introduced to phonics instruction, and a practice stage where they put into action the new knowledge about the English phonemes.

4.2   Visions of language, learning, and curriculum

4.2.1   Vision of language

This study views this component of language (words) as a whole constructed by smaller units. These units establish a knowledge network where learners intertwine what they already know and what they learn (Brown, 2007).   Connectionism, also refered to as Parallel Distributed Processing (PDP) (Gasser, 1990), makes it possible for the learners to pay attention to various things that are happening at the same time or to process information in parallel (McClelland, Rumelhart, & Hinton, 1986). This description matches the cognitivism school of thought.

Regarding the present study, these small units are the English phonemes and the whole is the word. It was intended that learners, after the implementation of this research project, would be able to use the knowledge about English phonemes to recognize words that contain them in multiple and in new combinations. For this particular case, this could

facilitate progress at different levels: phonemic awareness, listening comprehension and eventually vocabulary, and grammar structures.

4.2.2   Vision of learning

Behind teaching and learning a language there is a complex theoretical network that provides reasons for deciding on certain procedures in teaching practice. The approach is one of the main principles a teacher takes into account. For the purposes of this study, the comprehension approach is the one that rules all the implementation and the conception of learning behind this project.

This approach fits this research project because it emphasizes on the listening skill as a means for learning the language. Therefore, providing instruction on word recognition could facilitate access to the aural input. Moreover, this type of instruction can raise lifelong learning as learners can apply the strategy learnt when required, fostering autonomy (Field, 2010). Phonics instruction should be considered as one of the components of the language teaching that allows learners to reach comprehension, but not the only one. This is just the first stage. The purpose is to foster a natural development of the productive skills (Field, 2010).

4.2.3   Vision of curriculum

I.E.D. Pío XII as a public Colombian educational institution, has adopted the National Curricular Guidelines. These guidelines establish that the foreign language learning process should be strategic so that it can become a means for learners to improve their communicative competence as well as becoming skillful in integrating knowledge. The curricular guidelines also state that learners must acquire or develop four competences: textual, illocutionary, sociolinguistic, and grammatical competences (Bachman, 1990). The

latter includes the phonology/graphology, which is the component that helps learners reach

the physical representations of the language: sounds or written symbols (Bachman, 1990).

The last point that the curricular guidelines mention has to do with new ways to learn in a

world with a wide variety of new technologies. This research was planned for learners to

be able to access the aural input which in turn will give them access to most of the

information available today thanks to the implementation of the ICTs in the language

classroom and outside it.

4.3   Instructional design

4.3.1   Lesson planning

Most of the lessons delivered during the implementation of this research project had

three main components: phonemic awareness, phonics, and practice. The first component

refers to the identification of the individual sounds through a rhyme routine, oddity tasks,

oral blending, oral segmentation, and phonemic manipulation (See Appendix D). The

second component, phonics instruction, was accomplished primarily with phonics cards as

the main support material in order to establish a connection between phonemes and

graphemes. In the third component, learners reached the practice stage in which they

showed their abilities to identify the words they hear and they tested to check if they could

access their written form and sometimes their meaning.

The lessons had this structure because the main focus of this research project was

listening. Starting with a phonemic awareness stage, before phonics instruction, was an

appropriate sequence to structure the lesson in such a manner so that the student would

have to think of the sounds in a spoken word as a prerequisite for understanding how sound

and letters are interrelated in print (Trehearne et al., 2003). The practice stage at the end of

the lesson was included in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the phonics instruction and

to assess the learners' performance in the recognition of the spoken words. Finally, all the

lessons followed a fixed structure as one of the main principles of phonics is to create a

routine so that classroom management and instruction becomes more effective.

4.3.2   Implementation

Based on the needs analysis, seven sounds were chosen to be the focus of the

implementation which was divided into eight sections. During the first section,

participants' alphabetic knowledge was reinforced by including tucker singing and some

sample words for each letter. In sections 2-8, participants received explicit phonics

instruction in a specific sound during each one of the sections as follows:

1. Recognizing the alphabet and its sounds

2. Mid central lax unrounded (stressed)   /ʌ/

3. Voiceless interdental fricative   **/θ/**

4. Low front lax unrounded   /æ/

5. Mid front tense unrounded   /e/

6. High front lax unrounded   /ɪ/

7. Mid-high back tense rounded   /ɒ/

8. Voiced interdental fricative   **/ð/**

These sounds were chosen among the about 40 English phonemes because, firstly

vowels are acquired and utilized earlier in children's speech (McCartney, 2006) and,

secondly, they represent the major challenge regarding the differences in the phonological

system between English and Spanish. Spanish has just 5 vowel phonemes while English

has 16 depending on the dialect (Deterding, 2004). Regarding the consonants, the voiced

and voiceless interdental fricative do not exist in the participants' mother language

phonological system and the physical position of the tongue required in order to pronounce

these sounds represents another challenge for this group of learners.

In each section, the implementation included phonemic awareness activities:

Rhyme routine: in this stage the teacher provided learners with examples of pairs of words

that rhyme and that contained the studied sound. The teacher had to clearly state the reason

why they rhymed so that learners could decide whether or not the rest of the pairs also

rhymed.

Oddity tasks: here the learners had to identify the word, out of a group of three or four,

that did not contain the studied sound.

Oral blending and oral segmentation: learners joined together words by adding sounds

or groups of sounds. They also separated the sounds or groups of sounds in a word to

identify its components.

Phonemic manipulation: in this stage learners manipulated some sounds in the word in

order to transform it into a different one. They used substitution, addition, deletion and

reversal to do so.

After the stages mentioned above learners reached the explicit phonics instruction

routine that consists of three stages: decoding, encoding, and handwriting. In the decoding

stage, learners listened to the sounds in a word and the whole word while the teacher

pointed out its graphemes. Phonics cards were also used here, which contained the letter of

the alphabet, a picture related to the sample word and related to its sound, as well as clues

to understand the written representation of that phoneme. In the encoding stage, the teacher

pronounced the phonemes in a word and counted them on his/her fingers. Learners

identified the word and write it down. In the handwriting stage, learners had to write the

graphemes. Typically, the teacher provides examples and writing lines. However, this latter stage was rarely used during the implementation as participants were seventh graders who already knew how to hand-write. Original phonics instruction includes a short story related to the phoneme for learners to remember its sound. Unfortunately, this research study did not have access to those stories. Therefore, the researcher showed the phonics card, modeled the phoneme, and reinforced this by singing the tucker singing part related to the phoneme at hand.

Finally, the researcher pronounced a word that included the phoneme studied and learners had to encode it using the phonics cards they previously received. As each participant had one or two phonics cards at most, they were supposed to use their phonemic awareness to identify if the word the teacher pronounced had the letter on the card in his/her hands. At the end of each drill, a group of learners were standing in front of the class showing the cards to their classmates in the correct order so that they could read the word pronounced.

The implementation tried to maintain the sequence of the vowels. However, in order to avoid confusion between their mother tongue /u/ and the English phoneme /ʌ/, this letter was moved to the first place, changing the standard order. Likewise, the voiced and voiceless interdental fricative phonemes were also separated so that learners did not confuse them.

4.3.2.1   Timeline

The research study was implemented in 25 lessons as follows:

Table 1	
Lessons	Activity
1-2	Recognizing the alphabet and its sounds
3	Alphabet phonics
4-7	Short /u/ sound
8-10	Voiceless *th* diagraph
11-13	Short /a/ sound
14-16	Short /e/ sound
17-19	Short /I/ sound
20-22	Short /o/ sound
23-25	Voiced *th* diagraph

Table 1 Implementation timeline

4.4   Conclusion

A solid and supported view of the whole situation in language teaching and learning offers a more structured implementation process and the opportunity to discover the reasons behind the researcher's decisions. This chapter presented the general outline of the lessons and a detailed explanation about the implementation process. It also incuded the philosophical background of the visions the researcher has of language, learning and curriculum. The next chapter will report on data analysis and findings.

