



**THE IMPACT OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS ON EFL STUDENTS' READING
COMPREHENSION**

CAROLINA CUERVO CAÑÓN

UNIVERSIDAD ICESI

Cali.

2025



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COMPREHENSION**

By

Carolina Cuervo Cañón

Submitted to the Escuela de Ciencias de la Educación

of Icesi University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirementsfor the Degree of

Master in TEFL

Research Advisor

Juan Manuel Aragón

Dedication

To my sister and brother-in-law,

Thank you for your constant presence, encouraging messages, and unconditional love.

Your support has been a source of strength, and without you, I would not be the person I am today.

To Professor Jorge Hernán,

Thank you for believing in me, for your guidance, and for your friendship.

Your support during the most difficult moments has been deeply appreciated and will never be forgotten.

And to myself,

for never giving up, even in the darkest and most challenging moments.

For finding the strength to keep going, for choosing resilience over defeat, and for believing in the light even when it was hard to see.

This work is a reflection of all of you, and it is with profound gratitude that I dedicate it to you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Juan Manuel Aragón, for his continuous support, insightful feedback, and encouragement throughout the development of this research.

Special thanks go to the students who participated in this study and made this research possible with their time and engagement.

I also extend my appreciation to my classmates and friends for their encouragement and collaboration during this academic journey. Finally, I am grateful to my family for their unwavering support, patience, and love, which sustained me throughout this process.

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension skills among fourth-semester students at University of Quindío focusing on a sample of six participants who were engaged in a four-week phonological training program with one session per week of 1 hour. Using an action research methodology, the study used pre-tests, post-tests, questionnaires, and a journal to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The findings indicate that integrating phonological training into the EFL curriculum significantly enhances students' reading comprehension, as evidenced by improved vocabulary recognition and word decoding abilities. However, the results also highlight the importance of providing additional support to address persistent phonological challenges faced by some students.

Key words: Phonological awareness, phonological training, reading comprehension, vocabulary development.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study aims to investigate the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension skills in fourth-semester Modern Languages students at the University of Quindío with emphasis on English and French. To start with, phonological awareness has been defined as the ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structures of a language and is a strong predictor to reading and literacy skills in language learners (Pfohl et al., 2019). According to Anthony & Francis, 2005, as cited in Pfohl et al., 2019 phonological awareness entails the understanding of various sound units such as syllables, onsets and rime. Having said this, phonological training can significantly support early reading development by allowing students to decode words more effectively and facilitating better comprehension skills.

First and foremost, as stated in (Liang & Fryer, 2024) by (Pae, 2020, p. 251). The relation that exists between phonological awareness and reading development varies depending on the orthographic nature of the language, hence, in alphabetic languages like English, phonological awareness is a crucial factor for students understand grapheme and phonemes correspondence to the letter, which supports word reading and decoding allowing students to compare (L1) and (L2) demonstrating that rule generalization can help students to increase their confidence. Contrary to students who use logographic alphabets such as Chinese and Japanese who may require different strategies to develop phonological awareness correspondences between L1 and L2. (McBride, 2016; McBride et al., 2022) cited in (Liang & Fryer, 2024).

On the one hand, according to Li and Woore (2021), many second language learners may not have enough exposure to the sounds and phonetic rules of the target language (L2), making the process of developing phonological awareness more difficult. These difficulties can

particularly be seen in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, where the students do not use the language outside the classroom as happens in Colombia. As a result, due to limited exposure to sounds and phonological rules of the target language, learners cannot develop their ability to distinguish between similar sounds or recognize rhymes, which hinders student's reading ability.

In addition, different studies have compared the impact of phonological awareness training on developing reading comprehension skills specially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Phonological awareness training has been found to yield better results for pseudo-words and understanding basic structures of English Lian and Chen, 2016. However, as stated by Erler, 2003, Erler & Macaro, 2011 and Woore, 2009 in the UK in Li & Woore, 2021. Limited exposure to the target's language phonological rules can result in difficulties for learners, since they do not receive explicit phonological instruction hindering the importance of knowing the language deeply.

Despite the challenges faced by students and teachers on learning and teaching phonological awareness, the relevance and importance of phonological awareness and instruction among EFL students cannot be overlooked. Besides, conforming to, (Swanson, Rosston, Gerber & Solari, 2008; Dahmer, 2010 & Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2011) quoted in Gellan Gamal Atwa Abdel-Maksod. (2020) phonological awareness is not only very important in oral language that relates to the ability to think about the sounds in a word rather than just its meaning but It has also two leading roles in reading: as an important predictor of reading achievement, and as a reading strategy. Some other studies showed that intervention in phonological awareness through direct and explicit instructions have a significant effect on the development of phonological awareness abilities of the target learners not only in the (L1) but also in (L2) as was sated by (Abu-Rabia 2000; Chafouleas, 1997; Ehri, 2004; Makhoul, 2017; Perfetti et al., 1987; Wagner et

al., 1994) quoted in (Hawas 2019). This reinforces the findings of (Hawas 2019) who concluded that there is a strong relation between phonological awareness and reading comprehension.

To address these challenges, it is essential to implement structured phonological awareness training in EFL contexts, which can serve as a bridge between learners' existing linguistic knowledge and the development of phonological awareness. Furthermore, the acquisition of strong reading comprehension skills among 4th-semester modern language students at the University of Quindío remains an essential concern since it is one of the main courses in the degree; since it is essential for the program that the students develop good reading and writing skills as they are becoming teachers. Despite existing curricular emphasis on language proficiency, the impact of phonological awareness on enhancing reading comprehension in the University of Quindío remains underscored due to the insufficient attention that has been directed toward understanding how the development of phonological awareness contributes to, or potentially hinders, the students' ability to comprehend texts effectively.

Consequently, there is a significant gap in knowledge regarding the specific relationship between phonological awareness and the developing of reading comprehension skills in the region of Quindío specifically at the university of Quindío. The aim of this research is to address this gap by investigating the correlation between phonological awareness development and reading comprehension proficiency among 4th-semester modern language students at the university of Quindío, thereby providing valuable insights for educational enhancement strategies to improve reading comprehension skills among students from Modern languages program.

This project was conducted using an action research methodology guided by an interpretivist philosophy, which enabled the observation and analysis of small groups. A qualitative approach was also employed, allowing the researcher to explore participants' opinions and experiences in depth. This approach

provided a better understanding of the data, leading to a more critical and reflective interpretation of the results. Consequently, the research question that emerged was: What is the impact of phonological training on the reading comprehension skills of 4th-semester students in the Modern Languages program at the University of Quindío? This action research aimed to establish the relationship between phonological awareness training and the development of reading comprehension skills. This paper presents the methodology, results, implications, limitations, and conclusions regarding the effectiveness of phonological training for 4th-semester students in the Modern Languages program at the University of Quindío.

Chapter 2: Justification

According to Resolution 2041 of 2016 issued by the Colombian Ministry of Education, all future English teachers in Colombia must achieve a C1 level of proficiency at the end of their career. In alignment with this requirement, the Modern Languages program at the University of Quindío aims to ensure that its undergraduate students reach the same level. This initiative not only aligns with national educational policies but also prepares future teachers to function as competent language users in their professional roles.

To meet these standards, the program has established a set of competencies aligned with the professional profile demanded by society. One key competency is conceptual competence, which, according to the Proyecto Educativo del Programa (PEP), goes beyond mastering the linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic aspects of the four language skills. Moreover, it involves understanding how these elements function in real communicative settings and their pedagogical application in diverse educational contexts, thus demonstrating the importance of developing reading competencies that allow students to interpret, analyze and decode texts critically which is an essential skill for teachers. Furthermore, this competence ensures that future educators not only develop proficiency in the language but also acquire the necessary theoretical and methodological knowledge to effectively teach and facilitate the language-learning process, preparing them to meet both national educational policies and the evolving demands of the teaching profession.

Within this framework, reading comprehension is an essential skill for students in the Modern Languages program, as it directly impacts their success as future teachers. Not only does developing this skill enhance their own proficiency, but it also equips them to teach reading effectively, aligning with the program's goal of producing competent educators who meet

national standards. Since phonological awareness is widely recognized as a strong predictor of reading proficiency, understanding its role in reading development is crucial for improving students' academic performance. As suggested by the study conducted by Sara Hamid Hawass (2019) there is a positive correlation between phonological awareness and the development of English reading skills in EFL students. Consequently, a phonological training is crucial for student's improvement specially in this context, where Spanish speakers, often struggle with vowel distinctions, consonant cluster, rhyming and word stress, which hinders their ability to decode unfamiliar words and affects their reading ability.

Despite having studied English for two years, many students still struggle to achieve the expected B1 reading comprehension level. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), students should have reached B1 proficiency at this stage, given the 256 hours of supervised instruction they receive over two years, 128 hours per semester, with 8 hours per week split evenly between reading/writing and listening/speaking.

Despite this structured exposure, students continue to face difficulties in meeting reading standards, since they are not able to understand the meaning of the text due to their lack of vocabulary, decoding and inferring skills that are not fully developed at this stage. As a result, students may rely on contextual guessing rather than developing word recognition and decoding abilities, which ultimately limits their comprehension, in support of this, Swanson et al. (2008) highlight the importance of oral language, syntax, and vocabulary in reading proficiency, supporting the need for a more structured vocabulary-centered approach.

According to PEP, phonological instruction has never been incorporated into the curriculum. Nevertheless, the previous curriculum incorporated phonetics instruction; however, it aimed to improve pronunciation rather than support reading development. Given that phonological awareness is a well-established predictor of reading success in both L1 and L2

learners Li & Woore (2017), its absence in the program may contribute to students' reading difficulties.

This gap raises concerns about the effectiveness of current instructional strategies, thus highlighting the need for targeted pedagogical interventions. It suggests that the existing approaches to teaching reading comprehension primarily through direct instruction, reading strategies, and an emphasis on grasping the overall meaning of the text are not fully addressing students' needs. Therefore, it underscores the importance of incorporating targeted interventions, such as phonological awareness training, to better support and enhance students' reading comprehension skills.

Furthermore, my interest in this topic deepened during my master's studies at ICESI University, where I gained insight into the multifaceted nature of reading development, which led me to recognize that reading skills are not solely acquired through direct instruction but require an integration of multiple components, including phonological awareness. As research by Li & Woore, (2017) demonstrated that phonological awareness is a key predictor of reading ability in both L1 and L2 contexts. This realization prompted me to investigate how phonological training could enhance reading comprehension among Modern Languages students.

Addressing this gap by incorporating phonological training into reading instruction could significantly improve students' reading outcomes, better preparing them for both academic and professional success.

Based on the identified gap and the need for improved reading instruction, this study seeks to answer the following question:

What is the relationship between phonological awareness training and the development of reading comprehension skills among students in the Modern Languages program at the University of Quindío?

Objectives

General Objective

To establish the relationship between phonological awareness training and the development of reading comprehension skills, from a qualitative approach in students from 4th semester of modern languages at the University of Quindío during the second semester of 2024.

Specific Objective

1. To implement a phonological awareness training program.
2. To examine students' performance in reading comprehension before-after training
3. To explore the correlation between phonological awareness and reading comprehension in EFL students.

Chapter 3: Literature review

Reading comprehension is a central objective in foreign language education. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to struggle with decoding and understanding texts. A growing body of research points to phonological awareness, the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of spoken language, as a foundational skill that supports vocabulary development, decoding, and ultimately, reading comprehension. While studies have confirmed the importance of PA in first language (L1) literacy acquisition, its role in second language (L2) and EFL contexts, particularly among adult learners, remains underexplored.

In recent years, international studies have begun to examine how phonological training affects reading outcomes for EFL students. These studies suggest that structured PA instruction can enhance decoding skills and improve comprehension, especially in settings where learners receive little exposure to English outside the classroom. However, despite this promising evidence, few investigations have addressed this issue in Latin American contexts, and even fewer have focused on university students in Colombia. The present literature review explores the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension in both L1 and EFL settings, with particular attention to empirical studies on adult learners and instructional interventions. It also identifies a research gap that justifies the need for the current study, which examines the effects of phonological training among Modern Languages students at the University of Quindío.

Phonological awareness plays a central role in the development of reading comprehension skills by supporting learners' ability to decode words and access meaning from print. In first language acquisition, this relationship has been extensively studied. Muter et al.

(2004) found that phoneme awareness, letter knowledge, and rapid automatized naming were strong predictors of early reading success. These findings underscore the importance of sound-based decoding strategies in the initial stages of reading development, highlighting the need for early literacy instruction that integrates phonological awareness into curriculum design to support long-term reading success.

The influence of PA extends beyond decoding; it also facilitates automatic word recognition, a process crucial for reading fluency. When readers can quickly decode and recognize words, they can allocate more cognitive resources to higher-level comprehension processes, such as inference-making and integrating prior knowledge (Ehri, 2004). This makes phonological awareness a foundational skill not only for reading accuracy but also for overall comprehension and academic achievement.

