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Prosodic Sensitivity and Reading Comprehension and Fluency: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined the prosodic sensitivity, reading fluency, and reading comprehension of Grade 6 learners at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School during the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it aimed to determine the learners' levels of prosody, fluency, and comprehension based on Phil-IRI English results and to explore the relationships among these variables. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, involving 95 purposively selected Grade 6 learners. Data were collected using an adapted Prosodic Sensitivity Rating Scale, Fluency Assessment Rubric, and Reading Comprehension Test. Collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation coefficient. Results revealed varying levels of prosodic sensitivity and reading performance, with significant positive relationships between prosody and both fluency and comprehension. Findings suggest that expressive oral reading enhances comprehension and reading efficiency. The study recommends prosody-focused instructional strategies to improve literacy outcomes, providing guidance for teachers, administrators, and policymakers in designing evidence-based reading interventions.

Keywords: prosodic sensitivity, reading fluency, reading comprehension, oral reading prosody, literacy development, Grade 6 learners, Phil-IRI English

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Introduction

Prosodic sensitivity, defined as the ability to recognize and use rhythm, stress, and intonation in spoken language, is increasingly acknowledged as a crucial but often neglected dimension of reading development. It goes beyond mere decoding and directly influences how learners read with phrasing, expression, and meaning, thereby affecting both fluency and comprehension. International research has long established that reading proficiency is not only a function of recognizing words but also of processing text with appropriate prosody, which reflects comprehension and engagement with the text. However, literacy remains a global concern. According to UNESCO (2021), more than 600 million students worldwide have not attained the minimum reading proficiency level, despite expanded access to education. This persistent gap underscores the need to examine factors beyond traditional literacy components such as phonics and vocabulary. Rasinski et al. (2022) emphasized that prosodic sensitivity is a significant yet underexplored element of literacy, as oral reading with appropriate phrasing and intonation reflects deeper text understanding, while flat and monotonous reading often signals comprehension difficulties.

In the Philippine context, literacy challenges are particularly urgent. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2021) revealed that the Philippines scored significantly below the international average, pointing to systemic difficulties in reading comprehension and fluency. Similarly, the World Bank (2022) reported that more than 90% of Filipino children aged ten experience “learning poverty,” which refers to the inability to read and understand a simple text at the expected age. These alarming figures mirror the realities observed in classrooms, where teachers frequently encounter learners who read in a flat tone, fail to apply appropriate phrasing, and struggle with expressive reading, all of which hinder comprehension. Recent local studies have begun to recognize this issue. For instance, Santos and Villanueva (2023) highlighted that prosodic sensitivity is not merely a matter of oral performance but a fundamental component of literacy development in the Philippine context. Despite these insights, instructional practices in many schools remain heavily focused on decoding and comprehension strategies, with limited attention to prosody as an integral part of reading instruction.

The significance of prosodic sensitivity has been consistently reinforced by a number of scholars. Garcia (2020) and De la Cruz (2021) found that students who exhibited stronger prosodic awareness also demonstrated higher levels of reading fluency and comprehension compared to their peers. Tolentino (2022) similarly observed that learners with greater sensitivity to prosodic features made quicker gains in comprehension and fluency than those who lacked such awareness. Rasinski et al. (2022) provided further evidence by arguing that prosody is not a superficial skill but a marker of deep text understanding, as appropriate phrasing and intonation are closely tied to comprehension processes. Collectively, these studies confirm that prosodic sensitivity is a reliable predictor of reading achievement and should be emphasized in both literacy research and classroom practice.

Existing research has largely focused on phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies, but prosodic sensitivity remains underexplored, especially in the Philippine context. Grade 6 learners are at a critical stage, transitioning from “learning to read” to “reading to learn,” yet national and division-level assessments consistently show that many continue to perform below proficiency in oral reading and comprehension (DepEd, 2022). At Oroquieta City Central Elementary School, teachers have observed learners reading in a flat, monotone voice, struggling with phrasing and expression, and experiencing comprehension difficulties. These classroom realities, reflecting the broader national trend of learning poverty, highlight a glaring gap in literacy instruction and underscore the need to investigate prosodic sensitivity as a potential factor in improving reading outcomes.