Chapter 5: Results and Data Analysis

5.1   Introduction

The analysis of the gathered information is described in this chapter. The validation process and the principles used in order to analyze the data are here detailed. From the analysis stage, codes and categories emerged that conceptualize the raw material (collected data) to fit the purposes of the research study (Flick, 2009). These categories are also described in this section.

5.2   Data management procedures

The documents collected during the implementation of this research project were organized in separated sections in a physical folder. The information extracted from the instruments was inserted into a digital document in order to facilitate the data analysis stage (Appendix E). The names of the participants were replaced by an assigned code with the purpose of maintaining the participants' anonymity.

5.2.1   Validation

Typically, during and after the process of analyzing data, researchers grasp phenomena (Cohen et al., 2007) and foresee and shape its theoretical support. However, it is difficult to prove if the researchers were accurate in their interpretations of the data (Flick, 2009). Thus, validating the relationships established between indicators or the patterns found is essential to provide support to the assumptions and inferences made by the researcher and for the effectiveness of the research study (Cohen et al., 2007; Flick, 2009).

There is a wide variety of validation types:

- Content validity

- Construct validity

- Ecological validity

- Cultural validity

- Catalytic validity

- Consequential validity

- Criterion-related validity

- Triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007)

This research study was validated by triangulating the data collection instruments that are questionnaires, follow-up interviews and listening tests.

5.2.2   Data analysis methodology

The research process results in collecting a great amount of data. At the analysis stage, the research follows the six steps to analyze and interpret the data: organizing and preparing, exploring, coding, reporting, interpreting, and validating (Creswell, 2013). These steps are not a fixed sequence but they can be addressed and re-addressed at any moment during the data analysis (p. 237). However, analyzing data also requires a methodology that can guide the researchers' work. One of the most predominant methodologies that serves the purpose of analyzing qualitative data is the Grounded Theory (GT). The Grounded Theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In this methodology, theory is discovered through data by extracting the meaning from participants' words, artifacts, documents and/or observations and by constant comparison, uncovering the concepts behind the collected data (Lingard, Albert, & Levinson, 2008; Locke, 2001; Strauss, 1987).   This stage is not only about organizing the data but organizing the ideas in it (Strauss, 1987).

The concept-indicator nature of the Grounded Theory makes the researcher analyze the data from the bottom-up. This process sometimes requires analyzing words, phrases or lines. By following this type of analysis, it is possible to discover similarities during the conceptualization of data, and similarities between behavioral actions or events (indicators). The connections established between indicators give rise to patterns understood as coding (Locke, 2001; Strauss, 1987) which is the main process in GT (Flick, 2009). Coding has at least three stages and they have received different names. However the following are common when analyzing data under the GT principles (Flick, 2009):

- Open or initial coding (Charmaz, 2006)

- Theoretical coding (B. G. Glaser, 1978), axial coding (Strauss, 1987) or focused coding (Charmaz, 2006)

- Selective coding (B. G. Glaser, 1978)

These types of coding help the researcher to refine the data and identify the core categories.

The open coding process starts with brainstorming in which the researcher's intuition is essential. This type of coding provides the vocabulary or terminology that the researcher can use in order to refer to the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Strauss (1987) mentions four guidelines for a successful open coding. The first one is to ask the following questions about the data: "What study are these data pertinent to?", "What category does this incident indicate?" and "What is actually happening in the data?" The second is to examine the data carefully. The third guideline is to stop coding for a moment in order to write a theoretical memo. The last one is to avoid giving relevance to "face sheets" before the analysis provides evidence of their importance.

The next coding step is axial coding. However, as it establishes relationships between codes, it can be done simultaneously with the final part of the open coding stage or alternate with it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, 1987).

Finally, the selective coding takes place although it can start earlier during the first coding stages. In this coding stage the researcher establishes connections between the categories resulting from the axial coding. The final goal of this stage is to find the core category (Strauss, 1987)

Once the coding stage has finished, the analysis process continues with the discovery of the core category. Some features of this core category are: it must be central and frequently found in the data, it has to be easily associated with the rest of the categories and result in generating theory and variance (Strauss, 1987).

In the course of the data analysis, it is highly advisable to make constant comparisons, which is the main principle when it is about analyzing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lingard et al., 2008; Locke, 2001; Strauss, 1987). This helps to find relationships among categories which soon will result in discovering the core category.

This research project was developed under the Grounded Theory principles explained above. In addition to that, GT accepts quantitative data analysis approaches (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, this research project included a mixed method quantitative and qualitative data analysis since both of them can offer a more general view of the problematic situation and the quantitative analysis can support the qualitative one (Flick, 2009).

5.3   Categories

5.3.1   Overall category mapping

Once the data was collected, it was organized in a digital file (See Appendix E) as part of analysis preparation (Dörnyei, 2007). After that stage, analysis began with coding the information. Saldaña (2009) defines code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). This helped not only for the previous purpose, but it also reduces the amount of data and synthetizes it (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). After reflecting on the data, connections among pieces of data were identified. The codes deciphered from the collected data are shown on Table 2.

Then, the data analysis moved from codes to categories (Creswell, 2013; Flick, 2009; Saldaña, 2009). Constant comparison was still the main principle in order to integrate codes into categories (see Table 3).

Coding, categorization and subcategorization were refined several times as part of the process of data analysis. The amount of information was drastically reduced and answers to the research question started to emerge. The selective coding process resulted in the categories is shown on Table 4.

Table 2
- Pronunciation improvement   - Discrimination between sounds   - Blending sounds   - Rebus sentences   - Exposure to new words   - Identification of sounds   - Grapheme and phoneme connection   - Sound similarities   - Instruction   - Word complexity   - Speech rate   - Localization of the word in a sentence   - Familiarity with the word   - Words in a speech   - Kinetic signals   - Vocabulary   - Inferring   - Incomprehensible input/unintelligibility   - Identification of differences between English and Spanish   - Word recognition   - Pronunciation   - Attention   - Likes   - Insecurity   - Confidence   - Linguistic knowledge   - Indifference   - Phonological awareness   - Schemata   - Explicit instruction   - Strategy for learning   - True cognates   - Spelling

Table 2 Open coding

Table 3		
• Insecurity • Confidence	**Self-efficacy**	**Affective factors**
• Attention • Likes • Indifference	**Motivation**	
• Kinetic signals • Schemata • Vocabulary	**Semantic knowledge**	**Cognitive Factors**
• Word recognition • Phonological awareness • Spelling • Identification of differences between English and Spanish	**Linguistic knowledge**	
• Speech rate • Incomprehensible input/unintelligibility • Pronunciation	**Obstacles to word recognition**	**Modified input**
• True cognates • Kinetic signals • Infering • Vocabulary	**Compensation strategies**	**Classroom practices**
• Instruction • Blending sounds • Rebus sentences • Exposure to new words	**Teaching methodology**	
• Improvement in pronunciation • Discrimination between sounds • Grapheme and sound connection • Word recognition • Spelling	**Aspects of improvement**	**Impact of phonics**

Table 3 Preliminary categories and subcategories

Table 4		
Subcategories	Categories	Core category
Impact of phonics instruction	Phonics facilitated the recognition of sounds and written forms	Explicit phonics instruction helps students to enhance the recognition of the foreign language sounds
Successful classroom practices on phonics		
Knowledge provided to successful phonics instruction	Phonics enhances phonological awareness	
Input requirements to successful recognition of sounds	Modified input aids the decoding or bottom-up process	

Table 4 Final categories

5.3.2   Discussion of categories

Once the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding stages were completed, three categories were identified: Phonics facilitated the recognition of sounds and written forms, phonics enhanced phonemic awareness and modified input aids the decoding or bottom-up process. These categories are the result of a systematic process in which the researcher went backward and forward on data in order to refine the quality of the analysis.