While phonological awareness is widely recognized as a critical predictor of reading success in L1 contexts, its relevance in EFL settings has gained increasing attention in recent years. EFL learners often struggle with reading comprehension due to limited exposure to the phonological structures of English, which differ significantly from their native language (Li & Woore, 2017). This challenge is particularly evident among adult learners, whose formal language education often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over sound awareness, despite the foundational role of phonology in decoding and word recognition (Muter et al., 2004).

Several studies have investigated the effect of PA on adult learners in EFL contexts, revealing that explicit instruction in phonological skills can significantly improve reading comprehension. Hawass (2019), for instance, conducted a quasi-experimental study with Egyptian university students and found that phoneme segmentation and blending activities led to measurable gains in reading comprehension. Similarly, Susanto and Nanda (2023), using a correlational study design involving standardized reading tests, reported a strong correlation

between PA and reading ability in Indonesian adult EFL students, emphasizing that decoding skills are as crucial for adult learners as they are for younger students. These studies support the idea that PA remains relevant across age groups and can be effectively developed through targeted interventions, even beyond childhood.

Moreover, the work of Jafari and Rad (2016) highlights the broader cognitive benefits of PA training. Their study with Iranian university students demonstrated that phonological instruction not only improved reading comprehension but also enhanced grammatical awareness. This suggests a reciprocal relationship between sound awareness and syntactic development, reinforcing the importance of integrating phonological elements into advanced EFL instruction. Despite this evidence, which underscores the positive impact of phonological instruction on adult EFL learners' reading skills, many continue to receive minimal phonological instruction, particularly in Latin American higher education institutions. At the University of Quindío, for example, phonological awareness is not explicitly addressed in the Modern Languages curriculum, and pronunciation is often treated as a secondary skill. This oversight may contribute to persistent reading difficulties, especially among learners who have limited English exposure outside of class. As noted by Dahmer (2010), even when educators recognize the importance of PA, a lack of formal training often results in inconsistent classroom practices. Teachers may rely on intuition rather than evidence-based strategies, limiting the effectiveness of instruction.

Taken together, the research suggests that phonological awareness plays a critical role in reading development among adult EFL learners and should be considered a key component of language instruction in university contexts. The findings also highlight the need for professional development and curriculum reforms that address the specific phonological challenges faced by older learners in low-exposure environments.

Despite the increasing recognition of phonological awareness as a key factor in reading development, very few studies have examined its role among EFL learners in Latin America, particularly in Colombia. Most of the available literature originates from Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, where English is often taught with different instructional resources, exposure levels, and curricular priorities. As a result, the findings from these regions may not fully apply to Colombian university students, who often come from public school backgrounds with limited phonological instruction and minimal English use outside academic settings.

At the University of Quindío, reading comprehension challenges persist even after several semesters of English instruction. While students are expected to reach B1 or B1+ proficiency according to national standards, many fall short, particularly in tasks that require word recognition, inference, and vocabulary understanding. As identified in the theoretical framework, one possible explanation is the lack of phonological training in the curriculum, where phonology is sometimes addressed in pronunciation exercises but rarely linked to reading development. Furthermore, both students and teachers may lack awareness of how PA supports comprehension, reinforcing a traditional focus on grammar and meaning over sound structure.

The absence of local research that systematically investigates this issue represents a significant gap in literature, potentially leading to continued instructional practices that overlook phonological training and, consequently, hinder students' ability to improve their reading comprehension in EFL contexts. By focusing on a specific group of university students in a Colombian EFL program, this study contributes context-sensitive insights into how phonological training can enhance reading comprehension. It also offers practical implications for curriculum design and teacher development. Addressing this gap is particularly important considering national education policies requiring high levels of English proficiency among future teachers.

As such, the study aims not only to generate new knowledge but also to inform more effective and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Research across various contexts confirms that phonological awareness significantly contributes to reading comprehension in both L1 and L2 learners. While the foundational role of PA is well established in early literacy development, studies in EFL contexts have shown that adult learners also benefit from explicit phonological instruction. However, this area remains under-researched in Latin American university settings, particularly in Colombia, where phonological training is often absent from EFL curricula. The literature points to a clear need for targeted interventions that can support learners in developing decoding and comprehension skills. This review highlights the importance of addressing these gaps and sets the foundation for the present study, which aims to examine the impact of phonological training on the reading comprehension abilities of Modern Languages students at the University of Quindío.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

In the context of English as a Foreign Language, students are expected to develop the fourth core English skills, with reading comprehension remaining as a cornerstone of academic success. To become effective readers, learners must acquire the ability to decode and understand written texts, processes closely connected to various components of linguistic knowledge. Among these, phonological awareness has emerged as a fundamental factor influencing reading development. Therefore, this section reviews key theoretical perspectives on phonological awareness and its role in reading comprehension, particularly within EFL contexts. It also identifies gaps in current research and explains the relevance of studying this construct in the specific context of the University of Quindío.

Research consistently shows that phonological knowledge plays a vital role in the reading development of language learners. Walton and Walton (2002) define phonological awareness as "conscious access to the component sounds of speech within words and the ability to manipulate sounds" (pp. 79-80). Similarly, Jeon and Yamashita (2014), described it as the ability to recognize and manipulate the language by segmenting it through sound structures, phonemes, rhymes and syllables. In other words, they emphasize that phonological awareness involves a learner's skills in identifying and manipulating the different sound components that make up words, an essential ability for developing reading and literacy skills. Additionally, Snow, Burns and Griffin 1998, explain that phonological awareness involves a general understanding of the sounds of speech, separate from their meanings. Thus, this understanding allows learners to encompass the recognition of words by breaking down into a sequence of phonemes.

In recent years, phonological awareness has gained significant importance in English teaching and has become a focus of extensive research. In fact, Anthony and Francis, (2005, p. 255.) argue that the correlation between phonological awareness and reading ability is evident

across all alphabetic languages. This claim is supported by foundational studies such as Bradley and Bryant (1978), as well as more recent research by Chan and Wade-Woolley (2018), both of which demonstrate that phonological awareness serves as a reliable predictor of reading ability. In EFL contexts, Sara Hamid Hawass (2019) found a moderate but significant correlation between phonological awareness and reading comprehension, emphasizing that explicit training in phonological skills can lead to measurable improvements in students' reading development.

Nevertheless, while this body of research offers valuable insights, most studies have been conducted in Asian and European contexts, where English is primarily taught as a second language. In contrast to the extensive body of research conducted in Asian and European contexts, studies on phonological awareness in Latin America, and particularly in Colombia, remain limited. To date, no published research has specifically addressed this topic within the Quindío region. This absence in the literature highlights a critical research gap and further underscores the need for context-sensitive investigations. Moreover, preliminary observations at the University of Quindío reveal that fourth-semester students demonstrate limited phonological awareness, a factor that appears to hinder their reading comprehension performance. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining the extent to which phonological awareness training can enhance reading comprehension skills among EFL learners in this local context.

3.1 Phonological Awareness

3.1.1 *The Foundational Role of Phonological Awareness in Reading Development*

The role of phonological awareness training in reading development has been widely demonstrated across various age groups and linguistic contexts. Phonological awareness plays a foundational role in reading development during early language acquisition, for instance at initial

stages of learning, students begin to identify pronunciation patterns that allow them to decode and pronounce words, even when they do not know the fully understand their meanings, by relying on the predictable relationships between sounds and spelling patterns. This ability to manipulate sounds within words supports early word reading recognition, which is essential for developing reading fluency. These claims are supported by As Al-Tamimi and Rabab'ah (2007) who concluded that children who received explicit instruction in phoneme segmentation and syllable awareness demonstrated substantial gains in word reading accuracy compared to their peers in a control group. The study supports the notion that phonological awareness not only enhances decoding but also equips learners with tools to engage more confidently with written language.

3.1.2 *Beyond Grammar and Vocabulary*

While grammar and vocabulary instruction have long been emphasized in language education, recent evidence suggests a reevaluation is necessary. Reading development has long been associated with the growth of grammatical and lexical knowledge, as both elements are crucial for understanding the structure and meaning of written texts. As a result, many instructional approaches in EFL and ESL contexts have emphasized mastering grammar rules and expanding vocabulary as primary pathways to enhance reading comprehension. Consequently, language programs, such as the one at the University of Quindío, have often prioritized these components to ensure students' reading success, sometimes overlooking the foundational role of skills such as phonological awareness. However, recent research suggests that while grammar and vocabulary are important, they may not be sufficient on their own, particularly in the early stages of reading development when decoding and word recognition play a more central role.

This is strongly supported by findings from Dufva et al. (2001) and Muter et al. (2004), who both emphasize that phonological awareness is a critical predictor of early reading success, especially in the development of word recognition skills. Their longitudinal studies highlight that phoneme sensitivity, phonological memory, and letter knowledge are more influential in the initial stages of literacy acquisition than vocabulary or grammatical knowledge. According to Dufva et al., phonological memory and word recognition are central to reading development from preschool through grade two, underscoring the importance of sound-based processing. Similarly, Muter et al. found that while reading comprehension later becomes more dependent on vocabulary and grammar, early word reading is best predicted by phoneme awareness and the ability to map sounds to letters. Together, these findings indicate that phonological awareness remains a cornerstone of beginning reading instruction and should be a critical component in early literacy programs.

Supporting this findings, Al-Tamimi and Rabab'ah (2007) observed similar results in L2 learners in Jordan, after implementing phonological training. In this study, an experimental group of ten children who received phonological training showed significant improvement in reading, confirming that learners with greater sensitivity to phonological components perform better in reading tasks. Their study revealed that phonological awareness is a more reliable predictor of reading ability than vocabulary and grammar knowledge. In a related study, Jafari and Rad (2016) investigated how phonological and grammatical awareness contributed to reading performance among EFL students at the university of Kerman. Their findings revealed that both phonological and grammatical awareness significantly contribute to learner's ability to comprehend written texts. Specifically, participants with higher levels of phonological awareness performed better in decoding tasks and vocabulary recognition, which led to improved sentence-level comprehension. These results underscore the interdependence of linguistic sub-skills in reading development and

support the integration of both phonological and grammatical instruction in EFL settings.

3.1.3 Phonological Awareness in Adult Language Learners

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of phonological awareness for reading comprehension. While much of this evidence has focused on young learners, growing attention has been given to its advantages for adult learners as well. Given that English is widely recognized as a global language, individuals are increasingly required to acquire it at various stages of life. In Colombia, for example, the importance of English has grown significantly over the years, prompting many adults to pursue language learning well beyond childhood, this is also evident at the University of Quindío, where several students enroll in the Modern Language Program during adulthood. In this context, integrating phonological awareness into adult education curricula may be particularly advantageous, as it equips learners with essential decoding strategies that support reading development.

For instance, Hawass (2019) conducted a study at Mansoura University with first year EFL adult learners, to investigate the effect of explicit phonological awareness training on reading comprehension. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension scores for the experimental group after the intervention, whereas the control group showed no such progress. Moreover, the study found that sub-skills such as phoneme blending and segmentation were particularly effective in producing comprehension gains, outperforming other phonological tasks. Overall, these results confirm that phonological awareness is teachable and beneficial even beyond early childhood, thereby providing valuable insights for EFL curriculum design at the university level.

Further evidence of the effectiveness of phonological awareness training in adult EFL contexts is provided by studies conducted in various university settings. For instance, Jafari (2016)

investigated both phonological and grammatical awareness among adult learners at the Islamic Azad University of Kerman, the findings revealed that phonological awareness not only improves reading comprehension skills but also enhances grammatical awareness demonstrating the effectiveness of phonological awareness broader reading skills. Similarly, Susanto and Nanda (2023) conducted a study at an Indonesian university with EFL students confirming the significant correlation between reading ability and phonological awareness. Their results emphasized the reciprocal relationship between phonological skills and reading comprehension in second language acquisition.

These studies highlight the importance of incorporating phonological training for EFL learners in higher educational settings, particularly at the university of Quindío. This context shares several similarities with the international settings where the studies were conducted, this includes limited English exposure outside academic environments and common difficulties with reading comprehension. However, unlike those institutions, there is limited local research addressing this issue in the Colombian context, specially locally, this lack of evidence underscores the need for studies that explore the relationship between phonological awareness and reading development in local EFL environments. Therefore, the present study is both relevant and necessary, as it aims to contribute to a better understanding of how phonological training can improve reading comprehension among university students in Quindío.

3.1.4 Cross-Linguistic Transfer of Phonological Skills

Another important dimension of phonological awareness is its potential for cross-linguistic transfer. Lafrance and Gottardo (2005) highlighted the role of phonological awareness in both L1 and L2 reading development. Their longitudinal study with bilingual children found that strong phonological processing skills, such as phoneme awareness and non-word repetition,

were predicted of later reading success in both languages. These findings support the concept of cross-linguistic transfer, wherein skills acquired in one language contribute to literacy in another. As such, when students develop an awareness of how to accurately pronounce and decode letters in their L1 they are better equipped to apply those skills in their L2. A key factor influencing this transfer is orthographic depth, or the consistency between graphemes and phonemes in a language; in languages with shallow orthographic, like Spanish, the transparent sound-letter correspondence supports the development of decoding strategies that can facilitate decoding strategies that can, in turn, support reading comprehension in languages with deeper orthographies, such as English.