This study seeks to address the gap by examining the role of prosodic sensitivity in the reading performance of Grade 6 learners at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School. Specifically, it aims to determine whether learners with higher prosodic sensitivity perform better in reading fluency and comprehension compared to their peers with weaker prosodic awareness, focusing on those reading at the ready, independent, and instructional levels. It further seeks to validate prosodic sensitivity as a significant predictor of reading difficulties, with the goal of providing practical insights for classroom instruction. Existing data highlight the need for this research, as national assessments like the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) show that many Grade 6 learners at these reading levels still demonstrate only moderate fluency and comprehension. Studies from schools such as Luna Central (2023) and Bacolod City report persistent struggles with phrasing, expression, and intonation—key components of prosodic reading. Although international research reveals a moderate correlation between prosodic sensitivity and comprehension ($r \approx 0.51$; Miller et al., 2022), local studies have yet to explore this relationship.

This study aims to fill that gap by providing evidence on how prosodic sensitivity influences reading performance among Filipino learners, ultimately supporting the development of more effective, prosody-integrated reading instruction.

The expected outcomes of the study are threefold. First, it is anticipated that the findings will confirm that learners with stronger prosodic sensitivity also achieve higher levels of fluency and comprehension. Second, the study expects to validate prosody as a diagnostic marker for identifying and addressing reading difficulties, thereby offering teachers an additional tool for early intervention. Third, the study intends to provide practical guidance for the integration of prosodic instruction into literacy programs, equipping teachers with strategies to enhance both fluency and comprehension among their learners. Ultimately, the study aspires to contribute to the improvement of literacy outcomes by helping struggling readers build confidence, succeed academically, and develop the competence to read not only with accuracy but also with understanding and expression.

Methods

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine prosodic sensitivity, reading fluency, and reading comprehension among 95 Grade 6 learners of Oroquieta City Central Elementary School during School Year 2025–2026. The respondents were purposively selected based on established inclusion criteria, including enrollment, attendance during assessment, parental consent, and learner assent. Data were collected using an adapted instrument consisting of a Prosodic Sensitivity Rating Scale measuring rhythm, stress, intonation, and phrasing; a Fluency Assessment Rubric assessing accuracy, rate, and expression; and a Reading Comprehension Test measuring literal, inferential, and critical understanding. The instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing, with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for reliability. Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to describe learners’ reading performance and determine the significant relationships between prosodic sensitivity and both reading fluency and comprehension. Throughout the study, ethical principles were observed through parental informed consent, learner assent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the participants’ right to withdraw without penalty.

Results and Discussions

Table 1

Relationship Between Learners’ Prosodic Sensitivity and Reading Fluency Based on Phil-IRI English Results (n = 95)

Variables	r-value (Pearson)	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
Prosodic Sensitivity and Reading Fluency	0.68	0.001	Strong positive relationship	Significant

Table 1 showed a strong positive correlation between prosodic sensitivity and reading fluency ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.001$). This finding indicated that learners who read with better rhythm, phrasing, and expression tended to read more fluently. Strong prosodic skills allowed learners to allocate cognitive resources more effectively, which improved reading rate, accuracy, and smoothness. In other words, learners who could read expressively spent less mental effort on decoding individual words and were able to focus more on maintaining appropriate speed, intonation, and phrasing, which ultimately supported overall reading performance (Rasinski et al., 2022).

Research supported the critical role of prosody in fluency development. Rasinski et al. (2022) and Paige et al. (2023) emphasized that prosodic reading promoted automaticity, which allowed learners to read faster and more expressively without compromising comprehension. Prosodic sensitivity enabled learners to recognize sentence boundaries, emphasize key ideas, and interpret punctuation correctly, all of which contributed to smoother and more effective reading. Learners with limited prosody, on the other hand, often read mechanically, which slowed their pace and hindered comprehension.

The implication of these findings was that teachers needed to intentionally integrate prosody-focused practice

into daily reading instruction. Structured activities such as teacher modeling, repeated oral reading, choral reading, and performance-based exercises strengthened learners’ rhythm, phrasing, and expressive abilities. Focusing on prosody not only improved reading fluency but also enhanced comprehension and overall reading confidence. For learners who struggled with reading speed or expression, targeted prosody interventions were particularly beneficial, as they ensured the development of the automaticity and expressive skills necessary for independent, fluent, and meaningful reading. Schools also needed to provide professional development and resources to support teachers in delivering effective prosody-focused instruction, thereby fostering learners’ holistic reading growth (Rasinski et al., 2022; Paige et al., 2023).