5.3.2.1   Phonics facilitated the recognition of sounds and written forms

This research project found that phonics as a classroom practice can help EFL learners to familiarize themselves with English phonemes. It also helped students to recognize the phonemes despite the fact that children have a phoneme discriminative ability that declines as they develop (McCartney, 2006; Weber & Cutler, 2004). Explicit phonics instruction could be the difference between frustrated learners lost in a new world of sounds and learners that can cope with the phonological challenge that learning English poses with its approximately 40 phonemes (McCartney, 2006). Phonemic routines (segmenting, blending, deleting, substituting, and rhyming) and phonics instruction (decoding, encoding, and handwriting) were effective tools for achieving the goal that had been set for this

research study; that is, to determine how phonics can help A1 (CEFR) English learners to

recognize the sounds of spoken English.

Phonics instruction had a positive impact on the learners' ability to discriminate,

identify, and differenciate sounds. This type of instruction bridged some gaps students had

in terms of the familiarity with the sounds of the target language. The research process

revealed that most of them had a serious difficulty with the alphabet, that is they did not

really know the alphabetic code. It might be argued that instead, they memorized a

sequence of sounds that corresponded to the alphabet. However, naming some letters in

isolation or in a different order was a very tough task for most of them. As for moving

from the name of the letters to their phonemes, this group of learners had not had the

opportunity to listen to segmented or individual English sounds and to distinguish the

differences and similarities between those sounds and the sounds from their mother tongue

(Spanish). In these excerpts from the follow-up interview there is evidence that phonics

instruction helped some of them to understand these differences. They were asked if they

were able to recognize any differences between Spanish and English sounds.

"Claro pues digamos en la letra u nosotros la decimos como /u/ mientras que allá la dicen /ʌ/ entonces se escucha muy la diferencia es muy se nota apenas aunque algunas veces la confundimos con la o". (Participante 19)
"Sure, let´s say that we pronounce letter u as /u/ but there they pronounce it as /ʌ/ so you listen to the difference. You notice it but sometimes we confuse it with letter o". (Participant 19)

"Si digamos la o en español no es así y en el inglés si". (Participante 3)
"We can say that letter o is not like that in Spanish, but in English it is." (Participant 3)

"Si y mucha. Pues digamos la letra e nosotros la mencionamos como /e/ y alla la mencionan como i y también la letra u que alla la mencionan como /ʌ/". (Participante 4)
"There is a big difference. We pronounce letter e as /e/ and there they pronounce it like /I/ and there they pronounce letter u as /ʌ/". (Participant 4)

> *"Si hay muchas diferencias porque la u suena en el español asi normal pero en el inglés suena como /ʌ/".* (Participant 9)
> *"There are a lot of differences because letter u sounds normal in Spanish, but in English it sounds as /ʌ/."* (Participant 9)

As the implementation progressed, more improvements were seen in the

participants' ability to recognize the sounds as seen in Figure 1:

Write a rhyming word on each line

red	bed	met	Net
Ben	net	peck	vet
mess	beg	keg	tell
set	tell	yep	web
quell	yell	leg	egg
Meg	beg	Jed	bed
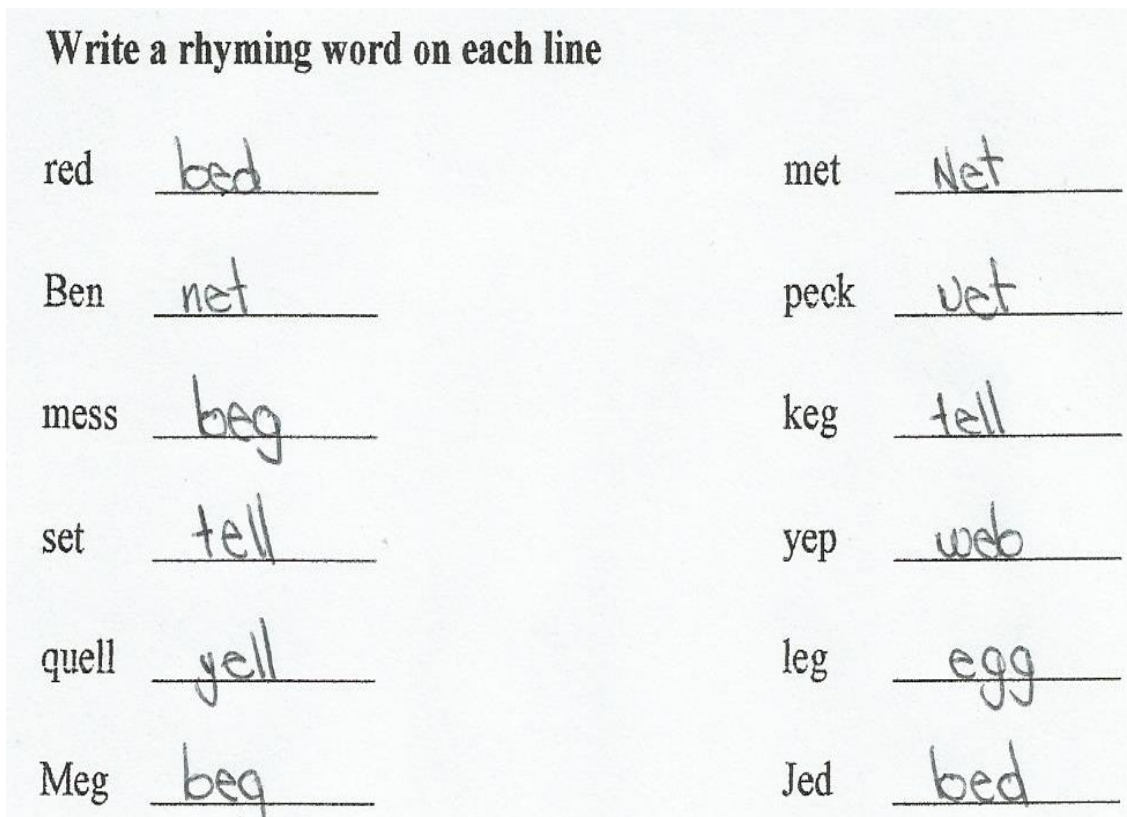
Figure 1 Artifact Participant 1 April 24th 2015

In this activity they were asked to write a rhyming word and, in order to do the

assignment correctly, they had to be able to identify the sounds included in the word

provided in the exercise and the sounds that were part of the word they proposed.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show more evidence of the learners' progress in identifying

English sounds.

1. Organize the letters as you
   listen to their names:

   __5__ i

   __3__ a

   __2__ u

   __1__ e

   __4__ o

2. Organize the letters as you
   listen to their sounds:

   __5__ i

   __1__ o

   __2__ a

   __3__ u

   __4__ e

3. Listen and circle the word you hear:

   (bag) beg

   bed   (bad)

   big   (beg)

   (hell) hill

   (jog) jug

   (just) jest

   lack (luck)

   (lock) luck

   (bunch) bench

   (cat) cut

   (fin) thin

   (man) men

   pig   (peg)

   ten   (tan)

   (that) sat

   (well) will

Figure 2 Artifact Participant 4 April 27th 2015

1. Organize the letters as you listen to their names:

5 i
3 a
2 u
1 e
4 o

2. Organize the letters as you listen to their sounds:

5 i
1 o
2 a
3 u
4 e

3. Listen and circle the word you hear:

(bag)   beg

bed   (bad)

big   (beg)

hell   (hill)

(jog)   jug

(just)   jest

(lack)   luck

(lock)   luck

(bunch)   bench

(cat)   cut

(fin)   thin

(man)   men

pig   (peg)

ten   (tan)

(that)   sat

(well)   will

Figure 3 Artifact Participant 6 April 27th 2015

1. Organize the letters as you listen to their names:

/ e i

/ U a

/ a u

/ o e

/ i o

2. Organize the letters as you listen to their sounds:

✗ U i

/ a o

✗ o a

/ e u

/ i e

3. Listen and circle the word you hear:

/ (bag) beg

/ bed (bad)

/ big (beg)

✗ (hell) hill

/ (jog) jug

/ (just) jest

/ lack (luck)

/ (lock) luck

(bunch) bench /

cat (cut) /

fin (thin) /

(man) men /

pig (peg) /

ten (tan) /

(that) sat /

(well) will /

Figure 4 Artifact Participant 8 April 27th 2015

There was an improvement in their ability to recognize sounds in words that were not in isolation, but within a text, as seen in Figure 5.