As previously discussed, phonological training demonstrates cross-linguistic benefits, particularly in contexts where learners' first language features non-alphabetic or different orthographic systems from English. For example, Kang (2009) found that phonological awareness improved reading success not only in English but also in Korean, highlighting the cross-linguistic applicability of this skill. These findings support the concept of cross-linguistic transfer, wherein cognitive-linguistic abilities developed in one language, such as the capacity to identify and manipulate sounds, can enhance literacy development in another. In Kang's study, students with greater awareness of Korean phonological structures were better able to decode and comprehend English texts, despite the differences in writing systems. This reinforces the notion that phonological awareness is a transferable metalinguistic skill, not restricted to the phonology of a single language. Consequently, strengthening L1 phonological awareness may serve as an effective pedagogical strategy.

In EFL contexts such as the University of Quindío, where students typically have limited exposure to English, building a strong phonological foundation in their first language (L1) can significantly support the development of reading comprehension skills in a second language

(L2). Training students to recognize and transfer relevant L1 knowledge to L2 reading tasks can be especially beneficial when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or structures. While learners cannot always rely on their L1 for complete understanding, cross-linguistic transfer can be particularly helpful in recognizing transparent or cognate words, which share similar forms and meanings across languages. Encouraging strategic use of L1 resources may thus enhance reading comprehension in L2, especially when integrated into explicit instructional practices.

Cross-linguistic transfer has been demonstrated not only among Korean learners but also among Chinese students, highlighting that this phenomenon is not a barrier but rather a beneficial mechanism in both EFL and ESL contexts. It shows that skills developed in a first language can positively influence literacy acquisition in a second language, regardless of the learning environment.

This is well supported Li & Woore, (2017), in an experimental study with Chinese EFL learners, found that explicit phonics instruction significantly enhanced learners' phonological decoding abilities. Their study revealed that learners who received phonological instruction outperformed those in the comparison group on both decoding and vocabulary tasks, underscoring the strong link between phonological awareness and word learning. Moreover, the authors emphasized that phonics-based approaches are beneficial for L2 learners whose native language has a different writing system from English, as they often lack intuitive knowledge of English phonology; this phenomenon particularly affects students at the university of Quindío who often transfer phonological rules from their native language when learning English demonstrating limited metalinguistic awareness of the structural differences among the two languages due to their limited exposure to the language and overlapped role of phonological instruction.

While most studies support the efficacy of phonological awareness, there are exceptions.

Chen (2013) conducted an experimental study with sixteen students from Hong Kong, found that while general phonological awareness tasks, rhyme and syllable recognition, had limited impact, more complex skill, such as non-word reading and prosodic awareness, stress and rhythm, were stronger predictors of reading performance. These findings suggest that phonological awareness remains a crucial component of L2 reading development, but instruction should be prioritized in higher- level phonological processing particularly in context where students struggle with decoding and fluency. This is especially relevant in the context of the university of Quindío. Where many learners lack phonological awareness and decoding skills due to the lack of explicit training in phonological awareness during their learning process.

In conclusion, extensive research has established that phonological awareness significantly strengthens reading skills across various ages and contexts. This ability encompasses the recognition and manipulation of the sounds, phonemes, syllables, and word stress plays a critical role in decoding, word recognition, reading and vocabulary acquisition. As a result, it aids not only L1 but also L2 learners to become more aware of how to produce the sounds in the target language L2, thus improving their reading abilities. Besides, this phonological awareness not only helps learners recognize and manipulate sounds more effectively but also makes them better readers overall. Numerous studies have confirmed that learners with stronger phonological awareness outperformed their peers in reading tasks as seen in the work of Al-Tamimi and Rabab'Ah (2007), Jafari and Rad (2016), and Chen (2013), among others. Besides, these studies indicate that phonological awareness is not only relevant in early childhood or in L1 context but can be explicitly taught to adolescent and adult learners as a necessary component of literacy instruction among EFL environments helping students to become aware of the target language sounds aiding to improve reading skills.

Although phonological awareness has gained recognition in education worldwide, its

application in teaching reading skills remains limited, particularly in Colombia, and specifically in Quindío. At the university of Quindío, for instance, phonological awareness is often overlooked by professors, since their primary focus is not phonetics, and reading is viewed as a skill that improves solely through practice. Furthermore, the role of phonological awareness in enhancing reading abilities is frequently underestimated, this may stem from a lack of knowledge on the subject or the misconception that phonology only benefits speaking skills, forsaking its importance in areas such as reading comprehension. Additionally, at the University of Quindío, there is not a formal training in phonetics or phonology within the curriculum therefore, teachers occasionally incorporate related strategies in speaking and listening courses; however, these strategies are not consistently implemented or assessed due to time constraints and the need to meet other curricular objectives. As a result, the development of students' phonological awareness is often overlooked.

Therefore, there is a need to incorporate a phonological training into EFL curriculum at the university of Quindío, doing this will not only bridge an institutional gap but also provide students with the tools needed to become autonomous and effective readers. As the evidence suggests, prioritizing phonological awareness in EFL instruction is not optional but essential for advancing reading outcomes and overall language competence.

3.2 Phonological training

The term Phonological training refers to a structured instructional approach aimed at enhancing learners' awareness and manipulation of phonemes, the smallest units of sound in language. This type of training typically involves explicit instruction and guided practice in recognizing, differentiating, and producing these sounds to enhance reading and literacy skills. It has been shown to be effective for learners of all ages and in both L1 and L2 contexts, making it a valuable tool for enhancing literacy development across diverse learning environments.

3.2.1 Impact of Phonological Training on Reading Skills in EFL Learners

Phonological training has shown its effectiveness across different contexts due to direct instruction develops students' sound awareness since they will be able to recognize and manipulate sounds in isolation or when integrated in words, leading them to become better decodes and therefore better readers, Gellan Gamal Atwa Abdel-Maksod (2020) conducted an experimental study in an EFL context in Egypt, they investigated the impact of phonological awareness strategies such as rhyming, alliteration, blending and segmentation and the findings reveal that students who received targeted training use these strategies significantly outperformed in oral reading fluency tasks, including sentence reading and comprehension. Moreover, the study concluded that phonological training positively impacted not only the ability to decode and pronounce unfamiliar words but also oral reading fluency when reading aloud in EFL learners. This study underscores the value of structured phonological training in EFL classrooms, especially at early stages, where learners are still developing their reading skills. Therefore, integrating phonology awareness into the curriculum can be considered a practical and effective approach to fostering reading development in beginner learners. Thus, underscores the need to implement such training in context like the university of Quindío where students often exhibit significant delays reading proficiency even at advance stages of their academic progress.

Phonological awareness not only improves reading comprehension but also supports vocabulary development, both of which are essential for enhancing students' overall reading ability. Integrating phonological awareness instruction into classroom practice can therefore be an effective strategy for simultaneously strengthening decoding skills, vocabulary, and comprehension. This is supported by Hentasmaka et al. (2022), who conducted a quasi-

experimental study with adult EFL learners and found that embedding phonological awareness training into vocabulary instruction led to significant gains in phonological skills. The experimental group, which received 4.5 hours of phonological instruction over six sessions, outperformed the control group in all post-test measures. These results suggest that even short-term, integrated training is effective. The study also highlighted that embedding phonological instruction within vocabulary teaching is more beneficial than teaching each component in isolation, as it enhances phoneme recognition, decoding, and metalinguistic awareness. Thus, the findings support the idea that adult language learners benefit from deliberate, integrated phonological training to internalize sound patterns and improve reading and pronunciation.

As previously discussed, phonological training has a significant impact on students in EFL contexts, suggesting that explicit instruction is more effective than mere exposure to the language. At the University of Quindío, for example, students are primarily exposed to English through coursework but do not receive targeted phonological instruction. As a result, they often struggle to manipulate sounds within words, which hinders their ability to decode unfamiliar vocabulary. Consequently, they rely on alternative strategies to support their reading comprehension rather than developing core decoding skills grounded in phonological awareness. This premise is supported by Ibrahim and Mahmoud (2018), who conducted a quasi-experimental study with adult Arab learners in Saudi Arabia. Their findings showed that participants who received structured phonological awareness training demonstrated significantly greater improvement in reading performance than those who were only exposed to regular language instruction. These results highlight the essential role of phonological instruction for adult EFL learners, particularly in contexts with limited prior exposure to the phonological structure of English.

3.2.2 *Phonological Awareness and Educational Practices*

Phonological training has been shown to benefit learners across various age groups, from early childhood to young adulthood. In the case of young learners, this type of training is particularly impactful because it aligns with critical periods of cognitive and linguistic development. At early stages, children are highly receptive to the sound patterns of language, and phonological awareness enables them to internalize the relationships between sounds and written symbols. Through targeted activities, such as phoneme segmentation, syllable blending, and rhyming exercises; young learners can develop a more intuitive and structured understanding of how language works.

This is supported by Li and Chen (2016), who conducted a quasi-experimental study comparing the effects of phonological and morphological awareness training among Taiwanese EFL children. Their findings revealed that while both training types led to significant improvements in word reading, only the group that received phonological instruction demonstrated statistically greater gains than the control group. Notably, this group also performed significantly better on pseudoword reading tasks, indicating that phonological awareness plays a crucial role in decoding unfamiliar words. These results highlight the effectiveness of phonological training in supporting the phonological decoding route, particularly during the early stages of L2 literacy development.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of integrating explicit phonological instruction into EFL curriculum, particularly in contexts like the University of Quindío, where phonological training is often overlooked in favor of other curricular priorities. Implementing such instruction is especially beneficial for young learners, as it provides a strong foundation for developing word recognition and decoding skills that are essential for successful reading in a

second language.

3.2.3 *Phonological Awareness Gaps in the University of Quindío*

Similarly, Nadia A. et al (2017) conducted a case study at Najran University to investigate the impact of phonological awareness training on EFL learners' reading comprehension. In this study, 160 students were involved and assessed four key phonological awareness skills: word identification, word deletion, word blending, and word rhyming. Additionally, students participated in pre- and post-intervention Cloze tests, which reveal the experimental group, that received phonological awareness training showed significant improvements in reading comprehension compared to the control group. Therefore, this suggests that incorporating structured phonological instruction into the curriculum at the University of Quindío could address current gaps in reading performance by equipping students with essential decoding and word recognition strategies that support overall comprehension in English.

Another example of the significant importance of receiving phonological training is the study done by Margaret Dahmer (2010), she conducted a qualitative study to explore how kindergarten teachers perceive and implement phonological awareness as foundational component of reading comprehension. The findings showed that although teachers clearly understood that phonological awareness is an important skill for learning to read, particularly as a bridge between speaking and reading, there was a clear difference between what they believed and how they taught it in the classroom.

As a result, many teachers reported relying on incidental or informal methods to address phonological awareness rather than integrating it through structured and intentional instruction. Furthermore, the study suggested that teaching experience may influence how phonological strategies are applied in the classroom, with more experienced educators demonstrating different approaches to incorporating these skills. Dahmer concluded that although educators value the

role of phonological awareness in reading acquisition, there is a clear need for targeted professional development to ensure that this knowledge is consistently and effectively translated into classroom practice.

Overall, this study is particularly relevant to my context, as it reflects similarities between the teachers involved in the research and those working at the University of Quindío. Like the participants in the study, many local instructors have not received formal training in phonological awareness and often hesitate to incorporate related strategies due to a lack of knowledge and confidence. This supports the author's conclusion that teachers tend to base their instructional choices on personal experiences and beliefs about what works best for their learners, rather than on formal pedagogical training.

3.2.4 *Limitations of Phonological Training*

While most of the studies discussed above highlight the positive impact of phonological training on reading comprehension, it is important to recognize that improved phonological awareness does not always guarantee enhanced comprehension skills for all learners. Although the ability to decode or read unfamiliar words is a fundamental aspect of reading development, comprehension also requires higher-level cognitive processes, such as understanding context, making inferences, and interpreting meaning. In other words, phonological awareness supports the mechanics of reading, but true comprehension extends beyond sound, symbol recognition to include the integration of semantic, syntactic, and discourse-level information. As Pfoista et al. (2019) found there was a strong relationship among phonological training, and it improved better letter knowledge; however, this improvement did not translate into a better reading performance. Although the intervention led to significant improvements in phonological awareness and letter knowledge, these gains did not translate into substantial enhancements in general reading abilities. This suggests that, despite improvements in early literacy skills like phonological

awareness and letter knowledge, these did not lead to notable advancements in overall reading performance.