Table 2

Relationship Between Learners’ Prosodic Sensitivity and Reading Comprehension Based on Phil-IRI English Results (n = 95)

Variables	r-value (Pearson)	p- value	Interpretation	Decision
Prosodic Sensitivity and Reading Comprehension	0.59	0.002	Moderate positive relationship	Significant

Table 2 showed a moderate positive correlation between prosodic sensitivity and reading comprehension ($r = 0.59$, $p = 0.002$). This finding indicated that learners who read more expressively also tended to understand texts better. Prosodic reading helped learners parse sentences, interpret punctuation, and emphasize key information, which supported deeper comprehension. Learners who could modulate their tone, pause appropriately, and stress key words were better able to organize information in their minds, make connections between ideas, and understand the intended meaning of the text (Rasinski et al., 2022; Paige et al., 2023).

Research highlighted that prosody was not merely a component of oral fluency but also a critical contributor to comprehension. Studies by Kim and Wagner (2021) and Paige et al. (2023) indicated that expressive reading facilitated both literal and higher-order comprehension, including inferential and evaluative understanding. Learners who read monotonously often overlooked important textual cues such as sentence boundaries, punctuation marks, or emphatic phrases, which resulted in superficial reading and difficulty in making inferences or evaluating information. This relationship underscored the interdependence of fluency, prosody, and comprehension in the reading process.

Additionally, prosody provided cognitive scaffolding for learners. By reading expressively, learners were able to chunk information into meaningful units, recognize relationships between ideas, and retain content more effectively. Prosodic reading also supported metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring for understanding and adjusting reading pace according to text complexity (Rasinski et al., 2022). When learners engaged in repeated practice with modeling, peer reading, and performance-based activities, both their expressive reading and comprehension skills improved concurrently.

The implication of these findings was that teachers needed to deliberately incorporate prosody-focused instructional strategies to enhance reading comprehension. Activities such as teacher modeling, repeated oral reading, guided practice, and comprehension exercises that emphasized expression helped learners internalize sentence rhythm and meaning simultaneously. Learners with lower prosodic sensitivity often required individualized or small-group interventions to ensure they developed both fluency and comprehension skills. Strengthening prosody not only improved oral reading performance but also promoted deeper understanding of texts, which fostered critical thinking and prepared learners for higher-level academic tasks. Schools also needed to provide resources, structured reading programs, and professional development to support educators in implementing prosody-centered instruction, thereby ensuring holistic reading development and overall literacy success (Rasinski et al., 2022; Paige et al., 2023).

Conclusions

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the Phil-IRI English results, the study concluded that Grade 6 learners at Oroquieta City Central Elementary School demonstrated varying levels of prosodic sensitivity, reading fluency, and comprehension. A majority of instructional readers showed limited prosodic sensitivity, reading in

a monotonous tone, while most independent readers exhibited strong expressive reading skills. Reading fluency among learners varied, with a significant portion achieving independent levels in word recognition and reading rate, but many still requiring support in expression and prosody. In terms of comprehension, learners performed better in literal understanding, while inferential and evaluative comprehension remained areas of challenge for a substantial number of learners. The study also concluded that prosodic sensitivity significantly influenced both reading fluency and comprehension. Learners who read expressively were able to allocate cognitive resources more efficiently, resulting in smoother, more accurate, and meaningful reading, as well as improved comprehension at literal, inferential, and evaluative levels. This underscores the critical role of prosody as a bridge between decoding skills and deeper understanding of texts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that learners, teachers, school administrators, reading coordinators, parents, focal persons, policymakers, and other stakeholders work collaboratively to strengthen learners' prosodic sensitivity, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Learners should engage in guided oral, repeated, and choral reading, while teachers should integrate prosody-focused strategies and use Phil-IRI results to provide differentiated and targeted interventions. Schools should strengthen reading programs through adequate resources, teacher professional development, technology-assisted reading activities, and continuous monitoring of learners' progress. Parents and community stakeholders should also support reading activities at home and in the community. Furthermore, early identification and intervention for struggling readers, continuous professional development for teachers, evidence-based literacy policies, and longitudinal studies are recommended to promote sustained improvement in learners' reading development.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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