5. Read the paragraphs below. Each of the words in bold has a short vowel sound. Listen to the vowel sound and write each word in bold under the correct heading.

Have you ever heard of the author Eve Bunting? She **has** written more **than** 150 books for **kids**. She writes about many different **things** that are important to her in some way. Eve has written about animals, like **ducks** and **dogs**. She has written about mummies, the **Civil** War, and growing **up** in Ireland. She has even written a book about the great **ship** Titanic. When Eve **visits** classes, students have **lots** of questions for her. Many of **them** want to know where she **gets** her ideas. Eve **tells** them that an idea might hit her anywhere. For example, she **got** the idea to write her **mummy** book after a **trip** to the museum.

Eve has said **that** she likes to write books that make children **ask** questions. If you think you might like to try an Eve Bunting book, **check** your library. It is sure to have many books by this popular writer.

(Taken from: Spectrum Word Study and Phonics, Grade 3. 2006.

short a cap	short e pet	short i kick	short o stop	short u snug
1. has	1. them	1. kids	1. dogs	1. ducks
2. than	2. gets	2. things	2. lots	2. up
3. that	3. tells	3. civil	3. got	3. mummy
4. ask	4. check	4. ship		
		5. visits		
		6. trip		

Figure 5 Artifact Participant 10 April 27th 2015

Along with the discrimination of sounds there were two other positive effects of phonics instruction on learners' performance – pronunciation and spelling.

5.3.2.1.1   Pronunciation

The implementation of this research project did not reach any formal productive stages. However there was, on occasion some informal production. At times students wanted to use English to participate in the class or they repeated the words that were part of the exercises proposed. In these instances, the teacher could listen to their pronunciation and it gradually improved or they self-corrected their pronunciation. This was especially true when they wanted to have access to the aural input once more. They repeated the word proposed several times and they tried to say it as accurately as possible, otherwise it had not been helpful to recognize the phonemes in it. Learners being able to do this is evidence that the words' phonological form was already identified (McCartney, 2006). It was also evidenced by observation (Burns, 2010) that they could transfer their newly acquired bottom-up listening skills to words with the sounds they had already studied but that were not part of the implementation exercises or that were not familiar to them. This was probably because their increasing phonological awareness made them imitate the sounds they were studying (Fitzpatrick, 1997) and it is also a sign of the implementation of a life-long learning strategy.

> *"Por ejemplo los ejercicios que nos ponía en inglés con el sonido /ʌ/ y la pronunciación de la letra th esa actividad nos puede ayudar para la pronunciación en una conversación o en un diálogo o para hablar."* (Entrevista Participante 8)
> *"For example, the exercises the teacher assigned in English with the sound /ʌ/and the pronunciation of the letter th. That activity can help us with the pronunciation in a conversation or in a dialog to talk."* (Follow-up interview, Participant 8)

> *"Si las entiendo porque pongo cuidado a la profesora y de tanta práctica, de tantas clases de inglés, **ya sé como se pronuncia** y que es cada palabra."* (Entrevista, Participante 8)
> *"I do understand them because I pay attention to the teacher and with that amount of practice, with that amount of English clases **I already know how it is pronounced** and what each word means."* (Follow-up interview, Participant 8)

The researcher identified this positive aspect during the second half of the study and in the sessions after the implementation was finished.

5.3.2.1.2   Spelling

They gained increased confidence in spelling. Phonics instruction includes some cards with the graphemes and they are used to make blendings between sounds. It might be argued that blending sounds routine practices enhanced their ability to correctly represent words in their written forms because it reinforced the connection between sounds and graphemes. In the first questionnaire, just 10% of the participants reported they could almost always write the words they hear, versus 40% in the final questionnaire. This may suggest that participants gained self-efficacy in this regard. Now they feel confident in their ability to listen, decode and encode (write) English words. Figures 6 and 7 show examples of activities in which participants had to write the words they heard. The words included in the exercise were: bath, bed, bell. cap, cup, fill, fun, gap, get, hag, hit, hut, lip, mug, path, pet, pit, quick, sun, and vet.

3. Listen to the words and classify them according to their vowel sound.			
Example word: **umbrella**	Example word: **ant**	Example word: **egg**	Example word: **ink**
cup fun hut mug sun	bath cap gap hag path	bed bell get pet bet	fill hit Lip pith quick

Figure 6 Artifact Participant 19 April 30th 2015

Figure 7 Artifact Participant 17 April 30th 2015

5.3.2.2   Phonics enhances phonemic awareness

Phonological awareness is the second category which emerged from the systematic

analysis of the data collected. "Phonological awareness is the area of oral language that

relates to the ability to think about the sounds in a word (the word's phonological structure)

rather than just the meaning of the word." (Trehearne et al., 2003). Phonological awareness

is not innate (Fitzpatrick, 1997). Thererore it requires instruction and practice so that it can

take learners to a level of proficiency in which they can listen for the sounds in the spoken

English and reproduce those sounds (*ibid* p. 5). Fitzpatrick (1997) refers to it as "listen

inside words" (p.5).

This type of instruction has to take place early in the process of learning a language

(Trehearne et al., 2003). Despite the fact that intervention started late for this group of

learners, they responded satisfactorily to instruction and they improved in the ability to

recognize some of the phonemes of the foreign language (English). In the first listening

test, 21% of students were able to recognize the words versus 53% in the second listening

test. Not only had their phonemic awareness increased but this indicated that their

phonological awareness had increased as well, which has to do with the understanding of

how syllables and rhymes operate in spoken words (Trehearne et al., 2003).

Learners' insights about this regard also support this finding:

> Questionario final
> Pregunta 8: ¿Qué técnica utilizas para entender mejor cuando te hablan en inglés?
> Participante 3:"*Analizar como se dice y despues como se escribe o buscar en el diccionario*"
> Final questionnaire
> Question 8: What strategy do you use to reach a better comprehension of oral English?
> Participant 3: *"Analyze how the word is pronounced, then how it is written or look up the word in the dictionary"*

In the previous excerpt, the participant mentioned a tool that may enhance

autonomy among learners. The dictionary can provide students with basic information

about the word they heard so that they can reach comprehension. However, it can only

become an effective tool if learners have the ability to encode the phonemes they heard.

This group of learners may have a more developed phonological awareness than it is

shown in their artifacts and/or tests since naming the letters and their sounds is not

necessarily proof of it (Trehearne et al., 2003). The fact that they can transfer their bottom-

up listening skills to decode words they hear outside the implementation sessions or the fact

that they can pronounce words more accurately can reinforce the idea of a strengthened

phonological awareness.

5.3.2.3   Modified input aids the decoding or bottom-up listening process

This category is very important, based on the number of times learners refered to

issues related to it. In this category, the characteristics input requires in order to fit

learners' needs are found. It may be the case that the input they have received during the

implementation and outside the project does not correspond to the language level they

actually have. In other words it may not be comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) because

it is not merely slightly above their language level but a little bit further than that in terms

of the speech rate, the vocabulary and the schemata.

Most of participants expressed their incapability to cope with the speed rate and

with the linguistic and semantic demands in order to decode or decipher the listening tasks.

There were times when the activity did not have a digitalized audio and the teacher read it.

They requested the teacher to repeat several times and to lower the speech rate.