Nevertheless, the study did observe small positive effects on word reading within a subgroup of low-performing children. The modest benefits observed among low-performing children suggest that such interventions might be more effective when tailored to individuals with specific needs. Additionally, the authors noted that differences in orthographic transparency between languages, such as German and English, may influence the effectiveness of phonological training, indicating that findings may not be directly transferable across different linguistic contexts.

As well as Foy & Mann, (2006) that found that phonological training and consequently phonological awareness facilitated the recognition letter and sounds it did not enhance reading skills. Suggesting that phonological training may not be sufficient to improve reading skills. Their study with preschool children demonstrated that basic phonological awareness skills, such as the ability to recognize and manipulate sound, support the acquisition of letter-sound associations, while growing familiarity with letter sounds further enhances phonological awareness. This bidirectional relationship suggests that instruction targeting either skill can benefit the development of the other. Although phonological training and, consequently, phonological awareness facilitated the recognition of letters and sounds, it did not significantly enhance overall reading skills.

To conclude, the studies discussed above are particularly relevant to my context, as most of them highlight the effectiveness of phonological training as a key factor in the learning process of a foreign language. In particular, the integration of phonological awareness into the teaching practices, enhances students' ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of English. This, in turn, allows them not only to improve their pronunciation but also to strengthen their

reading performance. Moreover, many of the studies reviewed emphasize that phonological training can be implemented flexibly, either in isolation or embedded within activities such as vocabulary instruction, demonstrating its versatility and applicability across diverse instructional settings.

Furthermore, research has shown that phonological training significantly impacts reading and literacy skills across diverse learner populations and contexts. As noted, most of the studies referenced above have found that phonological awareness strategies significantly enhance reading fluency not only in the L1 learning process but also in the acquisition of L2 for EFL students from various contexts, backgrounds, and ages. These findings were supported by a variety of research methodologies, including experiments where pre- and post- tests of phonological awareness were assigned to participants; the results clearly demonstrated that phonological training enables learners to manipulate the sounds in L1 and L2. Making these sound easier to recognize and produce while speaking or reading. Phonological training fosters phonological awareness in the target language facilitating improved reading and literacy.

However, while phonological training provides critical foundational support, some studies, such as those by Pfoest et al. (2019) and Foy and Mann (2006), suggest that improvements in phonological awareness and letter-sound recognition do not always result in immediate gains in overall reading performance. These findings highlight the importance of complementing phonological instruction with broader literacy strategies and adapting it to the specific needs of learners.

Considering this, implementing structured phonological training at the University of Quindío can address existing gaps in students' reading proficiency by equipping them with the necessary tools for decoding and understanding written English. However, for this implementation to be effective, it is essential to consider teachers' perceptions and confidence

regarding phonological instruction. As Dahmer (2010) observed, even when educators recognize the importance of phonological awareness, a lack of formal training often leads to inconsistent or incidental application in the classroom. This highlights the need not only for curricular integration but also for targeted professional development that empowers teachers to apply these strategies intentionally and confidently. Given the documented benefits and practical adaptability of phonological awareness training, it should be considered a core element of EFL instruction to support more effective and confident reading development among learners.

3.3 Reading Comprehension

3.3.1 Link Between Phonological Awareness and Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill for students' academic success. It involves not only the ability to decode written words but also the capacity to understand, analyze, and interpret the meaning of a text. Research has shown that phonological awareness is closely linked to reading comprehension, as learners who receive targeted phonological training tend to develop a stronger understanding of sound patterns. This, in turn, supports their ability to decode and make sense of written language. Therefore, integrating explicit phonological awareness training, particularly at the University of Quindío, may significantly enhance students' reading performance, providing them with essential tools to become more proficient and confident readers.

This is well supported by Anthony and Francis (2005) who highlighted that phonological awareness impact reading development over time. The authors defined phonological awareness as the sensitivity to sound structure of oral language, encompassing skills such as recognizing rhymes, segmenting syllables, and manipulating phonemes. They highlight that phonological awareness is the most strongly related to literacy. As a result, difficulties in this area often lead to

challenges in learning to read. Therefore, these findings underscore the importance of incorporating structured phonological awareness training into early literacy programs to support reading development effectively.

3.3.2 *Cross-Linguistic Transfer*

Additionally, cross-linguistic transfer has proven to be highly beneficial for both EFL and ESL learners, as it allows students to apply their existing language knowledge to the acquisition of a new language. Students can draw on their reading comprehension skills in their first language (L1) to support their understanding of texts in a second language (L2). Research has shown that learners with strong reading abilities in L1 are often able to transfer these skills to L2, thereby enhancing their overall reading comprehension in the target language. This transfer highlights the importance of building a solid foundation in L1 literacy, as it directly contributes to success in L2 learning contexts.

Tong et al. (2023) conducted a longitudinal study to explore the synergetic effects of phonological awareness, vocabulary, and word reading on bilingual children's reading comprehension. Tracking Chinese English bilingual learners over a three-year period, the study found that these three skills are highly interrelated and together form a strong foundation for reading comprehension in both the first language (Chinese) and the second language (English). Notably, L1 vocabulary directly influenced initial L2 reading comprehension, while L1 phonological awareness indirectly contributed to L2 reading through its impact on vocabulary and word reading. These findings underscore the interconnected nature of literacy development in bilingual learners, suggesting that reading comprehension is not the result of isolated skills but rather the outcome of integrated phonological and lexical development across languages. For EFL contexts such as the University of Quindío, this study supports the necessity of fostering

both vocabulary and phonological awareness in a coordinated manner to support stronger reading outcomes in the target language.

3.3.3 *Prosodic and Phonological Awareness*

Building on this, the strong interplay between phonological awareness and reading comprehension suggests that learners who develop greater sensitivity to the sound structures of language are more likely to succeed in reading tasks across both their first and second languages. AS, Sasakasi, Yamato (2023) investigated the contributions of both phonological and prosodic awareness to English reading comprehension among Japanese EFL learners. The study found that phonological awareness, defined as the ability to recognize and manipulate segmental features of language such as phonemes, rhymes, and syllables, was positively correlated with reading comprehension. This suggests that learners with strong phonological awareness tend to perform better in reading tasks. However, when the author analyzed the results using multiple regression, it found that prosodic awareness is the strongest predictor for reading comprehension. This suggests that the ability to process prosodic features of language may be more influential in understanding written English for learners whose first language has different prosodic characteristics. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating prosodic awareness training into EFL instruction. By focusing on prosodic features such as stress patterns, rhythm, and intonation, educators can enhance reading comprehension skills in EFL learners.

3.3.4 *Instructional Tools and Teacher Practice*

Considering that educators play an important role in the instruction of phonological awareness, it is essential to integrate diverse tools and strategies into classroom practice to enhance this skill among learners. This is supported by research conducted by Verena Hofmann (2021), who investigated the effectiveness of app-based learning in improving phonological awareness and word reading comprehension among first- and second-grade students. The

findings revealed that students who used the app showed significant improvements in phoneme synthesis, a core component of phonological awareness, particularly among those who initially struggled with this skill. This highlights the value of incorporating technology and innovative practices into the classroom. App-based interventions, therefore, can offer targeted, individualized support to students who need it most. However, the study also found that the app did not significantly enhance other areas of phonological awareness or overall word-reading comprehension, suggesting that while technology can be a helpful supplement, it may not fully replace comprehensive, teacher-led instruction.

3.3.5 Limitations

Despite these findings, some studies suggest that the correlation between phonological awareness and reading comprehension may not be as strong in all contexts. For instance, Özdemir et al. (2015) concluded that even though phonological significantly aids monolingual child's students in developing reading skills, the same effect was not observed for bilingual students under similar conditions. This contrast in outcomes may suggest that bilingual students require a different type of instruction to achieve similar results. Moreover, the absence of a relationship between phonological memory and awareness in bilinguals suggests that different cognitive resources may be engaged in bilingual reading processes. Consequently, these insights underscore the need for tailored instructional approaches that consider the unique linguistic backgrounds of bilingual learners, further emphasizing the importance of developing L2 specific phonological skills to enhance reading proficiency.

Elhassan et al. (2017) also concluded that while phonological awareness can influence reading development, it is not sufficient on its own to develop fluent reading skills. Their findings underscore that reading fluency involves more than phonological decoding; it also requires the rapid and automatic visual recognition of words. The researchers emphasized that

fluency is marked by a developmental shift, from conscious decoding to more efficient, automatic word recognition strategies. This transition indicates that as readers become more proficient, they increasingly rely on visual word processing rather than phonological decoding. Based on these insights, the study recommends that future research should focus on identifying the specific skills underlying automatic visual recognition in reading, to better understand and address the risk factors associated with dysfluent or disordered reading.

Similarly, Swanson et al. (2008) in a study among third-grade students demonstrated that oral language, syntax, and vocabulary significantly contribute to reading skills, beside phonological awareness. Their findings revealed that oral language skills, specifically expressive vocabulary and syntactic knowledge, were stronger predictors of reading comprehension and word reading than phonological awareness. Importantly, these effects were language-specific, meaning that oral language abilities in English predicted English reading outcomes, while Spanish language skills predicted Spanish reading outcomes. While phonological awareness did contribute to literacy development, its predictive power was notably weaker in comparison to vocabulary and syntax. These results underscore the importance of integrating language-specific instruction into bilingual education, with a focus not only on phonological training but also on the development of oral language skills in both languages. Overall, For EFL learners specially with those with limited exposure to English outside the classroom as the case of students from the university of Quindío the findings suggest that enhancing expressive language alongside phonological awareness may be critical for improving overall reading performance.

3.3.6 L1-L2 Differences

In contrast, other studies present mixed results rather than entirely negative findings. For instance, Lisa Yoshikawa, Junko Yamashita (2014) discovered that phonological awareness indirectly supports reading comprehension through pseudo-word reading, implying that Japanese

learner of English benefit from phonological awareness in the English reading comprehension process. Particularly because their L1 is non-alphabetic. Moreover, this research highlighted an indirect effect of phonological awareness on L2 English reading comprehension, especially for adult learners with non-alphabetic L1 backgrounds, reinforcing the role of phonological awareness in diverse language contexts.

To conclude, this section explores the pivotal role of phonological awareness in supporting reading comprehension, particularly among EFL and ESL contexts. The evidence presented demonstrates that explicit phonological training enhances learners' abilities to decode and interpret written texts, offering measurable benefits across groups and instructional settings. It also highlights the importance of teaching practices demonstrating the pivotal role of teachers in phonological awareness development among students as they can integrate different strategies to aid students enhance those skills.

Chapter 5: Methodology

THE EFFECTS OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS TRAINING ON EFL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION.

This study aims to understand if the phonological training improves reading comprehension skills on EFL students therefore, a qualitative study is appropriate when the goal of the research is to understand a phenomenon by relying on the development and implementation of a phonological training to examine and explore the correlation between PA and RC, Also the action research strategy aims to advance and optimize student outcomes through the systematic observation and introspection of classroom strategies. Which is based on the repeated cycles of identifying a situation: planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Burns, 2010).

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part, "Research Design," outlines the selected methodology, methods of data collection, sampling strategy, and data analysis techniques, offering a thorough explanation of the research execution process. The second part of the chapter, "Limitations" presents an honest evaluation of some potential factors that may have impacted the research results. Finally, the "Summary", provides a brief overview of the entire chapter. These three sections give a detailed and organized framework for the chapter, guiding the reader through research design, besides acknowledging its limitations, and ending with a concise summary of the research's importance and possible future directions.

4.1 Setting

The University of Quindío located in Armenia, Colombia, it is a prominent institution distinguished for its excellent and commitment to higher education. The university was established in 1960. It stands as pillar of learning in the region, the institution offers a diverse range of

programs across different fields of study. The university's Modern Language program is one of its esteemed programs, catering to students with a passion for linguistics, culture, and global communication. The program is designed to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of different languages such as English and French, emphasizing their language proficiency on strengthening speaking, writing and reading comprehension.

Students in the Modern Language program typically study two languages, English and French. The curriculum aims to cover linguistic theories, literature and cultural studies. Students often have opportunities to engage in immersive experiences through exchange programs, internships, or study abroad initiatives to enhance their language fluency and cultural appreciation.

4.2 Research Design

This was a qualitative study centered on classroom-based action research. (Burns, 2005) define action research as a systematic and reflective process carried out by teachers to investigate and improve their own teaching practices. It involves identifying a specific problem or question within the classroom, implementing an intervention or change, observing the effects, and reflecting on the outcomes to inform future practice. Besides, it was developed based on the philosophy of pragmatism which emphasizes practical outcomes and real-world implications. Moreover, a qualitative approach was used for this research since this enables the researcher to interpret participant's opinions and experiences. Specifically, this approach focuses on understanding how learners interpret their experiences with phonological training and how these experiences influence their reading comprehension. Therefore, this methodology provides the necessary flexibility and depth to explore the effects of phonological instruction in a real classroom context, such as that of EFL learners at the University of Quindío.