Entrevista
Pregunta 4: ¿Por qué es fácil entender cuando te hablan en inglés?
Participante 15: *"Si es la profe es más facíl porque es despacio"*
Follow-up interview
Question 4: Why is it easy to understand when someone talks to you in English?
Participant 3: *"It is easier if the teacher is the one speaking because it is slower"*

Entevista
Pregunta 5: ¿Por qué es difícil entender cuando hablan en inglés?
Participante 12: *"Cuando las dicen muy rápido y cuando no logro captar los sonidos."*
Follow-up interview
Question 5: Why is it difficult to understand when someone talks to you in English?
Participant 12: *"When they speak too fast and when I cannot identify the sounds"*

Cuestionario final
Pregunta 6: ¿Cómo te sientes cuado te hablan en inglés?
¿Por qué?
Participante 15: *"Un poco tensionada porque me hablan muy rápido"*
Final questionnaire:
Question 6: How do you feel when someone talks to you in English?
Participant 15: *"A little bit tense because they talk to me very fast."*

Nevertheless, speech rate should also follow the i+1 principle so that learner feel

challenged and that learners can gradually progress in coping with this feature of language.

5.3.3   Core category

The core category is the result of the analysis and the integration of the categories

and subcategories. It has a conceptual nature and it includes the main patterns related to the

phenomenon (Locke, 2001). Most of the categories are related to it and it integrates the

theory as well (Strauss, 1987). The process of coding and integrating categories gave rise

to the core category of this research study: **Explicit phonics instruction helps students to**

improve the recognition of the foreign language sounds. The following chart shows the

core category background in the processed data.

Table 5		
Subcategories	Categories	Core category
Impact of phonics instruction	Phonics facilitated the recognition of sounds and written forms	**Explicit phonics instruction helps students to develop the recognition of the foreign language sounds and their written forms.**
Successful classroom practices on phonics		
Knowledge provided to successful phonics instruction	Phonics requires and raises phonemic awareness	
Input requirements to successful recognition of sounds	Modified input aids the decoding or bottom-up process	

Table 5 Core category

        Listening to a foreign language requires listeners to primarily have a baseline

linguistic knowledge (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Due to the phonological differences

between Spanish an English, EFL may have some problems trying to recognize sounds that

are part of the target language and are not used in their mother tongue. Language learners

may require instruction in order to overcome those aural barriers the foreign language poses

in their learning process. As the objective of this research study was to determine how

phonics can help A1 (CEFR) English learners to recognize the sounds of spoken English

and their written forms, phonics emerged as a method that facilitates and enhances the

acquisition of bottom-up listening skills required to deal with the units of the linguistic

knowedge: phonemes, for this particular case. However, learners may be exposed to a

modified input which should be modified as the learners ability to decode oral texts

gradually increases thanks to explicit instruction on phonics.

5.4   Conclusion

This chapter described how the data collected as a result of this research project was

analyzed. As a result of this analysis, it was found that phonics is an effective method in

order to improve the foreign language learners ability to recognize the target language

phonemes and to establish connections between them and their graphemes. During the

development of this research study, two extra factors were identified that affect listening

apart from the ones closely related to the bottom-up model. They are the affective domain

and some cognitive factors related to the semantic knowledge. How phonics can deal with

these aspects is something that will require additional research. These topics are briefly

discussed in the limitations of this research study and as part of further research section in

the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

6.1   Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the impact explicit instruction on

phonics has on basic English learners' ability to recognize the English sounds and to write

the words they hear. These abilities are part of the bottom-up listening skills which are the

first skills any learner uses in the process of learning any language. Listening is one of the

less explored language skills by researchers (Nunan, 1999; Vandergrift, 2007). It is also

one of the less explored in terms of classroom instruction (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Therefore, this research study intended to find successful classroom practices that can help

English learners with similar characteristics to the ones participating this study to take

advantage of the powerful role listening has in the language learning process.

The previous chapter explained in detail how the data, collected during the

implementation of this research project, was analyzed under the principles of the Grounded

Theory. Based on this analysis, it was found that phonics instruction had a positive impact

on the learners' ability to recognize English sounds and their corresponding written forms.

In addition to that, this research study showed that explicit phonics instruction raised

phonemic awareness among the participants in this study. Lastly, the participants reported

that the characteristics of input they received (speech rate) was a determining factor for

successful or unsuccessful recognition of sounds.

This chapter describes how other research studies have dealt with the same strategy

proposed for solving the problematic situation at hand with the caveat that their purpose

was to improve learners' reading performance. This chapter demonstrates the potential

phonics instruction has, in this context and in similar contexts, as a method to raise

phonological awareness and to improve pronunciation. Finally, this chapter discloses the

time issues this project had since phonics instruction covers many more phonemes than the

ones included in this research project. This chapter also discusses the importance of

including more actively the semantic domain in phonics instruction with the purpose of

attaining listening comprehension. These limitations could provide inspiration for future

research into the value of deliberately promoting listening skills while teaching a second

language. This future research would contribute to the advancement of the field.

6.2   Comparison of results with previous studies' results

The results of this research study suggest that explicit instruction on phonics is an

excellent tool for developing the ability to recognize sounds in a group of participants who

were already first language readers. These learners were between the ages of 11 and 15,

and were in their second year of secondary school. They had had foreign language

instruction with language teachers for 1 year and a half.

There are many other research studies that have analyzed the impact of phonics

instruction on a variety of populations, some of them similar to the context of this research

project. The National Reading Panel (2000) includes 38 of them. This project only

includes those that were published during the last year before the publication of this report.

Those that were not relevant for the purposes of this research study were excluded.

Blachman, Tangel, Ball, Black, and McGraw (1999) conclude that phonological

awareness instruction was a successful tool for kindergartens to decode words and non-

words when reading. In contrast, the present research study deals with the encoding rather

than the decoding process. In other words, both studies emphasize different language

skills, Blachman et al. focus on reading and the present study on listening and secondarily

on writing (spelling). Regarding the spelling ability, Blachman et al. concludes that

participants demonstrated an outstanding performance in this regard. The present research

study can also confirm that phonics instruction is an effective tool to develop accurate

spelling among EFL learners. The population participating in these studies also makes

them different because they are not at the same literacy stages.

       Stuart (1999) was included in the National Reading Panel report and she also

published a follow-up of his work (2004). She concluded that phonics instruction has a

long term effect on learners' ability to recognize words and access their writen forms.

Nevertheless, for second language learners it is not as successful as it is in the case of

native English speakers in order to attain language comprehension. Stuart compares two

types of population in his work: five year old native English speakers and English as a

second language speakers. Despite the differences between participants, the present

research project confirms the effectiveness of phonics instruction on learners' ability to

identify words and the graphemes that represent them.

       In another research study, Santa and Hoien (1999) concluded that early instruction

accelerated the participants' reading learning process. Despite the fact that the researchers

do not mention the term "phonics" in their report, this study stressed the identification of

initial sounds by explicit instruction in phoneme-grapheme and grapheme-phoneme

correspondence. The latter fits the principles of phonics instruction. Therefore, it may be

argued that this study used phonics as a learning tool. Researchers also stated that this type

of instruction was probably the cause of learners' increasing phonemic awareness and their

spelling abilities. There is a big difference between these two studies because their purpose

was to confirm that early intervention could benefit the reading learning process in students

with reading difficulties. Therefore, participants are native English speakers in the earliest

literacy stage and their focus was the reading skill. In contrast, participants in the present

research study were EFL learners who were already literate and the focus of the

implementation was listening. In spite of this, findings from the present study support

Santa and Hoien's results because phonemic awareness as well as spelling improved after

participants received explicit phonics instruction.

Among all conclusions in The National Reading Panel (2000), which are also

reviewed by Ehri (2003), the most relevant for this study are that all types of phonics

(synthetic, larger-unit phonics and miscellaneous phonics programs) contributed positively

to the participants' reading skill. Regarding spelling, it was found that phonics helped

kindergarteners and 1st graders to improve their spelling but it did not have the same

success with learners above these levels.

Although The National Reading Panel included a considerable number of studies,

no final conclusion was drawn about the number of hours or the number of sounds a

phonics program should include. And most importantly, the effect of phonics instruction

on listening was not included in any of the studies that are part of the NRP report.

Therefore, there are no conclusions regarding this issue. In comparison, this research study

cannot reach any conclusion regarding the effects of phonics on reading because

improvements on that area, if any, were not a focus of this study. Regarding the ideal

number of hours and phonemes in a phonics program, the present study, with a brief

intervention (30 hours), cannot determine it.

Apart from the research studies included in the NRP, Martínez (2011) aims her

study at the effects of phonics instruction on EFL learners' literacy skills in Colombia. The

study focused on analyzing how reading comprehension, spelling and correct use of verbs

in written statements were affected by phonics instruction. This study found that the

impact of phonics instruction on spelling was not very successful since participants'

performance was good only on spelling words with short vowel consonants. Unfortunately, long vowel words spelling was a challenge probably because of L1 interference (Spanish).

Valbuena (2014) also explored phonics in a Colombian context. Her conclusions were that Tucker Singing is a tool that developed learners' phonemic awareness. This study reports that after phonics intervention, learners were able to manipulate most of the English phonemes in a variety of words and sentences. The Tucker Singing program was a successful tool for EFL learners to learn to read.

In contrast, this research project does not focus its efforts on the reading skill. Nevertheless, it was possible to observe that participants acquired the ability to manipulate graphemes in order to comply with some of the tasks proposed by the phonics routine implemented as follows: rhyming, deleting, adding, or substituting. Possibly this could result in an increasing skill to decode written texts. They were also able to recognize consonant phonemes and most of the short vowel sounds in order to identify and write familiar and unfamiliar words.

It is also necessary to clarify that Tucker Singing was used at the beginning of the present research project with the purpose of making participants familiar with the whole English alphabet and the sounds of the letters. In other words, it was a very fast instruction stage on alphabetical knowledge. Tucker Singing was used to facilitate the phonics routine exercises. Learners had to blend sounds that were a part of the research project's emphasis along with sounds that were not included in it. If the complete range of English sounds had not been incorporated, the range of words included in the implementation sessions would have been extremely limited. Based on the previous explanation, it is possible to confirm that Tucker Singing is an excellent tool in order to raise phonological awareness in EFL learners and as a complementary strategy to reinforce phonics instruction.

Many other studies have concluded that phonics instruction has a positive effect on decoding (Denton et al., 2004; Farokhbakht & Nejadansari, 2015; Johnston & Watson, 2004; Johnston et al., 2012; Noltemeyer et al., 2013; Valbuena, 2014). They confirm that phonics is an effective tool for different types of populations to learn to read. Most of them have reported that spelling was also positively affected by this type of instruction. However, just one of them reported its effectiveness on discriminating sounds (Valbuena, 2014). This lack of emphasis on the aural dimension could occur because phoneme discrimination is conceived as a side effect of learning to read. Nevertheless, the present study is more interested in the initial stages of the learning process in which listening has a main role over reading or writing because it takes place first in the natural process of learning a language. Language instruction for EFL should have scaffolded stages where bottom-up listening skills may be among the earliest teaching intervention stages the language learning process should include. This aims to provide them with the foundation necessary for coping with the phonological demands for English language learning. Therefore, learning to read is a side effect of the ability to discriminate sounds (Juel, 1994), not the other way around as the majority of previous studies on this implicitly indicate.

This study, and all the studies analyzed in this section, examined phonics as a teaching method in language classrooms. This aspect makes them similar because phonics served the purpose in all the studies mentioned as an effective tool in order to improve an aspect in the English learning process. This aspect is included in this research study because of the principles of phonics instruction which establish connections between phonemes and graphemes. However, the focus of their analysis is different. This study focuses on bottom-up listening skills while all the other studies focused on learners'

reading skills. Another aspect that makes this study different in comparison to the rest of

the cited studies is the type of learners participating in it. Martínez and Valbuena worked

in Colombian contexts as the present study does but they included first graders who are in a

different literacy stage whereas this study used seventh graders. Besides that, Martínez'

study was developed in a bilingual school. This is relevant because the amount of English

input they are exposed to is different from the other two contexts mentioned.

Li, Chen and Kirby's study (2012) is closely related to the issue at hand in the

present reseach study. They focus their attention on how the phonemic awareness can be a

predictor of listening. The results indicated that the relationship between the PA (phonemic

awareness) and English listening comprehension is reciprocal. However, they failed to

provide any instruction and merely administered various PA tests and measured the results.

The major difference between these studies is that the present study included listening

instruction during the implementation in order to evaluate the tool (phonics) used to

achieve recognition of spoken words, not only the relationship between the tool and the

result.

6.3   Significance of the results

The adoption of phonics in public schools language classrooms could be the answer

to solve problematic situations that affect EFL learners' language performance and their

academic results. The first of these problematic situations is that the expected language

level determined by Ministerio de Educación Nacional (2006) is very high in relation to the

type of instruction provided (English learners from public schools in Colombia do not have

access to a language teacher during elementary school) in order to achieve those standards.

For example, the third level described in the document that contains the national basic

standards for foreign languages (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006) is Basic 2 (A

2.2) for students in secondary school in sixth or seventh grade (the profile the participants

in this research study have). Listening skills for this level are described by seven items.

Here there are two of them: "I identify the general idea and the most important details in a

dialog, in a radio program or in oral presentations;" and "I understand the main idea in a

description or in a narration" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006). Based on these

learners' language knowledge, and the conditions of the instruction they have received, the

tasks described for this level represent a major challenge and they go against the

comprehensible input principles (Krashen, 1982) and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD). Under this panorama, phonics emerges as a possible solution to

provide the preparation needed in order to cope with tasks in which listening is the main or

the only source of information. Phonics instruction is a method that has not been explored

in public education in Colombia and, by the time students face English lessons, they are

supposed to understand the input provided in the class.

The second problematic situation is that learners normally do not receive listening

training. This skill, that is in charge of providing humans all the information they require

in order to learn their mother tongue, has been downgraded, probably because listening is

something difficult to teach (Field, 2010). Phonics instruction could be an effective tool to

teach EFL learners of all ages how to identify the English phonemes in order to have access

to the spoken words and later to the messages they convey. This tool seems to have the

power to turn language classes input into comprehensible input that can positively affect

other language skills. Due to the complex nature of listening (Buck, 2001; Vandergrift,

2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) and the marked differences between English Spanish

phonetical systems, learners require more guidance and training, not the opposite. Phonics

systematically provides the foundation necessary to smoothly improve the discrimination

and manipulation of the English sounds and their written forms with the purpose of having access to a whole world of new words. Sounds, and the study of them, can give rise to a higher level of expertise in listening and can provide support for skills like reading and speaking (pronunciation, fluency), making listening a means to learn the language, not an obstacle to it.

There are two changes caused by the implementation of phonics instruction in language classrooms. a. Students may feel more motivated to listen to and read in English because phonics provided them with useful and practical information they can use any time they try to decode what they listen or read. b. The levels of anxiety caused by the learning process can decrease due to the confidence phonics instruction can give them. Phonics instruction can have a positive impact on learners' aptitude and attitude towards learning English, which in turn can progressively improve the learning environment. All type of learners would feel confident about their performance and comprehension level of the given instruction because this method includes activities addressed to visual, kinesthetic and auditory learners. This method has a set of cards with the grapheme and with a drawing that represents the phoneme which is helpful to visual learners. Moreover, phonics instruction can include a set of plastic letters that learners can use in order to practice spelling as well as to start manipulating the phonemes and their graphemes. This is an aspect that is beneficial to kinesthetic learners. Plus, phonics instruction blends and segments sounds which is an appropriate component for auditory learners.

All in all, phonics instruction is a tool that will have a positive effect on all type of learners of all ages (adaptations required) because phonics instruction is better that no phonics instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2000). Phonics instruction is an opportunity to start training EFL learners in the listening

skill and at the same time expect improvements in reading and speaking. Working with phonics is the door teachers should open for their students to have access to a huge amount of information that will help them in their academic and professional growth.