4.3 Research Strategy

In this way, the research strategy was action research, which focused on encouraging

students from fourth semester at the university of Quindío to improve their phonological awareness and consequently their reading skills, so the problem was identified, and a possible solution emerged by developing some activities to improve their phonological knowledge addressing the following steps

4.3.1.1 Planning

Problem identification. It is evident that students from the fourth semester of the Modern Language program were facing challenges in accurate pronunciation of words, leading to misunderstandings during verbal communication. Consequently, their reading comprehension skills have been affected since they cannot recognize the sound in the written words, impacting their reading oral performance. These struggles lie from a lack of pronunciation strategies which are undertaken in the curriculum and the traditional approach for teaching reading and writing to students, where the emphasis is on the teacher guiding students solely to answer comprehension questions underestimating the importance of comprehending the text deeply and decoding words by their sounds.

Hence, it was inferred by teacher observation that these students required activities that enhance their abilities, fostering a sense of ease and confidence in both pronouncing and reading comprehension. Additionally, it is essential to assist them integrating phonological activities in their classes, not just for effective verbal communication but also to facilitate a deeper understanding of the content they read.

Problem solution. Since the students face problems of pronunciation in English, it was important to develop some classes focus on pronunciation to help them to overcome this problem, therefore, this study aims to help students to overcome pronunciation problems by the implementation of those activities which promote the phonological awareness among the

students.

4.3.1.2 Stage 2: Acting

Selection of participants. The research involved the participation of fourteen fourth-semester students from the Modern Languages program at the university of Quindío. These students came from a low socioeconomic stratum and hail from various regions of the country, including Bogotá, Santa Marta, Quindío, Manizales, among others. According to the university's curriculum, students in the fourth semester are expected to have a B1 level of English proficiency at the beginning of the semester and achieve a B1+ level by the end. Additionally, the participants were not selected randomly, as the group was naturally formed through student registration for the class; therefore, they served as the focus group for this study. Even though the 14 students received phonological instruction, only six students were taken into consideration for the study. The six students who participated in the study included three women and three men. All of them had received the same amount of English instruction prior to the intervention. These students were selected because they were the only ones who attended all four intervention sessions and actively participated throughout the process. Their ages ranged from 17 to 20 years, and they were enrolled in the evening shift of the Modern Languages program. The participants came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, primarily from strata 1 to 3, which are considered low to lower-middle income levels in Colombia. Most of the students were first-generation university attendees and had limited prior and current exposure to English, primarily due to the insufficient language instruction typically offered in public school settings. Additionally, several students worked during the day in various fields, including bilingual call centers, which provided them with

opportunities to practice and improve their English skills outside the classroom. Additionally, some ethical concerns were considered as the students were informed through a circular where the purpose and procedure of the study was explained in detail.

Designing and application of instruments. Participants received one hour training on phonological activities to provide them with sufficient input as well as to show the benefits phonological awareness can offer for reading comprehension. Then, students were asked to practice reading a passage with the sounds previously taught and to answer some questions to test their reading comprehension.

4.3.1.3 *Stage 3: Observing*

Exploring students' perceptions. A questionnaire was applied to 6 participants to explore their perceptions about the use of phonological training as a reading strategy to verify whether their perceptions were in accordance with the results obtained from the rubrics, and thus, to enrich the data. A diary was carried out by the researcher to write down what was observed during the activity's implementation.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

The research was implemented for four weeks where four classes of one hour were implemented to raise students' phonological awareness. And two were taken to implement the pre- and post-test.

The next table shows an outline for the research implementation

Table 1

Week 0	Pre-test
Week 1	“th” sound voice and voiceless
Week 2	Diphthongs
Week 3	Rhyming: Rhythm is the sense of movement in speech, marked by the stress, timing, and quantity of syllables.
Week4	Post-test

4.4.1.1 Instruments

Table 2

Instruments	Descriptions
Pre-test	A Reading comprehension pre-test B1 according to MCER was taken in the classroom. All fourteen Students read a short text, and they answered eight multiple choice questions about it. 20 minutes were given to complete it. see (Appendix 1)
Questionnaire	A questionnaire as a non-major observational way was used to know students’ perceptions, opinions

	and knowledge they have about phonological training and reading comprehension.
Classrooms documents	Lesson plans were crucial for the research as guide to register the activities that were carried out every session enabling the researcher to follow the aim and to be responsible and critical with the activities that were implemented. See (Appendix 2) for a lesson plan reference.
Journal	Observations during the four classes that were conducted by the teacher used an Anecdotal Observation Chart to record observations. The chart was filled out during each session, with one chart for each participant in every class to document their progress. It was completed during the free practice and assessment stages of the classes to check the students' understanding.
Pos-test	A Reading comprehension pos-test B1 according to MCER was taken in the classroom. All fourteen Students read a short text, and they answered eight multiple choice questions about it. 20 minutes were given to complete it. see (Appendix 3)

4.5 Analysis of the Data

Qualitative data will be analyzed using anecdotal journal observation throughout a thematic analysis, as was stated by Burns (2010) it refers to identify, group, code and analyze themes with qualitative data. Besides, it is addressed to answer the question what the relationship between phonological awareness training and the development of reading comprehension skills among fourth semester students from the Modern Languages program at the university of Quindío. This analysis provides individual and group insights about the context where the study was carried out.

Once the data was collected, it was organized and grouped by themes, essential features in common that were identified, also the pre and post-test were assessed to have a clear picture about the reading abilities of the students. After that, the themes were compared, interpreted and analyzed.

4.6 Limitations

Some limitations of the present study include the inability of the researcher to select the students, as the focus group was naturally composed of those who register for the subject. This was a minor problem since the students didn't participate voluntarily, potentially affecting the study's results due to their attitudes towards the activities. Additionally, time was an issue, as the students didn't attend the four classes of the phonological training due to extracurricular activities held by the university during the semester.

Chapter 6: Research Findings and analysis

The results presented in this paper are based on a pre-test, a post-test, and the field diary which contains the main aspects of some classes' observations along the implementation of the use of phonological training as a strategy to enhance reading comprehension skills.

Firstly, the outcomes from the applied instruments were shown. Later, results based on some themes that had some common patterns such as phonetics knowledge, lack of vocabulary, pronunciation challenges, challenges faced by learners in reading B1 proficiency level texts. All the results contributed to answering the research question of the study: what the relationship between phonological awareness training and the development of reading comprehension skills among fourth semester students from the Modern Languages program at the university of Quindío.

5.1 Questionnaire

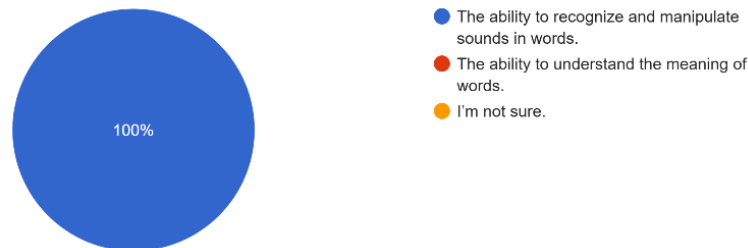
A questionnaire was administered to the students prior to the intervention to gather information about their prior knowledge of phonology and their self-perceived reading comprehension skills. The instrument consisted of five questions and was distributed via Google Forms to ensure easy access and efficient data collection. In the first question of the questionnaire, students were asked to respond to questions related to the definition and basic understanding of phonological awareness.

Figure 1

Phonological awareness

What do you understand by "phonological awareness"?

6 respuestas



Based on the students' responses to this question, it can be observed that they are familiar with the concept of phonological awareness, as they correctly identified it as the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of a language.

Figure 2

Phonological awareness aspects

Which aspects of phonological awareness interest you the most?

6 respuestas



In the questionnaire, students were asked which aspects of phonological awareness interested them the most. As shown in the graphic, the responses were evenly divided: 50% of the students expressed interest in learning how to identify individual sounds, while the remaining 50% indicated a preference for learning how to manipulate sounds within words. These results suggest that students are genuinely interested in exploring phonological aspects of language and are motivated to understand how sounds function and can be modified within words. This

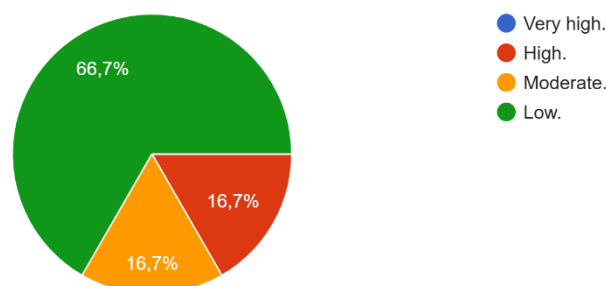
interest reflects a positive attitude toward learning phonology and engaging more deeply with language structure.

Figure 3

Techniques to improve phonological awareness

What is your level of knowledge about techniques to improve phonological awareness?

6 respuestas



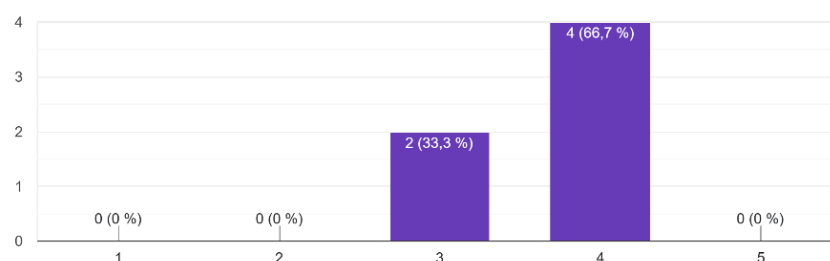
This figure illustrates the percentage of students' knowledge regarding techniques they can use to improve their phonological awareness. The data shows that 66.7% of the students reported having no knowledge of such techniques. In contrast, 16.7% indicated a moderate understanding, while the remaining 16.7% stated they had a high level of awareness of strategies that could enhance their phonological skills. These results highlight a significant gap in students' familiarity with practical methods for developing phonological awareness.

Figure 4

Reading comprehension

On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate your reading comprehension skills?

6 respuestas



This graph presents how students perceived their own reading comprehension

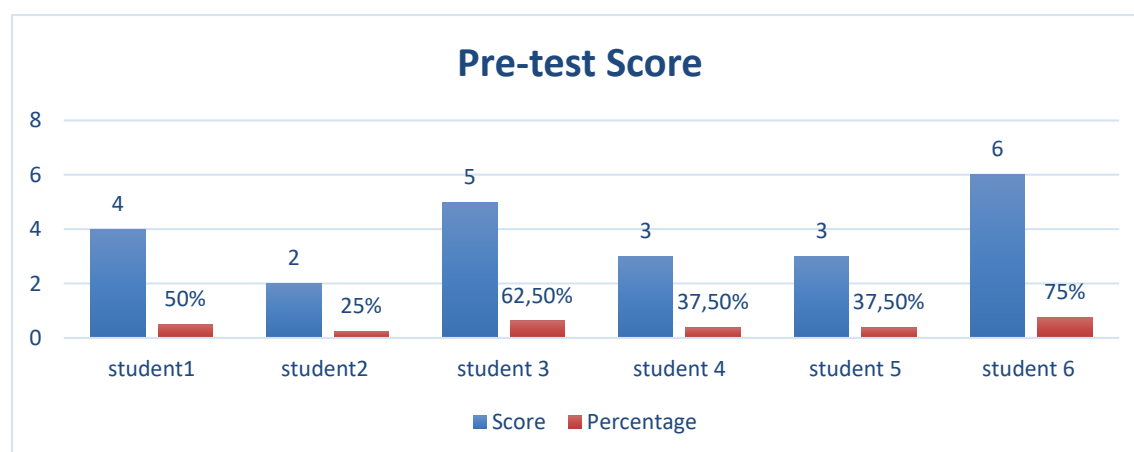
performance. According to the results, 33.3% of the students rated their reading performance at level 3, which represents an average score based on the university's grading scale. In contrast, 66.7% of the students rated themselves at level 4, which is considered a high score.

The data collected from the pre-intervention questionnaire revealed several interesting interests in students' perceptions of reading comprehension and their familiarity with phonological awareness. Despite their limited knowledge about phonological awareness, students clearly expressed their interest in developing their phonological skills. Some were more interested in learning how to identify individual sounds while others curious about manipulating sounds within words. This balance suggests that although students may not have solid foundations in phonological instruction, they recognize its relevance and are motivated to explore it further. Additionally, the results show that students self-perceived as good readers since they rated themselves on a high scale of performance.

5.2 Pre-test

Figure 5

Pre-test



During the first session, students were given 45 minutes to answer a B1-level reading

comprehension test with multiple-choice questions. This assessment aimed to evaluate their reading performance before the training, allowing the researcher to compare these results with those obtained at the end of the training to determine whether phonological awareness influences their reading comprehension skills.