6.4   Implementation challenges and research limitations

6.4.1   Challenges with implementing phonics-based strategies in the classroom

Regarding the limitations to successfully implementing phonics in public schools in Colombia, teacher training may be among the most important ones. Phonics is a very structured and systematic method that really requires training in order to be implemented. If there is no training then the teacher has to be very committed to the phonics implementation at his/her school as it has a great amount of content they have to master (approximately 40 phonemes depending on the dialect) and the quality of pronunciation it demands. However, elementary content teachers can implement phonics instruction at their institutions despite their language level proficiency since there is an important number of videos and free worksheets on the web that can facilitate the implementation and mitigate the difficulties resulting from their language level.

The amount of content is a definite limitation, not because of the number of phonemes but because of the number of lessons available for implementing phonics instruction in public schools. Follow-up studies have concluded that there is a long-term effect of phonics on learners' literacy skills (Johnston et al., 2012). In this case it would be preferable to implement phonics as an institutional policy.

Phonics has a well structured routine that may be considered boring or monotonous by young learners. Therefore, it requires a good raport with the students and a little bit of creativity in order to make subtle variances in the routine with the purpose of maintaining

the learners' interest and motivation. Onother issues, also related to participants, are their absences to school and finally, the fact that the instruments were not part of the evaluation for the academic term, lowered the level of extrinsic motivation.

6.4.2   Limitations of the current study

This research study should have had a control group in order to analyze the specific differences in bottom-up listening performance between participants with the same academic background, as well as the benefits participants received from the implementation. This aspect would have been crucial because, due to the lack of studies regarding the same topic and purpose it is difficult to establish more significant comparisons.

This research study's major limitation was time. This project was implemented in 30 classes (60 minutes each). It only covered five short vowel sounds and two consonant sounds. More complex relations between phonemes and graphemes were not considered in this research study because of the time constraints.

Another limitation was the fact that during the data collection stage, participants did not express their opinions or answers clearly because they confuse the concepts of letter, word, phrase, and sentence. Therefore, they confuse some of the terms required to talk about their insights or knowledge about the topic. For example, sometimes they used the terms letter, word or sentence interchangeably. This hampered data analysis.

6.5   Further research

There are still some questions about phonics instruction implementation. Finding answers to these questions can offer the possibility to develop new research projects in order to reach a new level of knowledge and bridge the gaps between practice and

literature. One of the aspects that deserves attention is the impact of the affective domain on the development of phonemic awareness and explicit phonics instruction. Generally speaking, learners may experience anxiety when they face a listening task in the language classroom. There are certain features they cannot control such as the speech rate or the vocabulary the speakers include in their speech and these aspects can negatively affect the learners' state of mind regarding learning.

The integration of semantic knowledge with phonics instruction is by far the most important aspect future research should consider. Phonics instruction helps English native speakers to access the written form of words they have heard or they hear in their everyday context. The latter provides the clues the learner needs in order to guess their meaning. In a foreign language, learners do not have these benefits because, in most of the cases, they have contact with the foreign language only in the language classroom. Accessing the aural form does not guarantee comprehension because of the arbitrariness of the linguistic signs (De Saussure & Baskin, 2011).

Regarding teacher training, it would be important to consider that elementary content teachers should receive phonics training and explore the impact of that instruction on their language proficiency. If this type of training positively affects their command of language, this would be beneficial not just for these teachers but for their students as well.

Many research studies in this field are short, tipically due to the fact that they are implemented by student teachers who have a limited time in order to implement their research projects. Thos opens up the the possibility for future action research. It would be interesting to have an elementary school as a pilot institution in order to evaluate the long-term effects of phonics instruction in a five year time frame. This would create the opportunity to start the implementation with students in their first literacy stages.

6.6   Conclusion

Listening is the most important skill in the process of learning a foreign language because it provides the learner most of the input required to learn it. Nevertheless, it has been downgraded because it is considered a passive skill and because of the complexity of the training classroom practices it requires. This research study was carried out with the intention of providing EFL learners with an effective strategy that can help them to take advantage of all the benefits a good listening performance could bring to their academic and professional lives. This strategy can also impact their self confidence and autonomy during and after their language learning process as life-long learners. Finally, implementing the use of explicit phonics instructions in public schools as part of the foreign language instruction for learners in their initial language learning stages can boost their language performance. It can make learners reach the language level expected at the end of the process thanks to the influence of the phonics instruction on their ability to access the aural input. Implementing this type of instruction would make the difference between listening as an obstacle in the language learning process and listening as a tool to learn English.

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Appendix A: Consent letters

Guatavita, 8 de abril de 2014

Señor

LUIS EVELIO GUARIN FLOREZ

Rector I.E.D. Pío XII Técnica en Turismo Guatavita

Respetado señor:

Me permito informarle que como parte de los requerimientos exigidos por la Universidad de La Sabana en el programa "Master in English Language Teaching Autonomous Learning Environments", el cual me encuentro cursando, debo implementar un proyecto de investigación con uno de los grupos de nuestra institución.

El objetivo de este estudio es el mejoramiento de la habilidad de escucha en lengua extranjera en el cual se abordan temas referentes a la cultura anglosajona a través del uso de las TICs. El grupo 701 cuenta con los recursos necesarios para poder llevar a cabo esta investigación, razón por la cual le solicito de manera cordial se sirva darme autorización para poder ejecutarla. Estoy convencida de que va a ser la oportunidad perfecta para lograr un avance significativo en el nivel de lengua de los estudiantes de este grupo y de paso explotar al máximo los recursos dados por la gobernación.

La participación de los niños y niñas es de carácter voluntario, así que los padres de familia de este grupo recibirán una carta de consentimiento informado y estarán en libertad de autorizar o no a sus hijos para que hagan parte de la investigación.

Agradezco de antemano su colaboración.

ASTRID MUÑOZ CORREDOR

Docente de inglés

Guatavita, 2 de marzo de 2015

Señores

PADRES DE FAMILIA

Respetados señores:

Yo, Astrid Muñoz Corredor, docente de inglés de la I.E.D. Pío XII Técnica en Turismo me

permito informarle que estoy interesada en implementar un proyecto de investigación con

uno de los grupos de nuestra institución. Este estudio hace parte de los requerimientos

exigidos por la Universidad de La Sabana en el programa "Master in English Language

Teaching Autonomous Learning Environments", el cual me encuentro cursando. El

objetivo de dicho proyecto es mejorar la habilidad de escucha en lengua extranjera.

A lo largo de la investigación, aplicaré algunos instrumentos de recolección de

información relevante para el estudio. Los participantes tendrán acceso a material educativo

que les ayude a la consecución de un mejor nivel en el idioma extranjero y serán guiados y

asesorados por mi durante todo el proceso.

He elegido a los niños y niñas de 702 ya que he visto en ellos un gran potencial, son

estudiantes muy aplicados, colaboradores y con muchos deseos de aprender inglés. Ustedes

están en libertad de elegir si hacer parte o no de la investigación, ya que la participación es

enteramente voluntaria. Debo aclarar que las identidades de los participantes serán

protegidas a la hora de publicar los resultados y que las calificaciones no serán afectadas de

manera negativa en ningún caso.

La implementación se llevará a cabo en las instalaciones del colegio y durante el horario de

clases. Los beneficios que los estudiantes podrán experimentar después de haber

participado en esta investigación serán evidentes en el grado de comprensión del discurso

oral en inglés. Otras habilidades también recibirán un impacto positivo ya que el

fortalecimiento de una irradia a las demás.

Si requieren información extra sobre cualquier detalle de la investigación o tienen alguna

pregunta, estaré presta a contestarles.

Atentamente,

ASTRID MUÑOZ CORREDOR

Docente de inglés

Consentimiento

He sido invitado(a) para que mi hijo (a) participe en una investigación sobre el aprendizaje

del inglés como lengua extranjera. He leído toda la información anterior, he tenido la

oportunidad de formular preguntas para aclarar mis dudas y he recibido respuesta a

satisfacción.