In the pre-test, students were required to answer eight reading comprehension questions. As shown in Figure 1, Subject 6 achieved the highest score, correctly answering six out of eight questions. This performance indicates strong word decoding skills and an ability to comprehend the overall meaning of the text, demonstrating proficiency in understanding B2-level texts. Similarly, Subject 3 answered five out of eight questions correctly, reflecting a prominent level of comprehension by effectively inferring meaning and utilizing prior knowledge. In contrast, Subject 1 demonstrated a moderate understanding, scoring four out of eight, which suggests an ability to grasp key ideas that facilitated their responses. Subjects 4 and 5 also scored four out of eight; however, their responses revealed difficulties in reading comprehension, which they attributed to a limited vocabulary. As Subject 4 stated, "I struggled with the text because of unfamiliar vocabulary," highlighting how lexical difficulty hindered their ability to engage with complex texts. Lastly, Subject 2 obtained the lowest score, answering only two questions correctly, indicating significant challenges in understanding both general and specific meanings within the text.

The findings indicate varying levels of reading comprehension among the participants. For instance, some students struggled with comprehension due to limited vocabulary, which hindered their ability to understand B2-level texts. Therefore, this highlights the importance of incorporating phonological training into their instruction. In fact, phonological awareness not only enhances reading comprehension, but also supports vocabulary development, a crucial skill for students at the University of Quindío, who often encounter difficulties when learning and

recognizing unfamiliar words due to the primary exposure to English through coursebooks without integrating phonological training. Accordingly, as Hentasmaka et al. (2022) concluded, embedding phonological training into vocabulary instruction can significantly benefit learners by strengthening their phoneme recognition and metalinguistic abilities. As a result, students are more likely to learn new words effectively and improve both their phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge. Ultimately, the benefits of integrating such training into EFL instruction are broad and can meaningfully support students' reading development in contexts like this.

While most of the students faced challenges, two participants demonstrated strong cognitive reading skills by effectively inferring meaning and applying prior knowledge to answer questions accurately. This underscores the importance of developing metalinguistic skills such as inferring and interpreting, which require higher-order cognitive processes and can be cultivated throughout the learning experience. Therefore, their performance aligns with B2 proficiency expectations, especially considering they have been studying the language for two years. However, external factors, such as exposure to the language outside the classroom and the instructional strategies used by the teacher, may also contribute to improved reading abilities. Despite these influences, the results suggest that such factors alone are not sufficient, as not all students benefited equally.

On one hand, during the pre-test, teacher observation indicated varying levels of student's confidence and anxiety which influenced their performance. To illustrate this, it is important to mention that 33% of the students exhibited worry or frustration when encountering difficulties with text comprehension for instance, one student felt worried and frustrated, and the other was stressful since he couldn't understand the text.

On the other hand, 67% showed varying degrees of confidence during the pre-test. One student seemed quiet and confident throughout the activity, another student was confident and

tried to gather and understand the meaning of the whole text. Besides, two students demonstrated understanding of the text as they could understand the overall meaning of the text and the other one was actively engaged in comprehension efforts.

This result suggests that students' performance is influenced not only by their knowledge but also by external factors, such as negative emotions, which can hinder their ability to comprehend. Consequently, students may struggle to answer correctly because they are not accustomed to working under stressful conditions. For example, as Student 1 stated, "I feel frustrated since I cannot understand the text because I do not know the words in it." This quote illustrates how students feel when they encounter difficulties while reading, demonstrating that a lack of vocabulary can significantly affect their performance. Furthermore, it indicates that students may lack effective strategies to cope with challenges during the learning process. In addition, it suggests that teachers may not be fully addressing other factors, such as stress or anxiety, which can impact student outcomes. Notably, the literature reviewed for this research did not include studies that explored these emotional aspects, implying that researchers have primarily focused on academic performance rather than investigating how emotional factors may hinder students' success.

Phonological training, when integrated effectively, may help students improve their decoding skills, allowing them to recognize words more efficiently. Additionally, since phonological awareness supports word recognition it may also facilitate vocabulary acquisition by helping students decode and internalize new words. As found by Swanson, H. L., et al. (2007). Oral language, syntax and vocabulary has an important role in reading acquisition evidencing that reading skills are closely related to vocabulary and oral language, remarking the importance of embedding phonological training into the classroom activities. Since students in this study do not receive any phonological instruction, they struggle to interpret and decode the

words effectively due to their limited phonological awareness, leading them to have a bad reading performance when encountering B1 level texts.

5.3 Phonetic Training

5.3.1 *TH sounds*

During the first session of the phonological training, students participated in a 45-minute lesson where they learned the differences between voiced and voiceless /TH/ sounds in English through various activities and researcher-led explanations.

All students displayed initial challenges with English phonetics and phonology. Firstly, with regard to ‘’TH’ 4 out of 6 students (67%) lacked prior knowledge of the distinction between TH voiced and voiceless sounds; Also, 2 out of 6 (34%) were aware of the differences; the first student recognized that the TH sound differs from the T sound in Spanish showing a limited awareness and the other one was aware of the difference, however did not know the reason behind the differences; These difficulties suggest that limited phonological awareness affects not only oral production but also reading comprehension due to the cross-linguistic transfer that occurs among EFL students, as noted by Lafrance and Gottardo (2005) student's first language can influence their second language, shaping their oral performance. The effects of this transfer depend on the student's phonological awareness in L1. Therefore, those with strong phonological awareness in their first language may benefit, while those who struggle to distinguish between sounds may face challenges, a lack of phonological awareness can lead to difficulties in recognizing sound differences between languages, resulting in mispronunciations that may cause misunderstandings in spoken and written communication.

Nevertheless, among the students in this study, cross-linguistic transfer was not beneficial, as they tended to transfer the Spanish "T" sound to the English "TH" sound. This

indicates that cross-linguistic transfer is only advantageous when the orthographic systems are transparent and the words share similar phonemes and sounds, as is often the case in Spanish. However, this obstacle can be addressed through the implementation of phonological training, which equips students with essential decoding skills. As Li and Woore (2017) argued, explicit phonological instruction can enhance students' ability to decode and accurately map L1 sounds onto L2 phonemes. This supports the idea that phonological awareness can be highly beneficial for students, as it helps them become more conscious of proper pronunciation, thereby enhancing reading comprehension by allowing them to focus on understanding the text rather than spending time decoding unfamiliar sounds.

On the contrary, by the end of the session, all students demonstrated accurate production and identification of the "TH" sounds, a significant improvement from the initial 67% who lacked this awareness, likely due to their active participation in class. Meanwhile, the remaining 33% also engaged in the practical activities, which helped them become more aware of the phonetic differences. This overall progress suggests that phonological awareness plays a crucial role in developing L2 learners' ability to recognize and manipulate sounds effectively. After the session, students showed a notable improvement in phoneme recognition, which had been not evident at the beginning. Therefore, this outcome highlights the benefits of explicit phonological training. As Hawas (2019) concluded, phonological training is not only beneficial for children but also for adult learners. Thus, incorporating such training in the classroom, even for short periods, can significantly enhance students' abilities to recognize and manipulate English sounds.

5.3.2 *Diphthongs*

During the second intervention of the phonological training, students were engaged in different activities to determine and assess them, about their diphthongs' knowledge. At the beginning of the class 6 participants were unfamiliar and struggled with the pronunciation of

English diphthongs, a result they couldn't differ their pronunciation from Spanish sounds. Furthermore, 5 out of 6 students struggled to articulate English diphthongs (/aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /oʊ/) correctly, while 1 student managed to produce them accurately. Specifically, half of the students (3) struggled particularly with the /aʊ/ pronouncing it as they would in Spanish. While the remaining 50% pronounced correctly, they faced challenges identifying the sound in written language. By the end of the lesson, there was notable improvement. 4 out of 6 students (67%) demonstrated more accurate articulation of diphthongs, particularly due to their increased awareness of mouth openness and roundedness, which was a critical factor for their success. Regarding written language, 3 students (50%) were able to accurately recognize diphthongs. However, 2 students (33%) continued to struggle with the /aʊ/ diphthong due to the interference from Spanish phonology.

These results indicate that students lack the ability to recognize English sounds, particularly diphthongs. This deficiency suggests that learners may also struggle with blending and segmenting sounds in the target language. Blending involves combining sounds to form words, while segmenting entails breaking words into individual sounds. Consequently, the inability to accurately recognize diphthongs in English, may hinder student's ability to identify corresponding sounds in the written language, potentially leading to poor reading performance. According to Anthony and Francis (2005), there is a causal relationship between blending, segmenting and reading comprehension skills. This underscores the importance of phonological awareness among EFL students as targeted training equips them with the necessary tools to manipulate the sounds, ultimately enhancing their reading proficiency.

Recognizing and manipulating diphthongs enhances students' oral performance as well as their reading skills. However, these results were not tracked over time within the group of participants, highlighting the need for long-term studies to accurately assess the effectiveness of

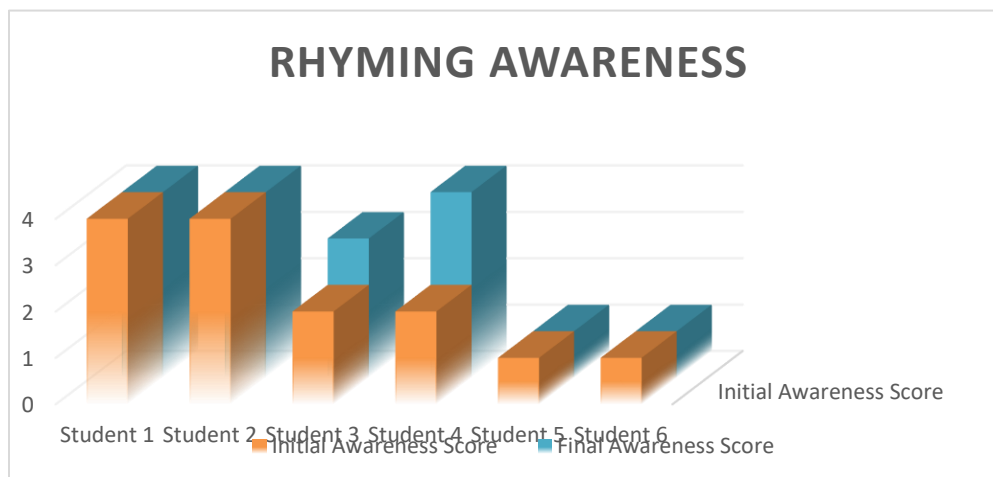
phonological instruction. Phonological training equips students with the ability to segment and manipulate English sounds, which ultimately supports the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences. This, in turn, enables students to recognize written phonemes, fostering improvements not only in reading comprehension but also in speaking abilities. This is well supported by Gellan Gamal Atwa Abdel-Maksod (2020), who concluded that students with high phonological awareness outperformed those who had not developed the same level of awareness. Within my context at the University of Quindío, this becomes essential for students to achieve a better understanding of the language. Considering they are training to become teachers, enhancing their phonological awareness will also enable them to integrate similar strategies into their future classrooms, thereby supporting their own students in developing this foundational skill.

5.3.3 *Rhyming*

During the third intervention of phonological training, students were engaged in different activities to explore student's rhyming awareness.

Figure 6

Rhyming Awareness



In the activity students were asked to find the words that rhyme each other to assess the

knowledge they have about the pattern of sounds that exist among English words. As shown in figure 6 some students showed a better performance during the activity than others. For instance, student 1 easily identified the rhyming words and he/she was able to identify new words that rhyme using their previous knowledge demonstrating that he/she has good understanding of the patterns of sound in L2 language, so his/her ability was consistently demonstrated throughout the lesson. Similarly, Student 2 completed the task effortlessly, despite creating some pseudowords to complete the task making evident his/her lack of vocabulary but showing a strong phonological awareness since was able to identify the pattern sounds. Moreover, student 4 initially found the activity challenging but demonstrated significant improvement ultimately completing the task with only two mistakes.

On the contrary, the rest of the students did not show a significant improvement in their process. For example, student 3 struggled at the beginning of the activity and she/he argued that it was due to a lack of vocabulary, making difficult for her/him to find words that can rhyme with the providing, however, she/he showed a moderate improvement throughout the lesson as she/he could write some words that rhyme but it was still influenced of L1 since she/he created some pseudo words to complete the activity. Besides, by teacher observation during the task it was observed that student 5 felt frustrated because of a lack of vocabulary and his/her ignorance of rhyming pattern of L2 language, therefore the student continues showing persistent difficulties from the beginning to the end of the lesson. Additionally, student 6 was the student who experienced most difficulty and frustration during the lesson since she took a long time to finish the activity, and she did not show an improvement.

These results suggest that most of the students encountered difficulties completing the activities due to limited vocabulary and a lack of phonological training. For example, they struggled to identify words because they could not rely on prior knowledge, indicating that their

restricted vocabulary hindered their success in the task. When learning a foreign language, students must acquire unfamiliar sound patterns, which requires the development of phonological awareness in the target language. This awareness does not emerge naturally; instead, it must be nurtured through explicit and structured instruction. The ability to notice and differentiate sounds is essential for second language acquisition, as it supports both pronunciation and word recognition. As Li and Chen (2016) and Nadia A. et al. (2017) concluded, receiving targeted phonological training, particularly in areas such as word identification, word deletion, and rhyming, enhances students' word recognition skills in the target language. This training raises learners' phonological awareness and reduces their reliance on L1 strategies to decode and pronounce unfamiliar words in L2.

Considering that students at the University of Quindío do not receive explicit phonological training during their learning process, they lack awareness of how English sounds function, which hinders their ability to complete activities that require phonological knowledge. For example, the rhyming tasks were designed for beginner-level students, yet fourth-semester participants struggled with them. This difficulty stemmed from their limited exposure to such activities, as they had never been explicitly trained to recognize sound patterns. Many students expressed feeling challenged and even threatened when they realized that, although they could pronounce the words, they were unable to identify the sound patterns. This experience confronted their self-perception, as many believed they had a high level of English proficiency. Consequently, realizing their difficulty in identifying sounds led to frustration and a sense of insecurity about their language knowledge.

Additionally, as shown in the results, L1 interference affected some students' performance, limiting their progress during the task. When learning a foreign language, students often rely on their native language to draw connections between L1 and L2 sounds, which

directly influences their pronunciation. This indicates that their phonological awareness is primarily shaped by Spanish, making it their main point of reference when encountering new English words, as they have not yet developed phonological awareness in the target language. These findings support the conclusions of Özdemir et al. (2015), who observed that bilingual students often transfer phonological features from their L1 to English. However, cross-linguistic transfer is only beneficial when both languages share consistency between graphemes and phonemes, allowing learners to apply L1 phonological awareness to support L2 development. This is not the case with English and Spanish, where orthographic inconsistencies in English make it difficult for learners to rely on Spanish pronunciation rules. As a result, students frequently make errors in English pronunciation when applying Spanish phonological patterns, suggesting that cross-linguistic transfer is not advantageous in this context.

On the other hand, some students demonstrated improvement during the task, suggesting that they require more time and structured practice to effectively manipulate sounds in the target language. Numerous studies have shown that targeted phonological awareness training is beneficial not only for children but also for adult learners. Therefore, incorporating teaching practices that place phonological awareness at the center should be essential for students in the Modern Languages program. Li and Chen (2016), for instance, emphasized the importance of phonological training in enhancing students' phonological decoding skills. Similarly, Hentasmaka (2022) concluded that even short-term training can significantly improve students' phonological awareness when integrated into classroom practices. These findings suggest that phonological training should be a consistent and intentional part of educational practice, rather than relying on informal or incidental methods to develop this critical skill.

Building on this, it becomes even more important to equip students with the tools needed to recognize and manipulate English sounds effectively, particularly because they are preparing

to become teachers themselves. These future educators will be responsible for fostering phonological awareness in their own classrooms from early stages of instruction. However, it is important to recognize that teachers always teach what they know. As Margaret Dahmer (2010) pointed out, teachers' practices are closely linked to their confidence in teaching specific content. Therefore, when educators lack confidence in phonological instruction, they tend to rely on informal or incidental methods. This reinforces the need for targeted phonological training in teacher preparation programs to ensure that future teachers can implement phonological strategies consistently and effectively in their teaching practices.

To conclude, the results from the phonological training clearly demonstrate that explicit instruction in phonetics has a positive impact on students' phonological awareness. Initially, most participants exhibited difficulties in recognizing and pronouncing unfamiliar English sounds, largely due to limited exposure to phonological instruction and an overreliance on Spanish phonology. These challenges affected their pronunciation, decoding abilities, and overall confidence, particularly during tasks that required an understanding of sound patterns.

However, by the end of the sessions, several students showed notable improvements in phoneme recognition, articulation, and the ability to identify sound patterns in written language. These gains reflect the effectiveness of explicit, structured phonological training in helping learners internalize the sound system of the target language. This suggests that even short-term interventions can significantly enhance students' phonological awareness. Nonetheless, the activities also revealed that cross-linguistic transfer can hinder students' progress due to the lack of orthographic transparency between English and Spanish. Yet, this obstacle can be addressed through systematic instruction focused on the specific phonological features of the second language.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the urgent need to incorporate phonological

awareness instruction into the Modern Languages curriculum at the University of Quindío, particularly because many students are preparing to become language teachers. Without explicit training, these future educators risk developing persistent gaps in pronunciation and reading comprehension, which may negatively affect both their academic development and professional effectiveness. Thus, fostering phonological awareness is not only crucial for enhancing students' own linguistic skills but also for equipping them with the necessary pedagogical tools to support the literacy development of their future students.

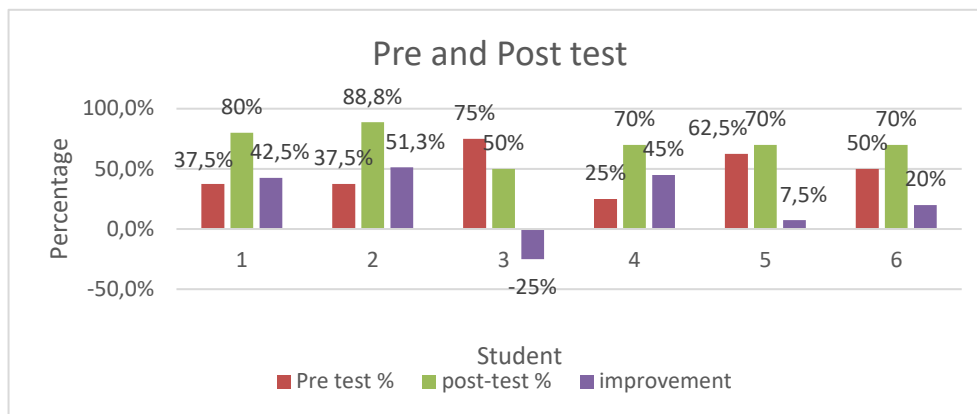
Overall, the results underscore that phonological awareness is not a skill that develops incidentally, especially among adult EFL learners. Rather, it must be deliberately cultivated through structured, guided instruction. Implementing such training consistently will not only improve learners' oral and reading abilities but will also contribute to forming competent and confident language teachers who understand the critical role of phonological instruction in second language acquisition.

5.4 Pre and Post-test

At the end of the four-week training, students took a reading test to assess their reading comprehension skills both before and after receiving phonological training. The goal was to determine whether they showed improvement in reading comprehension.

Figure 7

Pre and post test score



In the post-test, students read a text and answered ten multiple-choice questions. As shown in Figure 3, Student 1 answered 3 out of 8 questions correctly in the pre-test, achieving 37.5% accuracy. However, in the post-test, the student answered 8 out of 10 questions correctly, reaching 80% accuracy, this represents an improvement of 42.5% by the end of the training period.

Similarly, Student 2 answered 3 out of 8 questions correctly in the pre-test, attaining 37.5% accuracy. In the post-test, the students improved significantly, answering 9 out of 10 correctly with an 88.8% accuracy rate, showing an increase of 51.3%.

Additionally, Students 4, 5, and 6 all achieved 70% accuracy in the post-test, but their improvement rates varied. Student 4 initially answered 2 out of 8 questions correctly 25% accuracy but improved to 7 out of 10 in the post-test 70% accuracy, reflecting a 45% increase. Student 5 scored 5 out of 8 in the pre-test 62.5% accuracy and 7 out of 10 in the post-test 70% accuracy, resulting in a 7.5% improvement. Student 6 answered 4 out of 8 questions correctly 50% accuracy in the pre-test and 7 out of 10 in the post-test, achieving a 20% improvement.

On the other hand, student 3 answered 6 out of 8 questions correctly in the pre-test achieving 75% accuracy. However, in the post-test, scored 5 out of 10 questions 50% accuracy, resulting in a -25% decrease in performance.

These results align with previous research findings, which have consistently demonstrated

that phonological awareness is a strong predictor of reading ability (Adam & Mohi, 2017; Anthony & Francis, 2018; Sasaki, 2023). Like these studies, the findings of this research show a clear connection between phonological awareness and reading comprehension, as most students demonstrated significant improvement after receiving training. The data suggest that phonological instruction played a key role in enhancing students' ability to decode and process text more effectively. As a result, students at the University of Quindío exhibited noticeable gains in their reading comprehension skills. This improvement highlights the effectiveness of phonological training, as learners became more aware of correct pronunciation and were better able to decode unfamiliar words, thereby improving their overall reading fluency.

Anthony and Francis (2005) emphasize that phonological awareness training, particularly when combined with instruction in letter knowledge, leads to lasting improvements in phoneme awareness, reading, and spelling (p. 258). This suggests that structured phonological training provides foundational skills that can support long-term literacy development. Additionally, reading fluency is closely linked to letter knowledge, indicating that phonological training should not focus solely on developing sound awareness but should also include vocabulary acquisition. In line with this, Swanson et al. (2018) concluded that vocabulary and syntactic knowledge are strong predictors of reading comprehension. Together, these findings suggest that embedding phonological instruction alongside vocabulary development can significantly enhance both phonological skills and overall reading performance.

These findings further demonstrate that students from the University of Quindío gained not only phonological awareness through the training but also expanded their vocabulary, which contributed to improved reading proficiency. This progress was evident in the post-test, where students reported feeling less frustrated and more confident when engaging with texts. Their increased ability to decode unfamiliar words allowed them to approach B2-level texts with greater

ease. In contrast, during the pre-test, students appeared more stressed and less confident, often struggling to decode and comprehend the material due to limited phonological skills and vocabulary knowledge. This shift highlights the combined impact of phonological training and vocabulary development on enhancing reading confidence and comprehension.

It is important to highlight that one student showed a decrease in reading performance during the post-test. This outcome suggests that phonological awareness alone is not a universal solution to reading comprehension difficulties and that phonological training does not yield the same results for all learners. As Özdemir et al. (2015) and Elhassan et al. (2015) concluded, while phonological awareness can positively influence reading performance, it is not sufficient on its own; learners also require well-developed syntactic and vocabulary knowledge to fully comprehend written texts. Overall, students from the University of Quindío would benefit from a more holistic approach—one that combines phonological training with instruction in other linguistic areas. Exposing learners to integrated activities that target both phonology and vocabulary could enhance their reading comprehension more effectively than teaching these skills in isolation. This is supported by Hentasmaka et al. (2022), whose study demonstrated that embedding phonological instruction within vocabulary teaching improves learners' metalinguistic awareness, thereby strengthening their word recognition and reading proficiency in the target language.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that students' reading performance may also be influenced by the classes they take throughout the semester. As they continue developing skills in other components, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, their overall language proficiency improves. Therefore, while phonological instruction is a valuable support, it may not be sufficient on its own to enhance students' reading abilities. However, it can serve as an important tool within a broader instructional framework to support reading development. As

discussed earlier, merely exposing students to English through coursebooks is not enough to help them develop the awareness and skills needed to become proficient readers. This suggests that opportunities to interact with and manipulate the language are essential, as they allow students to understand its structure more deeply. Additionally, other classroom practices, such as listening tests, presentations in the target language, and integrated language tasks, can also contribute to improved reading performance and the development of metalinguistic awareness among students.

To conclude, the findings of this study confirm that explicit phonological training can significantly enhance EFL learners' reading comprehension and decoding abilities. Specifically, at the University of Quindío, where phonological awareness is not typically emphasized in the curriculum, the short-term training sessions led to measurable gains for most participants. These improvements included better pronunciation, increased recognition of English sounds, greater confidence, and enhanced reading fluency, particularly among those who initially struggled with phoneme discrimination and word decoding.

Furthermore, the study underscores that phonological awareness is not a skill that develops naturally, especially among adult learners. Instead, it requires intentional, structured instruction that enables learners to build meaningful connections between sound and print. Although phonological training alone may not fully address all reading comprehension difficulties, given that vocabulary and syntax also play pivotal roles, it nonetheless provides essential support for learners' ability to engage with written texts more effectively.

In addition, the research draws attention to the urgent need for curriculum reform within the Modern Languages program at the University of Quindío. Given that many students are preparing to become teachers, it is crucial that they not only receive phonological training themselves but also learn how to integrate such strategies into their future teaching practices. Doing so would help close existing gaps in phonological instruction and promote a more holistic

approach to literacy development, one that combines phonological, lexical, and syntactic instruction while also addressing emotional and metacognitive factors.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the expanding body of research that advocates phonological awareness as a foundational component of EFL instruction. It provides compelling justification for embedding phonological strategies into teacher education, particularly in under-resourced contexts. Such integration would not only enhance learners' academic performance but also equip future educators to become more effective, confident, and reflective in their instructional practices.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Limitations

6.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the relationship between phonological awareness and reading comprehension skills among fourth-semester students in the Modern Languages program at the University of Quindío. Through a four-week intervention, which included focused instruction on the “th” sounds, diphthongs, and rhyming activities, students engaged with the phonological structure of English in a way that is rarely addressed in the current curriculum.