Doy libre consentimiento para que mi hijo (a)

_____ participe en esta

investigación.

Nombre del acudiente:

_____

Firma del acudiente: _____

Fecha: _____

Appendix B: Questionnaire

I.E.D. Pío XII Técnica en Turismo Guatavita

"Developing Bottom-up Strategies to Improve Listening Comprehension Skills

through Phonics"

Name:_____

Marca tu respuesta:

1. Cuando oyes una palabra en inglés, ¿puedes escribirla?

a) Siempre

b) Casi siempre

c) Algunas veces

d) Casi nunca

e) Nunca

2. ¿El idioma inglés tiene los mismos sonidos que el español?

Si   No

3. Cuando escuchas hablar en inglés, ¿te concentras en las palabras aisladas?

Si   No

4. Cuando escuchas hablar en inglés, ¿te concentras en la idea general?

Si   No

5. ¿Cómo te sientes al enfrentar un dictado en inglés?

_____

6. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando te hablan en inglés?

_____

¿Por qué?

_____

7. ¿Tienes alguna estrategia para entender mejor cuando te hablan en inglés?

Si   No

Si tu respuesta fue "si" contesta la pregunta 8

8. ¿Cuál técnica utilizas para entender mejor cuando te hablan en inglés?

_____

9. ¿Cuáles son los problemas que enfrentas cuando te hablan en inglés?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C: Listening test

Developing Bottom-up Strategies to Improve Listening Comprehension Skills

through Phonics

Listening test

Name: _____

1. Organize the letters as you listen   2. Organize the letters as you listen

   to their names: to their sounds:

   ____   i   ____   i

   ____   a   ____   a

   ____   u   ____   u

   ____   e   ____   e

3. Listen to the words and classify them according to their vowel sound.

Example word: umbrella	Example word: **ant**	Example word: **egg**	Example word: **ink**

4. Watch the video and complete the typescript:

   The _____ _____ _____ on a mat.

   The _____ and the _____ _____ on a mat.

   The _____ sat on the _____.

The _____ and the fat _____ sat on a _____.

The _____ sat on the _____.

Retrieved from http://www.early-reading.com/

5. Listen to the reading and complete the story:

Bess, Bud and the Junk

"Look at this junk" Bess Duck called to Bud Duck

"We can't get _____ with this junk. " said Bud.

"This stuff must go to the _____!"

Bess picked _____ six _____ filled with _____, ten _____ filled with

_____, and a big jug.

Bud picked _____ a _____ with rips, a _____ with _____, plus, a bed with

lumps.

Bump! Bump! Thump!

Bess and Bud had to _____ and lug all the _____.

Bess huffed and Bud puffed.

It was not _____, but they did it!

Bess and Bud got rid of the _____,

But they did not go to the _____!

Hutchinson, E. (2006)

6. Listen to the song and complete the lyrics:

There was a _____

And he was _____

He liked to _____

And wear a _____

He did a _____

And ate a _____

He was a _____ _____ _____

7. Listen to the story and complete it.

Bunny and the bug

Bunny hears a _____

The _____ is from a _____

There is a bug in the _____

The bug is _____ loudly.

The _____ bugs bunny

Bunny takes the bug out of the _____

Bunny throws the bug out

The bug flies back in.

The bug _____ around the room

Bunny wears a pair of earmuffs.

Appendix D: Lesson plan sample

Lessons 8,9 and 10

The /θ/ sound (diagraph)

Stage	Aim	Procedure
Rhyme routine	To identify sounds	- The teacher will present 10 sets of two words. - Students will say if they rhyme or not. - To finish this stage, learners will look for words that rhyme with the word given by the teacher.
Oddity task	To identify the odd sounds	- The teacher will present 10 sets of three words. - Learners will identify the word with the odd sound. - The teacher will use three different sets with the focus on the initial sound, on the final sound and on the medial sound respectively.
Oral blending	To blend sounds	- The teacher will start with CVC words. - The teacher will include more complicated words with consonant blends. - This stage will progress until 5 phoneme words.
Oral segmentation	To segment by onset and rime	The teacher will provide a list of 10 words to do this segmentation exercise.
Phonemic manipulation	To conform new words by substitution, deletion, addition and reversals.	The teacher will present an example of each one of the ways of phonics manipulation.

Phonics	To establish a relationship between sounds and written forms.	• The teacher will present sample words by using the phonics cards. • Learners will write the words the teacher presents.
Dictation	To apply learning	• The teacher will dictate an excerpt from a decoding book appropriate to the level and prior knowledge.

Lesson plan appendixes

Rhyme routine

1. bath, path

2. birth, lap

3. death, mammoth

4. math, wrath

5. month, mount

6. Moth, cloth

7. parenthesis, synthesis

8. tooth, youth

9. truth, tooth

10. with, ten

Oddity tasks

1. Thick, think, feet

2. Thank, thought, meet

3. Thunder, finder, thumb

4. Come, thanks, thorn, thirty

5. Felony, theater, theory,

6. Thin, sick, thing

7. Geography, mathematics, parenthesis

8. Bathtub, toothache, emperor, toothbrush

9. Bathrobe, complete, panther, toothpaste

10. Plug, cloth, moth

11. Earth, mouth, pond, teeth, youth

Oral blending

Thin   th/ in or th/i/n

Third

Path

Bath

Math

booth

Oral segmentation

thing   path   moth

south   month   third

bath   fifth

Phonemic manipulation

moth- math   Substitution

thing-thin   Addition

think-thick   Substitution

thorn- thorny   Addition

Phonics

1. Thud	6. thing	11. thirsty
2. Thin	7. think	12. sixth
3. Path	8. thumb	13. worth
4. With	9. thunder	14. birth
5. thank	10. thick	

Dictation

1. This is a tale about Beth and Seth Thack. They live in Thip. Beth and Seth Thack like to

bake lots of things like cakes and pies.

2. This week there is a pie contest in Thip. The rules say that the pies can be thick

and thin.

3.Beth and Seth think it will be a thrill to win that pie contest. "We will bake the best pie

in Thip," they say. "It will not be too thick. It will not be too thin."

4.Beth and Seth throw lots of things in the pie mix. They toss in a bit of this and a bit

of that. At last, it is finished.

5. Beth and Seth take the pie to the

contest. They cannot wait until people sink their teeth into it.

6.One by one, the three people taste each pie. "This pie is too thick," they say. "This pie

is too thin," they say.

7.At last, they taste the pie that Beth and Seth made. "This pie is not too thick and not too thin," they say. "This pie wins!" Beth and Seth jump up and down with a thump, thump, thump!

Appendix E: Matrix sample

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1					QUESTIONNAIRE					
2										
3	Code		Question 1: Cuando oyes una palabra en inglés, ¿puedes escribirla?	Question 2: ¿El idioma inglés tiene los mismos sonidos que el español?	Question 3: ¿Cómo sabes que el inglés tiene sonidos diferentes a los del español?	Question 4: Cuando escuchas hablar en inglés, ¿te concentras solo en las palabras aisladas?	Question 5: Cuando escuchas hablar en inglés, ¿te concentras solo en la idea general?	Question 6: ¿Cómo te sientes cuando te hablan en ingles?	Question 6: ¿Por qué te sientes así cuando te hablan en inglés?	Question 7: ¿Tien alguna técnica par entender mejor cu te hablan en inglés
4										
5	S1		Algunas veces	No	Por la pronunciación	Si	No	Perdido	Porque hay muchas palabras que no entiendo y no sé lo que me dicen.	Si
6	S2		Casi siempre	No	Por el sonido	Si	Si	Bien	Porque es muy divertido.	No
7	S3		Algunas veces	Si		No	Si	Bien, a veces	Manejo el inglés bien.	Si

Figure 8 Digital document used to organize the data collected