To begin with, the pre-test results revealed that most students struggled with basic decoding skills and oral reading fluency. They demonstrated hesitation when reading and understanding the text, as they relied heavily on visual cues or contextual guessing to infer meaning. Moreover, they often skipped over words that were difficult to pronounce or unfamiliar. These findings not only indicate a lack of confidence in their phonological processing but also reflect a limited vocabulary, which directly impacted their reading performance, an issue further compounded by their limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

In contrast to the initial pre-test results, the post-test revealed a substantial improvement in most students’ reading comprehension, decoding abilities, and overall reading fluency. Specifically, five out of six participants demonstrated higher scores, with accuracy increases, indicating not only better understanding of the text but also more confident interaction with unfamiliar vocabulary and sound patterns. These gains were particularly prominent among students who had initially shown weaknesses in phoneme discrimination, sound segmentation, and decoding accuracy, skills closely associated with phonological awareness. The observed progress suggests that the phonological training sessions had a direct impact on students’ ability to decode and comprehend B2-level texts more effectively.

Notably, students who previously relied on visual cues, rote memorization, or contextual

guessing to navigate written English began to demonstrate stronger phoneme recognition and a greater capacity to pronounce and decode unfamiliar words with more ease. This shift was also reflected in their behavior and attitudes during the post-test: students appeared less anxious, more confident, and showed increased willingness to engage with challenging vocabulary. For example, students who had previously skipped difficult words or guessed their meanings based on context were now attempting to decode and pronounce them phonetically, showing a clearer awareness of the sound structure of English.

While it is important to acknowledge that the improvement cannot be attributed solely to the phonological training, since students were also exposed to other forms of language instruction during the semester, the results strongly suggest that the training played a pivotal role in developing their phonological decoding skills. The explicit, structured focus on sounds such as “TH”, diphthongs, and rhyming patterns appears to have provided students with concrete strategies to approach English texts with greater precision and independence. This was especially evident in students who had previously been hesitant or unsure when encountering phonologically unfamiliar words. As a result, the intervention not only supported their technical decoding abilities but also contributed to building their confidence and reducing frustration when reading.

Regarding the phonological training, each session contributed differently to students’ development. In the first week, students showed significant progress in distinguishing the voiced and voiceless “th” sounds, phonemes that are often mispronounced by Spanish speakers due to their absence in the native language. Moreover, in week two, although many students found diphthongs difficult to produce, some began to distinguish between complex vowel sounds and reported increased awareness of pronunciation. Additionally, in week three, focused on rhyming, it allowed students to recognize sound patterns in a more interactive way, though some continued

to struggle with identifying rhymes in longer or unfamiliar words. These outcomes highlight the value of sustained and repetitive exposure to sound-based activities in the development of reading comprehension, particularly in EFL contexts such as the University of Quindío. Since, in this setting, phonological instruction is not formally embedded in the curriculum, which means that students often lack the tools needed to reinforce their reading skills beyond traditional approaches. Therefore, instruction typically focuses on explicit comprehension strategies, such as identifying the main idea or grasping vocabulary in context, without fostering the phonological awareness necessary for decoding unfamiliar words. As a result, students may struggle to develop the long-term metalinguistic awareness required to recognize and manipulate sounds effectively, limiting their ability to read fluently and independently in English.

Importantly, these outcomes also confirm that one-time or short-term is not enough to ensure lasting improvement. For instance, the variation in student performance underscores the need for long-term phonological training. Since, several students continued to exhibit decoding issues relying on rote memorization or context clues rather than phonological strategies. This suggests that while phonological training positively impacted reading comprehension and students sound awareness of its full potential may be only realized when integrated consistently and systematically into the curriculum.

Moreover, the findings align with previous research that identifies phonological awareness as a key predictor of reading proficiency (Hawass, 2019; Li & Woore, 2017). However, the study also supports claims made by researchers like Swanson et al. (2008), who argue that phonological awareness alone is not enough as reading comprehension is influenced by multiple factors, including vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive reading strategies. Therefore, phonological training should be seen not as a stand-alone solution, but as a foundational skill that enhances students' access to more complex reading strategies.

From a pedagogical perspective, these results highlight the necessity of to revise the reading instruction approach currently use by teachers at the Modern Language Program in the university of Quindío. Given that phonological instruction is not currently integrated into the curriculum, students miss the opportunity to develop essential skills that support both pronunciation and reading comprehension. Therefore, integrating phonological training into reading and writing classes can be beneficial for the students since they can improve their academic performance and overall understanding of the language.

In addition, this study highlights a relevant issue in teacher preparation, professors at the University of Quindío may lack confidence to incorporate phonological training in their class, As Dahmer (2010) emphasized, teachers often teach what they know or feel comfortable with. Therefore, it becomes essential that phonological instruction is included in the training of future teachers. If students from the bachelor's degree are expected to become English teachers and reach C1 level of proficiency, as required by Resolution 2041 of 2016, they must acquire a deep and meaningful understanding of the language. This includes not only mastering linguistic content but also developing the ability to apply varied and effective strategies, such as phonological training, that will allow them to support their future students in becoming competent and confident language users.

In conclusion, phonological awareness training plays a significant role in supporting the development of reading comprehension among EFL students at the University of Quindío. By helping students identify, manipulate, and apply phonological knowledge, the training not only enhances their decoding skills but also improves their overall ability to engage with written texts in a more meaningful and confident way. Therefore, phonological instruction should be viewed as an integral component of language learning; one that can be effectively taught alongside other essential skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. However, it is also important to

recognize that phonological training alone is not sufficient; students must simultaneously develop a broader range of linguistic and cognitive skills to achieve comprehensive language proficiency.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations can be proposed to enhance the phonological awareness among the Modern Languages Program at the University of Quindío.

First, the integration of a structured phonological training program should be considered to address gaps in phonetics instruction mainly at the beginning of the career.

Second, it is essential to inform and educate teachers about the effectiveness of phonological strategies to empower educators to implement these techniques consistently, not only in the speaking lesson as was the case in this study, but also in their reading lessons to maximize the impact of phonological instruction.

Thirdly, further research is needed to investigate the long-term effects of phonological training among the students in other aspects such as writing and listening. Further research can explore broader applicability of phonological training across different socio-linguistic contexts offering insights about how the training can be adapted to diverse learning environments. Besides, can be implemented in different levels of English proficiency to ensure weaker students receive additional support to overcome their challenges.

6.3 Limitations

It is worth mentioning that this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between phonological training and reading comprehension, however, some limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the study relied on a naturally occurring group of students, which limited the voluntary participation of the students, since they must participate in the activity because of the

teacher's requirements.

Second, the four-week implementation period was not sufficient to capture long-term phonological training. Extending the period would allow a better understanding of the phonological training effects in broader areas of the language.

Additionally, the attendance of some students was limited since they must attend to other commitments from the university hindering the effectiveness of the phonological training program.

Finally, another aspect that must be considered for the design of subsequent students to enhance reliability and applicability of the outcomes is the sample size since the focus group only includes six participants which reduce the statistical power of the findings.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Sixteen - What now?

You're 16 and finally you can leave school! By now, you're probably sick of teachers, desks, tests and exams. But don't just run for the exit. You need to think carefully about what to do next.

If you want a professional career, you will need to go to university and get a degree. To do that, you need to stay at high school for another two years. But you needn't stay at the same place. There are several options in the district of Northacre.

St. Leopold's School has the best pass rate of all the high schools in the district. It offers a wide range of subjects in the humanities and sciences. St Leopold's is, of course, a private school, so may be too expensive for you. But don't worry, there are several other options if you want to follow the academic route. Knowle Grammar School is a state school, so there are no fees, and it has excellent tuition and facilities. It is a boys' school from the ages of 11-16, but from 16-18 it is co-educational. But it is selective, so you'll have to pass an exam to get in. If you're interested in going into Business, check out Wyle River Academy. This school specialises in subjects like Business Studies, Management and Economics. If you prefer the arts, look at the courses on offer at Northacre College. Here you can study woodwork, art, textiles and much more.

Northacre College also offers a wide range of vocational qualifications. You can do a 1-year certificate or a 2-year diploma in subjects like electrics, plumbing, roofing and hairdressing. If you'd prefer to work outdoors, look at Milldown College, where there are courses in Farm Mechanics, Land Management, Animal Management and much more.

A final option is to get an apprenticeship with a local or national company. You will get on-the-job training, gain certificates or diplomas and start earning straight away. But be warned - places are limited! Find out more at the Jobs Fair on 26th May at Northacre College.

1 The aim of the article is to...

advise young people about how to get to university.

tell young people about the options available.

advise young people to stay in education.

2 The article advises readers who want a professional career to...

go to university immediately.

stay at the same school for two more years.

go to high school for two more years, then get a degree.

3 St Leopold's is the best school for...

good exam results.

humanities and sciences.

facilities.

4 You can only attend St Leopold's school if you...

pay tuition fees.

pass an exam.

study both humanities and sciences.

- 5 You can only attend Knowle Grammar School if you...
pass an exam.
are a boy.
can afford the tuition fees.
- 6 Anna wants to work with horses. Where is the best place for her to study?
Wyle River Academy
Northacre College
Milldown College
- 7 Harry wants to be a builder. Where is the best place for him to study?
Wyle River Academy
Northacre College
Milldown College
- 8 Kevin wants to be a fashion designer. Where is the best place for him to study?
Wyle River Academy
Northacre College
Milldown College
- 9 Caroline wants to run her own company. Where is the best place for her to study?
Wyle River Academy
Northacre College
Milldown College
- 10 What is the problem with apprenticeships?
There are few available.
They are expensive.
They don't give you any qualifications.

Appendix 2

B2 Reading: The Environment

Read about a proposal to build a solar farm near a British village called Barnley. Then answer the questions.

The Barnley Village Committee is opposed to plans to build a 6,890 panel solar farm on a 15-acre site adjacent to the village recreation ground, currently used for agriculture. Under the proposed scheme, the area will be surrounded by an 8ft-high fence. The panels themselves will be about 7 feet high.

The committee has already lodged an appeal to the local authority against construction of the solar farm. The councillors are due to meet on 13th March to vote whether or not plans will go ahead. Local residents are invited to attend. Our objections will be presented before the board, and a representative from the solar firm SunGen will put forward the case for the development. Residents are encouraged to voice their objections to the development. These must address the aspects of the scheme that violate the current planning policy. However, you are welcome to make your objections personal, by stating how the plans will affect you as a user of the recreation ground. Some of the most common objections are listed below:

1. The extensive views from the village and recreation ground across the open country will be blocked by the panels and high fencing. Furthermore, once the site has been built upon, it may be considered brownfield, thus an acceptable site for housing or industrial development. It does not, therefore, comply with the local policy which states that developments must not adversely effect on the appearance or character of the landscape.

2. The recreation ground has recently undergone major improvements including a perimeter running track, new playground equipment and seating. It is heavily used by families, sports teams and dog walkers, and is regularly used for village events. Cricket and football teams regularly use the recreation ground and it is not uncommon for balls to enter the field. Cricketers are worried that they may become liable for damage to solar panels. If teams are forced to relocate, this would adversely affect the character of the village, and may jeopardise participation in the children's teams. This goes against the National Planning Policy Framework which requires developments to promote high quality public space and encourage the active and continual use of public areas.

3. There has been no assessment of the extent to which noise from inverters and cooling fans will affect local residents.

4. As the ground beneath the solar panels will be surfaced, there will be more additional run-off of rainwater. The recreation ground already has problems with drainage, and these may be exacerbated by this development. A formal flood risk assessment must be submitted.

5. The lighting and security systems have not been outlined, it is not clear how the area will be made safe for children

1 What is the committee's opinion of the development?

It is opposed to the development.

It supports the development.

It is waiting for comments from residents before taking a viewpoint.

2 The solar farm would be built...

on the recreation ground.

in an agricultural field.

on a brownfield site.

3 The meeting with councillors...

has already taken place.

will take place shortly.

has been proposed, but not planned.

4 Which of the following is NOT true of the proposed solar farm?

It will be surrounded by a high fence.

It will comprise of 6,890 7-foot high panels.

The solar panels will be placed directly on the grass.

5 People who want to object the development are advised...

not to write about their personal feelings.

to refer to the village's planning policy.

to send a letter in the mail.

6 What is inferred about brownfield sites?

It is easier to get permission to develop brownfield sites.

There are already too many brownfield sites in the village.

A brownfield site is not a suitable location for a solar farm.

7 Teams may no longer play on the recreation ground because...

parents will be worried about their children's safety.

spectators won't want to watch matches at the recreation ground.

players will be worried about damaging the panels.

8 Which of the following is NOT true of the recreation ground?

It has recently received considerable investment.

It occasionally floods.

It is well-lit.